
AN EXPLORATION OF KAMMA, REBIRTH AND THE LAW OF DHAMMA



Throughout the ages, periodically wise men arose in the world with the mission to enlighten unenlightened man. These were the great initiators who brought the light whenever the world was shrouded in darkness. Following their passing, people, anxious to not lose the light again, wrote down their teachings, organised, what thereto was preserved too loosely, and wrote

commentaries in order to explain the teachings to newer generations. But as each generation faces also issues unknown before, with time difficulties arise in applying the old teachings to contemporary problems. Hence, we find, even where the teachings themselves are untouchable, a growing collection of commentaries. However, there are issues which, although they existed for a long time, even stretching over many centuries, do not get addressed, either out of incapacity or out of fear of straying too far from the teachings of the founder. Buddhism is not exempt from that. When we look at the Abhidhamma system, which is regarded as the higher teaching of Buddhism, we find various statements which have puzzled and confused generation after generation. Amongst these, the author has picked here one, that he regards as being a very central part of Buddhist Cosmology: the topic of how consciousness relates to other planes of being.

In the Buddhist texts (esp. DN 33&34), we are repeatedly urged to both understand certain fundamentals of consciousness, as well as the various abodes beings can be reborn. Nevertheless, the amount of information we can find about either of these is exceedingly sparse.

Therefore in here, I want to offer a few ideas for a new way of approaching what has been given in the texts¹ and how we can relate it to meditative insights, especially regarding the nature of consciousness. The main purpose of which, is to offer a clearer and more meaningful picture of Buddhist Cosmology. Because, without ordering our conception of the world (however large or

¹ Most of the information that is textual in this writing draws from the Abhidhammattha Sangaha, the perhaps most famous Commentary on Abhidhamma.

small it may be), we will not be able to order our mind, a task which is so central in the Buddha's teaching.

However, in order to embed the teachings on Rebirth into a meaningful context, so that this writing by itself gives a complete picture of Buddhist Cosmology (as conceived by the author), I have prepended a brief explanation about the Law of Kamma, and let the Treatise on Rebirth be followed by an examination of the Law of Dhamma. Apart from that I should state, that this writing, or at least the central aspect on Rebirth actually was largely intended to act as a supplement to my previous work contained in my book Paramattha, wherein due to limitations of space I have given only a summary of the subject matter.

KAMMA

There are three important laws (or facts of existence), which a person seeking to understand the Buddhist path to enlightenment should seek to gain some comprehension of: The Law of Kamma, The fact of Rebirth and, The Law of Purification, or Dhamma. The Law of Kamma is the law which defines how the mind is producing results in the future or, how the mind affects the future.² This often has been thought of as being limited only to ethical considerations of 'good seeds lead to good fruits', 'bad seeds lead to bad fruits', a limitation which however exceedingly curtails the usefulness of the knowledge of the Law of Kamma. There are many, much more fundamental considerations of this Law, for example, the condition of habits (or habitual kamma) as in: 'What I do or think now, I might do or think with greater ease in the future'. In fact, even the famous Law of Dependent Origination (/Law of Becoming) is in reality a way of describing how the Law of Kamma works. Aspects of which will be for instance: 'What I perceive, might lead to interest, which may lead to desire, which may lead to becoming (this or that)'. This is just to say, that the Law of Kamma is very multifaceted and has many more implications than just moral or ethical ones. One of these implications is, that we can use the Law of Kamma not only to become better, more ethical persons, but that we can equally use it to solve various mental, and even to some extent, physical problems. The basic dynamic therein lies in the fact, that if you formulate a wish, consciousness may begin to see a possible path to the attainment of the wished-for

² Cetāna is not only intention, as often translated, but mental activity in general.

thing. And that is precisely also the reason why we have to use the Law of Kamma even to move forward on the path to the transcendence of kamma.

Yet, before thinking further about the end, let's begin with the more immediate things: The environment we find ourselves in, our weaknesses and strengths, our virtues and vices, our health, the occupations we are drawn towards, our family and to a lesser degree our friends, ...these are all conditioned by kamma done or acquired in the past. We have been drawn to these because of some attachment, some desire, some inclination. And the more we ravel in them, the more intensely we are going to be drawn towards, and into them in the future. While on the other hand side, the less we ravel in them, the more we are getting dispatched from them.

This is the main dynamic both for cultivating a particular line of kamma, i.e. a particular virtue, skill or perhaps even family bond, or for ridding ourselves from something undesirable, such as some vice, surrounding, or undesired occupation...

A wish therein is what makes consciousness (and conscious experience) more concrete (or definite) and more