CHAPTER III

EARLY BUDDHISM ON HUMAN CONDITION AND TEMPORALITY

As we have seen in the previous chapter, there are at least two theories that deal with the problems of human existence. One theory asserts the reality of human existence is self (Ātman). Thus, self or soul is regarded as a first cause and a unifying force behind all phenomena of the world. In other words, human existence, in the last analysis, is endowed only with one single reality, and that reality is called self or soul (Ātman), which is considered to be the ultimate reality because it is essentially the same as or identical with the supreme self (Brahman). And self or soul in man is permanent; its apparent change is only illusion that covers to real nature. Human existence is therefore essentially eternal. This theory is known as idealist eternalism (Sāsatavāda or Sasvatavāda Skt).

Another theory, on the other hand, argues that human existence is nothing but a mere combination of the four elements, namely, earth, water, air and fire, out of which the consciousness or self comes into existence. The self or soul exists so long as man is alive, but it is annihilated, nothing remains at all when man is dead. This theory is known as annihilationism (ucchedavāda). Both theories were rejected and described as the wrong views (Micchāthisthi) by Buddha. Now the question is: What is human existence or what is ‘man’ according to early Buddhism?

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1 Brahman and Brāhmaṇa are different terms; the former denotes Cosmic consciousness whereas the latter is the second part of Vedic literature consisting of the teaching of Vedic rituals.
**Human existence as five aggregates**

The Buddhist holds that what we call 'existence', or an 'individual', or 'I' or to be precise, 'man', is nothing but a combination of ever-changing physicality and mentality which may be divided into five groups or aggregates (*Pañcakkhandha, Skhandha* Skt.), namely, matter (*rūpa*), sensations (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formation (*samkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). These aggregates neither singly nor collectively constitute any permanent self, no such self or soul could be found apart from them. To understand this point, we need to ponder over each of five aggregates one by one:

1. The Aggregate of matter (*rūpakkhandha*): it is comprised of the elements of the whole material phenomena such as body, and behaviour of the body, matter and material energy including the qualities and behaviour of this matter and energy. In other words, it consists of the traditional four great elements, namely, solidity (*pathvi*), fluidity (*āpo*) heat (*tejo*) and motion (*vāyo*) and also the derivatives (*upādāya-rūpa*) of the four great elements. The derivatives include our five material sense-organs, i.e., eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body along with their corresponding objects on the external world, that is, visible form, sound, odour, taste and tangible things and also some physical components of the body such as vital force, nutriment, growth, decay and so on. It should be noted that the term ‘*rūpa*’ refers not only to the visible things but also invisible energies or qualities mentioned above. Thus, the whole realm of matter, both internal and external is included in the Aggregate of matter.

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2 Mererk, Prayoon, Selflessness in Sartre's Existentialism and Early Buddhism, (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, 1988), P. 104
3 S. III (PTS) p. 59
2. The Aggregate of sensation (vedanākhanda) is comprised of our sensations, pleasant (sukha), or unpleasant (dukkha) or neutral (adukhamasukha, or upekkhā), which experienced through the contact of physical and mental organs with the external world. In other words, sensation or feeling (vedanā) amounts to the impressions of pleasure, unpleasure or indifference that occur by the contact of six internal faculties, namely, eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, and their corresponding six external objects i.e. visible form, sound, odour, taste, tangible objects and ideas.\(^4\) As a result, there are six kinds of sensation. Take for example, the sensation or feeling experienced through the contact of eye and visible forms is called eye-sensation (cakkhuvedana). Thus, sensations can alternatively be divided into two categories; either in terms of their qualities and their origins as follows:

(a) Their qualities are of three kinds, namely, pleasant (sukha) unpleasant (dukkha) and neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant (adukkhamasukha) or equanimity (upekkhā) or they are of five kinds i.e., physical pleasant, physical unpleasant, delight, grief and equanimity.

(b) On the basis of how sensation is perceived or experienced, it can be divided into the six categories, that is, sensation of visible forms, sounds, odours tastes, tangible things, and mental objects.

Here a question arises: Why is the mental organ (mano) or mind included in the aggregate of sensation? Are the five material sense organs not sufficient to explain the whole existence? The Buddhist would say that it is true that we experience or perceive the world of visible form, sound, odour, taste and tangible objects through physical sense organs- eye, ear,

\(^4\) S. III (PTS) p. 59
nose, tongue and body. But the world of cognition is not the whole world. What about ideas and thought? They are also a part of the world. Although they cannot be perceived by physical sense organs, they can be perceived by mental organ, that is, mind.

Hence, the aggregate of sensation is the effective aspect of mental activities, for it has the characteristic of enjoying the taste of the object in quite different way from other aggregates. As Buddha says:

As regards enjoying the taste of an object, the remaining associated states enjoy it only partially. Of contact there is mere touching, of perception the mere notion or perceiving, of volition the mere coordinating, of consciousness the mere cognizing. But feeling alone, through governance, proficiency, mastery, enjoys the taste of an object. For feeling is like the King, the remaining states are like the cook.5

3. The Aggregate of perception (Saññākhandha) is the cognitive dimension of experience. Its function consists in recognition of the object whether physical or mental. In other words, it is the establishment of knowledge of conditions and the characteristics of various features of an object that are the cause for remembering that object.6 Like sensation, perception is also of six kinds, that is, perception of visible forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tangible things and mental objects.

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5 Buddhaghosa, Attasalini (The Expositor), Quoted by P.P. Mererk, P. 105.
4. The Aggregate of volitional activities or mental formations (sāriṅkhāra-khandha) consists of all volitional activities, whether good (puṇāṇa), bad (apuṇāṇa) or neutral (āneñjia), depending on our projection toward objects. There are various kinds of volitional activities, some of which are as follows: confidence (saddhā), mindfulness (sati) loving-kindness (mettā), wisdom (paññā), greed (lobha) ill-will (dosa), delusion (moha), equanimity (upekkhā) and so on. It should be noted that what is generally known as kamma (karma Skt.) comes under this group. It will be discussed in more detail when we deal with the concept of kamma. Here suffice it to say that like sensation and perception, mental formation is also of six kinds in corresponding to six internal faculties and external objects. But unlike sensation and perception, it is only the volitional activities that can produce kammic effect.

5. The Aggregate of consciousness (vīññānakkhanda) is a mere awareness of the presence of an object, not recognizing it. Hence, the nature of consciousness is just to be a ware or cognizant of the objects (ārammana) which include both physical and mental objects. Consciousness, like sensation, perception and mental formation, can be divided into the six components according to their origination. So we have eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness and mind-consciousness. As the Buddha says:

Consciousness is named according to whatever condition through which it arises: on account of the eye and visible forms arises visual consciousness, on account of the ear and sounds arises auditory

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7 S. III (PTS) P. 60
consciousness, on account of nose and odours arises olfactory consciousness, on account of tongue and tastes arises gustatory consciousness, on account of the body and tangible objects arise tactile consciousness, on account of mind and mind-objects arises mental consciousness.  

From the above statements it is obvious that consciousness is that which is conscious of an object (ārammaṇa). Hence, it cannot arise unless there is an object to be hung upon. It should not be taken as self or soul (ātman) residing in mind. It may be mentioned here that consciousness (viññāṇa) is also called thought or idea (citta) and mind (mana), these three terms are synonymous in the Buddhist literature. Although consciousness is one, it is named differently according to its functioning and arising. As the Buddha says:

> Just as a fire is named according to the material on account of which it burns. A fire may burn on account of wood and it is called wood fire. It may burn on account of straw and then it is called straw fire. So consciousness is named according to condition through which it arises. 

The above statements imply that consciousness (viññāṇa) is related to other aggregates, that is, matter (rūpa), sensation (vedanā), perception (saññā) and mental formation (saññkhāra). It cannot exist independently of them.

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8. D. III. 243
9. M. I. (PTS) 256
The five aggregates are also called ‘nāmarūpa’ as they can be grouped into two main categories, the non-material (nāma) and the material (rūpa). The aggregate of matter belongs to the material group whereas the aggregates of sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness are included in the non-material group. In the Abidhamma, the term ‘nāma’ is extended to include not only the four non-material aggregates but also Nibbāna. In this context, human existence can be seen either as five aggregates or as the psycho-physical complex.

**Human existence as twelve bases (Āyatana)**

In addition to five aggregates, human existence can be classified into the twelve āyatanas or ‘bases’ of cognition. The term āvatana means ‘entrance’ because it is an entrance for six external sense organs and their corresponding objects. As we have seen above, there are six cognitive faculties and six categories of derivative objects. They are twelve in number as follows;

1. The eye (cakkhu)
2. The ear (sota)
3. The nose (ghāna)
4. The tongue (jivhā)
5. The body (kāya)
6. The mind (mano)

These are the internal bases of cognition (ajjhātikāyana) and sometimes called six ‘indriyas,’ since each of them is responsible for its own duty, i.e. eye is responsible for seeing, ear for hearing and so on.

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10 See Meererk, p. 126
11 Vbh. 70
7. Form (rupa)
8. Sound (sadda)
9. Odour (gandha)
10. Taste (rasa)
11. Tangible object (phoṭṭhabha)
12. Mind – object (dhamma)

These are the external bases of cognition (bahirāyatana) and sometime called ‘arammana’ or ‘visaya’ since they are the objective sense data of the six sense organs. In the case of the sixth cognitive faculty (mana); consciousness itself, its preceding moment, acts as a faculty for apprehending non-sensuous objects. The reason behind a classification of existence into twelve āyatanas is to divide all objects of cognition into sense-object and non-sensuous ones. The first five items are then divided into ten groups according to the five senses and their five objects, and the second (dhammāyatana), including every non-sensuous object is left undivided. There are six items corresponding to six cognitive faculties. Thus the twelve āyatanas or ‘bases of cognition’ represent all elements of existence distributed within six subjective and six corresponding objective items.

**Human Existence as eighteen elements (Dhātus)**

In more detail, human existence can also be analysed into eighteen dhātus. Viewed from this standpoint, human existence always includes (1) six internal faculties i.e. from cukkhu-dhātu up to mano-dhātu, (2) six kinds of corresponding elements i.e. from rūpa-dhātu up to dhammadhātu and (3) six kinds of consciousness beginning with cakkhu- viññāna and ending with
Thus, in addition to the twelve āyatanas as mentioned above, human existence can be further analysed into the following items:

13. Eye-consciousness (cakkhu-viññāna)
14. Ear-consciousness (sota-viññāna)
15. Nose-consciousness (ghāna-viññāna)
16. Tongue-consciousness (jivha-viññāna)
17. Body-consciousness (kaya-viññāna)
18. Mind-consciousness (mano-viññāna)

The question may arise: What is the main objective of the Buddhist Philosophy in the analysis of existence into five khandhas, twelve āyatanas and eighteen dhātus? It can be answered without hesitation that the main objective is to show that in ‘existence’ or ‘man’ there is no self or soul, everything exists as production of stream of events, which are composed of various elements, both sensuous and non-sensuous ones. Thus, human existence can be analyzed as five khandhas, twelve āyatanas and eighteen dhātus as discussed above. And if somebody asked what is human existence according to Buddhism? We can simply say that it is five khandhas, twelve āyatanas, and eighteen dhātus respectively.

As a result of such analysis, human existence can be seen from the dimensions of five aggregates (khandhas), twelve bases of cognition (āyatanas) and eighteen elements (dhātus). To be precise, six internal senses namely, eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind; and six external senses, namely, visible form, sound, odour, taste, tangible object and mind-object, which are twelve in all, are called the bases of cognition (āyatanas).
These twelve bases of cognition plus six kinds of consciousness such as eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness etc, which are eighteen in number, are called elements (*dhātus*). And these elements of existence are also called *dhamma* (*dharma* Skt.), which is considered to be ‘a special meaning’ in the Buddhist Philosophy.¹²

**Human existence as non-substantiality (Anattā)**

The purpose of an analysis of human existence into five *khandhas*, twelve *āyatanas*, and eighteen *dhātus* is to show that there is nothing in man, which may be called a permanent and unchanging being. That is, human existence is non-substantial; it is without self or soul. The denial of the existence of such self or soul is known as the theory of selflessness (*anattā* or *anātman* Skt.). This doctrine contrasts sharply with the *Upaniṣad* philosophy of self, the detail of which had already been discussed in the first chapter. Here we are concerned with the Buddhist doctrine of “*anattā*”?

First of all, it is important to point out some misinterpretations with regard to the doctrine of *anattā*. One interpretation is that what Buddha really denies is not the Ultimate or Transcendent Self but only an empirical self as it is subject to change and impermanent. Another argument is that by introducing the doctrine of *anattā* Buddha denies the existence of everything. In fact, there is nothing new in these ideas, since they can be traced back to the classical views of eternalism (*sassataitići*) and nihilism (*natthikatiitići*) as mentioned earlier. Now what is *anattā* according to Buddhism?

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¹² Sec. . Stcherbatsky, The Central conception of Buddhism, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1944), PP. 1-9
As we have pointed out earlier, according to the *Upanisads* the *ātman* or *atta* is synonymous with the substantiality of personality, self, a living being, and a conscious agent. Buddhism denies the substantiality of such atman, saying that there is no permanent substance or entity within or without existence. For this reason, “*anatta*” means the non-substantiality of existence, since everything exists as a stream of interconnected elements. Whatever is designated by the names such as self or soul (*ātman*), the individual or existence (*puggala* or *sattā*) is a mere name for a multitude of causes and conditions.

It must be noted that here the non-substantiality of existence is one of the three marks (*lakkhanas*) of all beings. It applies to both conditioned and non-conditioned things whereas the remaining two marks, impermanence (*anicca*) and suffering (*dukkha*) apply only to conditioned things. This is the reason why Buddha uses the word “*Dhamma*” instead of “*Sankhāra*” when he wants to say that both conditioned and non-conditioned things or elements are no-self.

However, some may ask: Since the Buddhist analyses human existence into five *khandhas*, twelve *āyatanas* and eighteen *dhātus*, can it be concluded that these things are permanent substance or entity? To root out this misconception, Buddha clearly states:

*Body (rūpa) Monks! is not self. Now were this body self, it would not tend to sickness. And one might get the*

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13 Stcherbatsky, Ibid p. 24
14 Dhammapada, Ch. XX, 277-78-79
“*Sabbe sankhāra anicca*
*Sabbe sankhāra dukkha*
*Sabbe dhamma anatta*”
chance of saying in regard to the body 'let body become thus for me, let body not become thus for me. But it is because body is not self, it tends to sickness and one cannot get the chance of saying 'let body become thus for me, let body not become thus for me.'

The same pattern is repeated for the rest of khandhas, namely, vedanā, saññā, sankhāra and viññāna. The non-substantiality of existence will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Human existence as the circle of causes and conditions

As mentioned above, human existence is only the five components without anything that can be called self or soul. When one understands that existence is the interrelationship of the five aggregates he will not fall into nihilism, which is called ucchedadīthi, nor will he slip into eternalism, which is called sassatadīthi. Rejecting these extreme theories, Buddha propounds the theory of Paṭiccasamuppāda (Dependent Origination) to explain how the above five aggregates are unified as the process of human existence.

Thus, this theory is also called "the law of the middle path" (majjhenadhamma). "Kaccāna, 'everything exists' is one extreme, and 'nothing exists' is another extreme. The Tathāgata expresses the middle way that does not adhere to these two extremes."  

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15 S. XXII, 59
16 S. II 16-17, S. III 134-135
The general principle of *paticcasamuppāda* can be expressed in the following formula:

a. When this exists, then this exists; *imasmim sati idam hoti*,
   Because this arises, this also arises; *imassuppādā idam uppajjati*.

b. When this ceases to exist, this also ceases to exist; *imasmirī asati idam na hoti*.
   Because this ceases to exist, this also to exist; *imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati*.

Based on this principle, human existence can be specifically explained in detailed formula as follows:

1. Through ignorance are conditioned volitional action or Kamma-formation (*Avijjāpaccayā Saṅkhara*)
2. Through volitional action is conditioned consciousness (*Saṅkhārapaccayā Viññāṇam*)
3. Through consciousness are conditioned mental and physical phenomena (*Viññāṇapaccayā nāmarupam*)
4. Through mental and physical phenomena are conditioned the six faculties (*nāmarupapaccayā Sādāyatanam*)
5. Through the six faculties is conditioned contact (*Sādāyatanapaccayā phasso*)
6. Through contact is conditioned sensation or feeling (*Phassapaccayā Vedanā*)
7. Through sensation is conditioned desire (*Vedanāpaccayā taṇhā*)
8. Through desire is conditioned clinging (*Taṇṭāpaccayā upadānam*)
9. Through clinging is conditioned the process of becoming (*Upādanapaccayā bhavo*)
10. Through the process of becoming is conditioned birth 
\textit{(Bhavapaccayā jāti)}

11. Through the birth are conditioned (12) decay, death, lamentation, 
sorrow, suffering and despair.

This formula shows how human existence and its conditions such as 
decay, death and suffering etc., comes into being. It is called the process of 
the arising \textit{(samudayavāra)} as it corresponds to the condition of the 
arising of suffering in the four Noble Truth. When we reverse this formula, 
we come to the cessation of the process:

Through the cessation of ignorance, kamma-formations cease.
Through the cessation of kamma-formations consciousness ceases...
Through the cessation of birth, decay, death, lamentation, sorrow, 
suffering and despair cease.

This process shows how human existence and its condition come to 
an end. It is called the process of cessation \textit{(niruddhavāra)}, since it coincides 
with the extinguishing of suffering \textit{(dukkhanirodha)} in the doctrine of the 
four Noble Truths. It must be noted that the above element of dependent 
origination are interrelated, arising and extinquishing in a continuing 
manner.

Even though they are counted from ignorance \textit{(avijjā)} to decay and 
death \textit{(jarāmarana)}. It does not mean that ignorance is the ‘first cause’ in 
the sense of ‘creator’ as believed by the \textit{Upaniṣads}. The process of human 
existence should be considered as ‘a circle’ \textit{(bhavacakkha)} not as a chain. In 
order to understand this point more clearly, let us see the following diagram:
These elements of dependent origination can be briefly explained as follows:

**Ignorance** (*Avijjā*) means not knowing, not seeing according to the truth, not understanding nor keeping face with conditions, getting tied up with conventional assumptions, not understanding life and the world according to the truth.

**Mental formation** (*Sankhāra*) is a thought process that intends, aims, and decides the course of action according to inclination, habit and various properties of mind that have been stored up.

**Consciousness** (*Vitkāna*) is a perceiving process of mind-objects, that is, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and contacting according to the object in the mind, and this includes knowing the origin of various states of mind.
Mind-and-body (Nama-rūpa) means the condition of all the physical and mental factors existing in an interconnected state and performing—all their functions in response to the flow of consciousness and various parts of body and mind.

The six sense-bases (Sadāyatana) refers to the state of the senses that are related to the performance of duties and are relates to the circumstance at hand.

Contact (Phassa) means linking knowledge with the external world, perceiving mind-objects or various experiences.

Sensation (Vedanā) means feeling of pleasure or comfort, feeling discomfort and equanimity.

Craving (Tanha) means the ambitious, over-eager desire to find things that cause unpleasant sensation. It may be divided into a desire to get, to have (kama-tanha), to exist in a continuous state (bhava-tanha) and wanting to avoid, to annihilate, to destroy (vibhava-tanha).

Attachment or Clinging (Upādāna) means clinging to feeling of like or dislike, manipulating various things and conditions in order to sustain certain feeling, inflating the value and importance of various conditions and things in a way that responds to or increase craving.

Becoming (Bhava) means the sphere of existence or the whole behavioural process that reveals itself in response to craving and clinging and the conditions of existence that exist for a self depending on attachments and the behaviour associated with them.

Birth (Jāti) means coming to the realization that life exists or does not exist in a certain state, have or do not have certain things, are or are not in a certain way. It is the life process which has the properties linked with the force of kamma.

Decay and death (Jarā-marāṇa) means a state of separation from, or a lack of the above life process, which causes a feeling that we are
threatened by a final separation from that life process. Thus, arises the whole mass of sorrow, lamentation, suffering, grief and distress linked with feelings of desairs, loss, frustration and various miserable feelings.

These twelve conditions (paccayākāra or nidāna) are transitory; none of them can be described as a permanent substance because each element arises and disappears in a continuing manner as a process of cause and condition. Thus, the non-substantiality of existence can be explained in the light of paticcasamuppāda as follows:

Depending on ignorance (avijjā) arise volitional formations (saṅkhārā). With no knowledge of the truth there arises a confused thinking based on conjecture and imagination and conditioned by belief, fears and accumulated character traits. Hence, when there is volitional formation, there arises consciousness (viññāna), namely, seeing, hearing, and so on. But if no volition or intention is present, the consciousness will not arise. For example, when we are attentively reading a book, we are not aware of ourselves even mosquitoes bite us. When there is consciousness, there arises name and form (nāma-rūpa). When there are name and form, there arise sense bases (sadāyatana). When the name and form are functioning, they have to rely on any one of the six sense bases as a medium for their behaviour.

When the six sense bases arise, there arises contact (phassa). When the sense organs are functioning, there will be perceptions of objects through them. Depending on contact, there arises feeling (vedanā). When there is the perception, there must be feeling. When there is feeling, there arises craving (tanha). Depending on craving arises clinging (upādana). When craving becomes more intense, it turns into an attachment.
When there is clinging, there must arise becoming (bhava). We usually intend to invent the condition or becoming from the grasping both in behaviour and personality dealing with name and form. Dependent on becoming, there arises birth (jāti). When there is the becoming, there must appear ego or self to occupy the becoming of life by declaring itself as the owner, the doer, and so on. When there is birth there arises decay and death (jarā marāṇa). Birth into life state necessarily entails the experience of prosperity and decline within it. The inevitability of decline and dissolution, together with constant anxiety and afford to protect that state from them combine to cause sorrow, lamentation, suffering, grief, and despair.

**Kamma and Rebirth**

As we have explained in the previous section, Buddhism denies the substantial ego and asserts that in the last analysis of existence nothing remains as a permanent substance. But at the same time Buddhism also believes in *kamma* and rebirth. Is it possible for the Buddhists who deny the existence of permanent Self to retain the concepts of *kamma* and rebirth? Is the theory of non-substantial ego (*anatta*) not contradicted to such conceptions? If everything including body and mind is not self, then who commits *kamma*? Who receives the result of *kamma* and how can there be rebirth?

To deal with these questions, we need to clearly understand the Buddhist position on the concept of *kamma*. This is because there were a number of theories regarding the *kamma*, which had been prevailing in the period of Buddha. Among the multiplications of ideas it is easily possible for the people to misunderstand any one of them in the name of Buddha.
There are three doctrines of kamma, which Buddha does reject, namely, Past-action determinism, theistic determinism and indeterminism.\(^{17}\)

1. Past-action determinism (Pubbekatahetuvāda) holds that all happiness (sukha) arises from, or is determined by the past kamma.

2. Theistic determinism (Isssaraninmāhutavāda) believes that all happiness and suffering are determined or created by the will of Supreme Being or God.

3. Indeterminism (Ahetuvāda) believes that all happiness and suffering are without causes, or arise due to uncontrollable lust or accident.

These theories have been rejected by Buddha, since they inculcate in us neither motivation nor effort to decide what we should do and what we have to do. As a result, man may live his life in such a way that he is just passively losing around and waiting for everything to happen without doing anything to improve or change himself, or he may try only to please God. It must be noted that these days kamma is almost taught and treated largely from the perspective of past life. As Buddha says:

\[\text{O monks, when people take the past kamma as the essential cause, cling to the will of a supreme deity as essential cause, regard the luck or accident as essential cause, then proper resolve, effort, and the thought that 'this should be done, this should not be done' do not exist.}^{18}\]

\(^{17}\) A.I., 173

\(^{18}\) 12. A. 1. 173
However, one should not jump into conclusion that Buddha denies the significance of old *kamma*. In fact, past *kamma* according to Buddhism is partially related to the process of cause and effect and has the impact on the present. But conditions in the present are related to cause and effect and not to any power that transcends nature. Nor are they contributed to lust or fate. Even though the past action may have a bearing on the present one, it is dependent on man to decide to give up or find a way to overcome his condition. Therefore, man should take the past kamma as a lesson or a firm measure to improve or change himself. To understand the cause and effect process is to be able to learn from the past, understanding situation at hand, and is skillfully make a plan of action for creating, improving and correcting the future.\(^1\)

It must be noted here that Buddha does not deny the importance of the previous *kamma*, instead he says that it plays a very important role in the process of cause and effect and thus has an effect on the present in its capacity; yet, the present *kamma* is considered to be the most important one in shaping life or creating values of man. It is not dependent on a supernatural force for its existence as it can takes it own course in accordance with the law of cause and condition.

Now a question arises: what is *kamma* according to Buddhism? Literally, *kamma* means ‘action’ or ‘doing’. But not all action is kamma; only action that is accompanied or led by intention (*cetanā*) is called *kamma*, as Buddha says: “*Bhikkhu! I regard volition as action (kamma); having intended, one acts through body, speech and mind.*”\(^2\) But what is


\(^2\) A. VI. 63
this intention? It may be pointed out here that according to Buddhism there 
are four nutriments (āhāra) in the sense of cause and condition necessary for 
the existence and continuity of human existence. They are; (1) ordinary 
material food (kabalinkarāha), (2) contact of our sense organs with the 
external world (phassāhāra), (3) consciousness (viññāṇāhāra) and mental 
volition or will (manosancetāhāra). Of these, the will is the same as 
volition. It is the will to live, to exist, to re-exist, to continue, to become 
more and more, Hence, volition includes intention, choice, decision and 
will. In other words, the volition is the energy that instigates and directs all 
human actions.

As described above, it is clear that according to Buddhism, kamma or 
action without volition, namely, the instinctive actions such as sneezing, 
respiration and so on, is not regarded as kamma because it does not consist 
of a volitional consciousness, which plays the most important role in 
determining the nature of kamma.

Since the Buddhist believes that kamma and its result are invariably 
compatible just as every object is accompanied by its shadow, some may 
argue that there would be no room for freedom if action is always 
determined by volition. Is the Buddhist concept of kamma identical with 
determinism or fatalism? To root out this confusion, the meaning of 
determinism and fatalism needs some clarification.

The determinist believes that every event is causally determined, and 
the whole universe works deterministically; the freedom of actions becomes 
illusion and is nothing but reactions of the past deeds. The fatalist on the 
other hand holds that the present human situation is due to our past deeds 
that we cannot change or avoid. In short, the fatalist explains everything
through some unseen and inscrutable fate, whereas the determinist explains the events through some past events.

In the light of both theories, the concept of *kamma* may lead to misunderstanding that the present action is determined by our previous one, and that what has been has been, what will be will be. In fact, what the doctrine of *kamma* wants to convey is that man is the product of his action, which conditions his own situation. The implication of *kamma*-doctrine is that human beings are responsible for their own actions and they are the master of their own achievements or failures. Thus, The Buddhist theory of *kamma* is not determinism and fatalism, because it accepts the possibility of changing the result of *kamma* by human effort.

Based on the law of *patīcchasamuppāda*, however, *kamma* can be viewed in different perspectives as follows:

1. In terms of its qualities, *kamma* can be typified into two main items, namely, good *kamma* (*kusala kamma*) and bad *kamma* (*akusala kamma*)

   (1) *Kusala kamma* refers to skilful action which arises from the three roots of good action (*kusala-mūla*) i.e. non-greed or generasity (*alobha*), non-hatred or love (*adosa*), and non-dulusion or wisdom (*amoha* or *vījñā=vidyā*).

   (2) *Akusala kamma* is the action conditioned by three roots of unwholesome action i.e. greed (*lobha*) hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha* or *āvijñā*).
2. In terms of its arising, kamma can be classified according to the channels through which it arises. They are three in number as follows:

(a) Kāya kamma is the action that occurs through the body.
(b) Vaci kamma is that which occurs through speech.
(c) Mano kamma is that which occurs through mind.

Of these three types of kamma, mental kamma is considered to be the most important and far-reaching in its effect because it is the origin of the remaining kamma as Buddha says:

Listen, Tapassi. Of these three types of kamma so distinguished by me, I say that kamma has the heaviest consequences for the committing of evil deeds or verbal kamma for the existence of evil deeds, not bodily or verbal kamma.\(^{22}\)

3. In terms of its result, kamma can be classified into four categories as follows:\(^{23}\)

(1) Black kamma with black result: This refers to three kinds of kamma, bodily, verbal and mental, the example of which are killing, stealing, sexual infidelity, lying and drinking intoxicants.

(2) White kamma with white result: This refers to these three kinds of kamma, which are committed in accordance with the ten bases for skilful actions (kusala- kammathā) such as abstention from killing, stealing, committing sexual infidelity etc.

\(^{22}\) M. I. 373
\(^{23}\) A.II. 230-231
(3) Black and white kamma with its black and white result: This refers to all three kinds of actions, which are partly harmful, partly not, such as the action of people in general.

(4) Neither black nor white kamma: This refers to the action that leads to the cessation of kamma that is, the action which is conditioned by the noble eightfold path (ariya atthaṅgika-magga).

Of these, the last one is mostly emphasized by Buddha, whereas the first three kinds of kamma are in tune with the three kinds of kamma mentioned earlier, namely, good actions bear, good fruit, bad action bear, bad fruits and action partly good and partly bad bear fruit partly good and partly bad. It must be noted that here the third kind i.e. black and white kamma, does not refer to the manner of individual acts, but rather to the series of acts which defines an individual life. In fact, there is no such thing as black and white kamma or partly good and partly bad kamma, but it is mentioned that a certain person accumulates acts of body, speech, thought that are both discordant and harmonious.\textsuperscript{24} However, in the light of the kammic dimensions as mentioned above we can describe kamma in two different ways; as a conditioning factor and as human ethics, which may be explained in the following ways:

(1) As a conditioning factor, kamma can be seen as a component within the whole life process, being the agent, which fashions the direction taken in life. This is kamma in its sense of sankhāra as it appears in the doctrine of dependent origination (paticcasamuppāda), where it is described as the agent that fashions the mind. The factors or qualities of the mind, accompanied by intention, shape the mind into good, evil or neutral states,

and in turn fashion the thought process and its manifestations through body and speech. In this context *kamma* could be defined simply as mental proliferation. However, it is not proper to believe that every thing is determined by *kamma*. According to Buddhism, *kamma* is just one of the natural laws (*niyamas*), which can be classified into the five categories as follows:

1) *Utuniyama*: This law governs the formation of seasons, change in temperature and other physical conditions. It governs the condition related to floods, storm, epidemics, famines, harvests and so on.

2) *Bijaniyama*: This law governs the production of species, such as man giving birth to man or mango seed producing only mangoes.

3) *Cittaniyama*: This law governs the psychic phenomena or the mental process. It governs the function of a particular type of consciousness in a particular way, in conjunction with its concomitant factors (*cetasika*).

4) *Kammaniyama*: This law governs the order of actions. It is psycho-ethical law of cause and effect known as moral causation. It relates a cause to an effect on the basis of certain conditions such as bad and unwholesome actions producing painful and disgraceful result.

5) *Dhammaniyama*: This law governs the relationship and interdependence of all things that is, the way all things arise, exists... and then cease. It is a normal condition that man has to face birth, decay, sickness, death and suffering.

It must be noted here that the natural law or *niyama* as described by the Buddhists is quite similar to the concept of *Rta* described in the Vedas. But they are different in the sense that whereas the law of *Rta* is supposed to be created or protected by some outer agency, the *Niyama* in Buddhism does not depend on the Supreme Being. It can operate in its own way.
(2) As human ethics, *kamma* can be seen as personal responsibility as well as social responsibility. As personal responsibility, it refers to the manifestations of thoughts through speech and actions. As it is said, “My action is my possession; my action is my inheritance, my action is the matrix which bears me, my action is the race to which I belong, my action is my refuge.” For this reason, man must take responsibility for his own action. *Kamma* as social activity can be seen as work, labour or profession. This is the conduct of human life, which results from intention and creative thinking, which in turn effects society. As the Buddha said:

One does not become Brahmin simply by birth but by *Kamma* is one a Brahmin. By *Kamma* is one a farmer, an artist, a merchant, a servant, a chief, a soldier, a priest or even king.  

So far as the concept of *kamma* is concerned, its ethical implication can be summarised as follows:

1. It makes man to be a person with solid reasoning, that is, he sees action and fruits of action according to a process of cause and effect.

2. It helps man depend on himself by applying himself to the task at hand, not waiting for a lucky day or hoping for help from the external powers.

3. It emphasizes the fact that good qualities, abilities, behaviour and practice are the measuring ethics of human inferiority or perfection.

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25 M. III. P. 203, Quoted in Pouzin, the way to Nirvana, (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publication, 1982), p. 95
26 S. 612,654
4. With regard to past kamma, it can be used as a lesson; one should know and understand oneself according to reason. Instead of pointing the finger at others, one should look at oneself to make a self-improvement or plans for steady progress that is headed in the right direction.

Since the Buddhists hold that there is no permanent self that transmigrates from one life to another life, nor is there any authority or supernatural power that controls the law of kamma, yet they still believe in rebirth as the result of kamma, a question arise: What is reborn into the next existence? Who receives the result of kamma? To this question, the Buddhists would say that the law would take its own course in accordance with principle of Paticcasamuppāda. That is to say, the rebirth is possible through the effectiveness of birth-consciousness (vīññāna), without which the name-and-form (nāmarūpa) of new life would not come to birth.28

However, we should guard against some misunderstanding that may lead us the impression that it is the same consciousness that transmigrates from one life to another. This is because consciousness is momentary (khanika); it arises and perishes in each and every moment. Further, each moment is subdivided into three sub-moments, namely, genesis (uppāda), development (fhiti) and dissolution (bhaṅga).29 It should be noted that each conscious moment has causal relation with its predecessor, that is, consciousness unifies itself.

Now, when one conscious act dies, another conscious act is born in its place, appropriating all the potentialities of the dying conscious act. In this

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28 D. II. 63
29 Abh. IV. 3
way, consciousness dies and is reborn every moment in our daily life. And this process is also applied to the dissolution of body and rebirth into the next life. Just as the present conscious moment is the result of the preceding one, so the consciousness of the newborn child is the result of the consciousness of the dead person. It should be noted that the dead consciousness (cuti-citta) and the birth consciousness (patisandhi-citta) are neither the same nor different. Thus, the fact that consciousness is momentary indicates the temporal dimension of human existence.

Human existence as temporality

Human existence, as the law of paticasamuppāda reveals to us, is consisted of various causes and conditions, which are causally interrelated as a continuing process. It is therefore impermanent. In other words, human existence is temporal or momentary, because it changes every moment. The temporality of existence brings us to the fact that the duration of life is, strictly speaking, extremely brief. Just as a chariot that is rolling rolls at one point of tire, and in resting rests only at one point. In the same manner, the duration of existence is temporal, lasting only for the period of one moment. Thus, the temporality of existence in the light of the paticasamuppāda can be explained in two ways: either as a process of life after life or as a process of daily life.

(1) As a process of life after life, human existence is causally connected. The present life can be conveniently explained with reference to its past condition and its future effect. The process of existence may be divided into three periods, namely,

1) Past: ignorance (Avijjhā) volitional formations (Sānkharā).

See Merker, Ibid. p. 146
2) Present: consciousness (*Vinnana*) mind-body (*nāmarūpa*), six sense base (*sadaīyatana*), contact (*phassa*), feeling (*vedanā*), braving (*tanha*), clinging (*upādana*), becoming (*bhava*).

3) Future: birth (*jāti*) old age (*jara*) death (*marana*) etc.

In this sense, human existence is a long circle and therefore called the ‘wheel of *Saṃsāra*’ (*saṃsāracakka*). As Buddha, just after getting enlightenment, utters these remarkable words:

I have run through a course of many births, looking for the maker of this dwelling and finding him not. Suffering is birth again and again. Now are you seen, O’ builder of the house, you will not build the house again. All your rafters are broken, your ridgepole is destroyed, the mind, set on the attainment of *Nibbāna*, has attained the extinction of desire.  

In the light of the above statements, human existence is seen as the long circle of birth and death from life to life. From this point of view, time (*kala*) plays a very important role in driving human existence into three periods, Past, Present and Future. The Present existence is the result of the past and will also be the cause of the future life as long as its causes and conditions do exist.

For this reason, death is conceived as neither the eternal being nor the total non-being of existence. The Buddhist believes that man will be born
again as long as the wheel of becoming still remains. But there would be no birth any more if the cause and condition of existence is eradicated. In this way, a living being, when considered in relation to time, forms an endless continuity. It is not possible therefore to define what human existence exactly is, for it is always changing and progressing through stages of life according to causes and conditions.

2. As the process of daily life, human existence can be explained not only in terms of a long circle, but also in terms of a short circle of this very life. In this sense, the existence in interrelated by the process of continuity. There is no wide gap between past, present and future, since human existence always comes under the three forces of origination (upāda) development (thiti) and destruction (bhaṅga). The whole process of existence can be explained within the space of single thought –moment. In this sense, the whole of the twelve links of existence, when viewed from a point of the arising of suffering and its cessation, is concerned with this present life. And if the circle can be clearly understood as something that operates on the present, then the past and the future will also be clearly understood because they are all part of one and the same circle.  

For this reason, time according to the Buddhist philosophy is a mere concept (pannatti), and has no objective existence. The existence of time is possible in the conventional sense, and not in the ultimate sense. In other words, there is no time as such; we can talk about it only in terms of temporality or change, without which time has no meaning. The division of time into past, present, and future is, therefore, only conventional without any basis of reality; there is no ontological basis for the time-distinction.

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32 Inkrungkao, p. 133
33 See Mererk, Selflessness in Sartre's Existentialism and Early Buddhism, p. 155
these three dimensions, only the present, if at all, is said to be real because what is the past had already gone, and the future is yet to come.\textsuperscript{34}

Thus, it may be said that time is real or exists in one sense, but is unreal or does not exist in another. That is to say, time is real or exists in the sense of becoming (bhava), but unreal or does not exist in the sense of permanent entity. This is not to say that the present is entirely cut off from the remaining two, past and future; indeed, what the Buddhist wants to say is that the present is the most effective moment that could be regarded as the "turning point" for human action.

For example, if we want the past to be cheerfully remembered, we need to start doing the good thing at this very moment. Similarly, if we hope for a good future, we should have to concentrate on what we are doing now. As a result, man, though his personality may be influenced by an impact of the past kamma, or by an expectation of future, is not completely determined by either of them. For, he can surpass them through the present action.

As mentioned above, the present moment alone exists according to Buddhism. Yet, it is always accompanied by the sub-moments of genesis, development and dissolution. It is possible because these moments are not entirely different from each other; each is conditioned by its predecessor and successor. For this reason, time is divided into past, present and future only on the basis of logical or conventional analysis, not in the sense of ultimate reality. Time is changing, not eternal. And it is the time in this sense that the Buddhists call temporality and consider as the very integral part not only of human existence but also of all conditioned beings. In short, whatever exists

\textsuperscript{34} M. III. 187.
is temporal (yat sat tat kṣanikam), and what is temporal is suffering (yat aniccaḥ tāṁ dukkham).

**Human suffering**

As we have mentioned earlier, suffering (dukkha) is one of characteristics of existence, that is, it is a manifestation of human existence. In fact, the problem of suffering has become the main concern of thinkers, philosophers and laypeople since the ancient time. It is a global phenomenon and too obvious that everybody knows what is suffering. Many take it for granted that they know this problem very well, yet, they argue that we cannot be help being victims because to be existence is to suffer, what we can do in this situation is to bear it. According to the Upanisads, suffering arises due to one’s ignorance (avidyā) of his true self (ātman), the truth of which if man is conscious, suffering is no longer meaningful. For those who realise Brahman, suffering is nothing but mere illusion.

In contrast, the Buddhists hold that suffering is a reality that man actually experiences. It is regarded as one of the four noble truths, namely, suffering (dukkha), cause of suffering (samudaya), cessation of suffering (niruddha), and way leading to cessation of suffering (magga). The doctrine of suffering is generally known as The Four Noble Truths (Ariyasacca), which is considered one of the most important teachings of Buddha. Now let us see what is suffering according to Buddhism.

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35 See Stcherbatsky, ibid, p. 37
36 See above, p. 9
37 Brh Up, 4.4.23
It must be pointed out at the outset that the word “dukkha” in the Buddhist philosophy contains a far greater and wider meaning than it is implied by the translated words; “suffering”, “pain”, “sorrow” or “misery”, since it also refers to impermanence, emptiness and non-substantiality. Since dukkha has usually been translated and interpreted as suffering or pain, it leads to misunderstanding that Buddhism is pessimistic. It would be better to leave it untranslated, rather than to give an inadequate and partial meaning to it.\textsuperscript{38}

According to Buddhism, the conception of dukkha may be viewed from three dimensions; dukkha as ordinary suffering (dukkha-dukkha), dukkha as produced by change (viparītāma-dukkha) and dukkha as conditioned states.\textsuperscript{39} In short, the first is called the suffering of sufferings, the second the suffering of change, and the third the suffering of conditioning.

(1) Dukkha-dukkha includes all kinds of suffering in life like birth, old age, sickness, death, association with unpleasant persons and conditions, separation from beloved ones and pleasant conditions, not getting what one desires, grief, lamentation and distress. In short, all forms of physical and mental suffering, which are universally accepted as stress and strain, pain or sorrow, are regarded as ordinary suffering. It is clear that suffering in this dimension refers to painful experiences in daily life.

According to Buddhism, there are four experiences of this type of suffering, which are considered to be fundamental to existence; the suffering of birth, sickness, ageing and death. The significance of these states lies in

\textsuperscript{38} Rahula, Wapola., What the Buddha Taught, (London: Gordon Fraser, 1959), p. 17
\textsuperscript{39} Vism (PTS), p. 499
the fact that they contribute a source of philosophizing, which may lead to understanding of life. The impact of this kind of suffering is strongly demonstrated in the Buddha's own life story; Buddha is said to have caught sight of a sick person, and old person and a dead person being carried away. This leads him to philosophize that so long as existence is not free from the infinite process of birth, it would always be subject to this type of suffering. Thus, human existence has been characterized as being within the circle of birth and death that cause various suffering related to illness and ageing.

(2) *Viparināma-dukkha* refers to the moment when one has a happy feeling or a wonderful meeting with someone. He clings to such experience and wishes it lasted forever. But it is not possible because nothing is permanent; everything will change sooner or later. When it changes, it produces pain, sorrow and suffering. In short, any kinds of suffering that is caused by vicissitude or changes are included in suffering produced by change. However, one may ask: why does Buddhism state that experiences, which are apparently pleasurable, are ultimately states of suffering? Is only suffering real, not happiness?

It must be pointed out that the Buddhist does not deny happiness in life when he says there is suffering. On the contrary, he admits different forms of happiness, both material and spiritual. But they are included in suffering because their pleasurable status is only relative. If they were truly joyful states in themselves, then just as painful experiences increase the more we indulge in the causes that lead to pain, likewise, the more we engage in the causes that lead to pleasurable experience, the more our happiness or joy should have intensified, but this is not always the case.

Take for example, when we have good food, nice cloths, and attractive car and so on, we feel really marvelous. But after sometime, the
same object that gives us such pleasure can cause us frustration and dissatisfaction. The same thing can happen in friendships and even in sexual relationships. That is the nature of things; they change. So, if we look carefully, everything, however good, bad and ugly it may be, brings us suffering in the end.

(3) \textit{Samkhdra-dukkha} means suffering in the form of impermanence that always coexists with existence. In other words, it is the suffering of conditioning. As mentioned earlier, what we call ‘being’, ‘existence’, ‘individual’, or ‘I’ is only a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces, which may be divided into five groups or aggregates (\textit{pahcakhandhā}).\footnote{S.V (PTS), p. 421} These aggregates of existence are also called ‘\textit{sakkhara}’, because they have no independent entities, but depend on various conditions for their existence. When Buddha says, “In short, these five aggregates of attachment are \textit{dukkha}”, he means that \textit{dukkha} and the five aggregates are not two different things; the five aggregates themselves are \textit{dukkha}.\footnote{See above, pp. 2-6}

It must be noted here that \textit{dukkha} in this dimension is related to a temporality of existence in the sense that everything is changing from moment to moment constantly. This process of momentary change is not due to the external condition that arises to destroy something, but rather the very cause that leads the thing to arise is also a cause of its destruction. In other words, within the cause of its origin lies the cause of its cessation, because whatever is changing is also becoming the subject of suffering (\textit{yam aniccam tam dukkham}).
The third dimension of suffering, therefore, refers to the bar fact of our unenlightened existence, which is under the influence of ignorance. It is called the suffering of conditioning because this state of existence serves as the basis not only for painful experience in the present, but also for the causes and conditions in the future. So, as long as we remain within samsāra, that is, within the control of ignorance, we are in final analysis not free from dukkha or suffering of this type.

Since everything according to Buddhism comes into existence due to cause and condition, suffering also has its own cause. What is a cause of suffering? Buddha clearly states that it is passion, desire or craving (tanha) that causes suffering, which is regarded as the second noble truth. He further elaborates that tanha is the thirst that produces re-existence and re-becoming. It is mixed with passionate greed, which finds fresh delight here and there (tatratatrābhinandini). And it also can be viewed from three aspects, namely, thirst for sense-pleasures (kāma-tanha), thirst for existence and becoming (bhava-tanha), and thirst for non-existence (vibhava-tanha). However, one should not take tanha as the first cause, since even this tanha depends for its existence on other conditions such as sensation (vedanā), contact (phassa) and so on and so forth.

It must also be noted that according to Buddhism, tanha includes not only a desire for sense-pleasures, wealth and power, but also an attachment to ideas, views, theories and beliefs (dhamma-tanha). The fact that human suffering is caused by selfish desire is not difficult to understand. But how can tanha produce re-existence or re-becoming still remains problematic.

42 S,V. (PTS), p. 421
43 See above, pp. 10-14
44 See Rahula, What the Buddha Taught, p. 30
Thus, to remove this confusion the Buddhists point out that the production of re-becoming is possible because *tanhā* as the thirst to exist, to continue, does not stop at death.

For the Buddhists, death is nothing but the total non-functioning of existence. The moment when existence is about to stop functioning, the *tanhā*-energy is being transmitted to the next moment and thereby resulting in producing re-existence of life. So from the Buddhist point of view, re-existence will go on even after death so long as *tanhā* is not completely cut off. Yet, one may ask: Is it possible for man to live without desire or passion? This question will be tackled in the next section.

*The concept of Nibbāna*

It would have been reasonable to describe the Buddha’s view on suffering as pessimistic if he had pointed out only such a problem without recommending any solution. But Buddha firmly states that apart from suffering and its cause, there exists also its cessation. The fact that suffering can be eliminated is the third noble truth. Actually, there are many words that indicate the extinction of suffering such as *tanhakkhaya* (extinction of thirst), *virāga* (absence of desire), *nirrodha* (cessation), *vimutti* (freedom), *santi* (peace), *nibbāna* (blowing out, extinction) etc. Of these, *nibbāna* has gained currency in the Buddhist circles. Let us see what is meant by ‘*nibbāna*’, according to Buddhism.

*Nibbāna* (Skt. *Nirvāṇa*) literally means extinction, blowing out, and coolness. The logic behind this meaning is that all dimensions of *tanhā*

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46 See Ingrungkao, Prasit, The problem of dukkha and its solution in Theravāda Buddhism, p. 161
such as lust (rāga), hatred (dosa) and delusion (moha), according to Buddhism, are compared with fire or flame. Thus, when any person whose tanhā or desire had been extinguished by wisdom (paññā), he is said to have attained the state of nibbāna, and becomes a noble person (ariyapuggala). Such a person is no longer burned by the fire of desire, hatred and delusion; he really achieves the absolute peace and frees from suffering according to Buddhism. Nibbāna cannot be answered completely in words, because language is not enough for expressing the real nature of it. Nevertheless, without language we cannot do anything, since it is always served as a symbol that may lead to the Truth. Though nibbāna cannot be defined in any specific term, it may be characterized as follows:

(a) It is often referred to by such negative terms as tanhakkhaya ‘extinction of thirst’, virāga ‘absence of desire’, dukkhanirodha ‘cessation of suffering’, as it is mentioned in the Pali texts: “O Radha, the extinction of thirst is Nibbāna.”\(^{47}\) The words that carry a negative meaning such as arogaya ‘well-being’, amata ‘immortal’, do not represent a negative state. Thus, to use a negative word to describe the state of nibbāna does not necessarily means that it is a negative state that expresses self-annihilation, since there is no self or soul to be eliminated; if at all, nibbāna refers to the annihilation of ignorance or illusion, which is the cause of suffering according to Buddhism.

(b) It is beyond all terms of duality and relativity. As mentioned above, nibbāna can be described not only in negative terms but in positive terms as well. While the terms such as tanhakkhaya, virāga and so on indicate the state which is devoid of unwholesome tendency (kilesa) like

\(^{47}\) S.J. (PTS) III, p. 190
lust, hatred delusion etc., the terms like ‘santi’ ‘paramasukha’ refer to the fullness of peace and happiness. However, the words ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ are relative and cannot be applied to nibbāna, which transcends the realm of duality or relativity. So, no positive or negative terms can fully described the state of nibbāna. Just to say ‘nibbāna is’ could be the proper way for us to talk about it, because the only way to know nibbāna is to see it, to realize it.

(c) It is considered to be the absolute truth. For nibbāna is the state in which desire, hatred and delusion cease to exist, thereby leading one to see things as they are (yathābhūtan) without illusion or ignorance. Any person who realizes this absolute truth is called ‘a noble one’ or ‘a perfect one’ (arahant), since he is fully conscious of the fact that birth is finished, life is purified, what should be done is done, nothing more is left to be done. Thus, the Buddhist firmly believes that nibbāna is ideal or the summum bonum, which can be realized in this very life; we need not to wait till we die to attain it.

(d) It is beyond logic or reasoning (atakkāvacara). In this sense, nibbāna is not something we can understand by being engaged in speculative discussions, it cannot be proved or disproved through the exercise of logical thinking. Instead, it is to be realized by oneself through his own effort and wisdom. However, the realization of nibbāna is possible only when we follow the right way, that is, ‘the noble eightfold path.’

Now, since nibbāna is the ultimate truth, which liberates human existence from all kinds of defilement like craving, hatred, greed etc., it is

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48 See W. Rahula, What the Buddha Taught, p. 40
thus known as *vimutti* or freedom in Buddhism. For this reason, it can be said that where such defilements (*kilesa*) are no longer existent, there exists freedom. In other words, a person is said to be 'free' only when he is not under control of the defilements. But the problem is: Is it possible for man to live a life without passion or desire? Is *nibbāna* or freedom in Buddhism only the ideal goal, which only few people can achieve? Here it must be pointed out that desire or *tanha* according to the Buddhist is not an essential nature of consciousness (*citta*), it is one of the unwholesome psychic factors (*cetasikas*), and thus can be minimized and even completely eliminated. Had desire or *tanha* been an indispensable factor of consciousness, it would not be possible for man to realize *nibbāna* or freedom.

Though *nibbāna* has only one taste, that is, freedom, it can be divided into two levels; the mundane (*lokiya*) and the transcendent (lokuttara). The first aspect refers to the state of affairs in which defilements like desire, hatred delusion and so on have been suppressed or suspended for the time being, it can be temporarily realized even by a common man in day to day life when his mind is empty of defilements. The second belongs to a noble man (*ariyapuggala*) who at least enters the initial stream of *nibbāna* or freedom (*sotāpanna*). For this reason, *nibbāna* is not the ideal state lying beyond the reach of man, that is, each of us has potentiality to achieve it even though only an *Arahant* is said to be capable of realizing it completely. To affirm the existence of this Ultimate Truth, Buddha says:

> Monks there is an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade an unconditioned. Had there been no an unborn, an unbecome an unmade, an unconditioned, there

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49 The noble man can be classified into four categories, namely, *Sotāpanna*, *Sakadgami*, *Anāgami* and *Arahant*. The last one is considered to be a supreme man (*uttama-purisa*) according to Buddhism. D. I. 156
would be no escape from what is born, become, made and conditioned. Since there is an unborn, an unbecome, an unconditioned, so there is escape from what is born, become, made and conditioned.\textsuperscript{50}

From these statements, it follows that nibbāna is not created or born out of any cause and condition and thus free from ageing and death; in the ultimate sense it is permanent or immortal (amata). Thus, nibbāna is not a non-existence; rather it is positive, permanent reality. If it were non-existence, then the escape from the long series of existence (samsāra) could not be possible. This is the reason why Buddha has regarded nibbāna as one of the noble truths.

\textbf{The way to nibbāna}

Buddha not only asserts the possibility of nibbāna but also suggests the way or method by which such Truth could be achieved by prescribing certain moral conducts to be followed by those who aspire to get a real peace of mind and freedom from suffering and despair. This way is known as ‘the middle path’ (majjhā-patipadā) because it avoids other two extreme ways, namely, the indulgence in sensual pleasure (kāmasukkhalikāuyoga) on the one hand, and the engagement in self-mortification (attakilamathāuyoga) on the other.

The middle path is only one way that can lead us to the end of suffering, Nibbāna, yet, it is consisted of eight factors. They are as follows:\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{50} Ud, 80-81
\textsuperscript{51} D. II., 312
1. **Right understanding** (*Sammā-thitthi*)
2. **Right thought** (*Sammā-samkappa*)
3. **Right speech** (*Sammā-vācā*)
4. **Right action** (*Sammā-kammanta*)
5. **Right livelihood** (*Sammā-ājiva*)
6. **Right effort** (*Sammā-vāyāma*)
7. **Right mindfulness** (*Sammā-sati*)
8. **Right concentration** (*Sammā-samādhi*)

Let us briefly clarify the meaning of these factors:

1. **Right understanding**: it refers to the comprehension of the four noble truths, selflessness and temporality of existence as mentioned earlier.

2. **Right thought**: it is the thought of renunciation from the bad things, thought of good will, and thought of harmlessness, which is opposed to the thinking that is influenced by sense desire, ill-will and harmfulness.

3. **Right speech**: one should speak only truth and avoid falsehood, that is, one should not speak evil of others, should refrain from slander, avoid abusive and angry language, speak kindly and should not indulge in foolish and irrelevant talks.

4. **Right action**: it means abstinence from the wrong actions such as killing, stealing, infidelity and so on. It indicates that one should extend loving-kindness to all beings, perform duty honestly, and be faithful and sincere.

5. **Right livelihood**: it means the way by which one earns a living should be in the frame work of the principles of moral conducts, that is, one should not indulge in corruption, drug trafficking, practising deceit and so on.

6. **Right effort**: it means that one should cultivate a positive thinking and have enthusiasm in what he is doing. In short, it is the effort that we make in order to avoid the bad things and develop the good things.
7. **Right mindfulness:** it means a constant awareness of each and every movement of what we do, which safeguard our attention against the wrong views and lead to see things as they are.

8. **Right concentration:** it refers to the power of thinking that focuses on the particular object, which gives us the necessary motive to develop or train ourselves so that we are in position to help ourselves as well as the fellow-beings.

The noble eightfold path may be regarded as the practical ethics of Buddhism for the purpose of building up the human character and improving it, but at the same time, it is the way of the holy religion for attaining the highest enlightenment. It must be pointed out that this eightfold path should not be regarded as a combination of different ways. It is a unitary way that can transform a common man into a noble person.

Of these, the first two factors are summarized in the mode of wisdom (*pañña*), the second group of factors from three to five in the mode of moral conduct (*siła*), and finally, the third group from six to eight in the mode of concentration (*samādhi*). Looking from this point of view, human existence can be characterized in three dimensions, namely, physical, mental, and intellectual. Thus, man needs to develop himself in three ways in order to attain the state of *nibbāna*. The physical mode can be developed by observing moral conducts such as abstaining from killing, stealing, fidelity, telling lie and taking drugs. The mental mode can be cultivated by focusing the thinking on a particular object so that the power of thought is capable of flying to one direction. Finally, the intellectual dimension can be developed and sustained by insight meditation (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*).\(^{52}\)

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\(^{52}\) See P. Merck, *Selflessness in Sartre's Existentialism and early Buddhism*, p. 193
Now it is clear that even though Buddhism regards human existence as being under the control of various causes and conditions such as change or temporality, suffering and non-substantiality, it also maintains that one can transcend these situations not by changing them or ignoring them but by transforming one's attitude toward them. The possibility of freedom and transcendence has been substantiated by the principles of Dependent Origination (*Paticca-samuppāda*) and the Four Noble Truths (*Ariya-sacca*) as mentioned above.

That Buddhism points out the reality of human suffering does not mean that it is pessimistic, since it also affirms the cessation of suffering and suggests the way to overcome it. Thus, it can be said that human existence according to Buddhism is a synthesis of situation and freedom. Buddha delineates human condition not only to reveal what it is but also to suggest how we should respond to it. He strikes our attention to the fact that nothing come incidentally, because everything depends on cause and condition for its existence. So, if one realizes this truth, he can take a course of action accordingly.

Thus, Buddha suggests that for these noble truths to be useful, one should react or perform an appropriate action to them in the following ways: 53 (a) suffering or *dukkha* is the reality that should be comprehended, (b) the cause or *samudaya* of suffering is the reality that must be eradicated, (c) the extinction or *nirodha* of suffering is to be realized, (d) the path (*magga*) that leads to the extinction of suffering is to be developed.

53 Vin. I. 10; S V 422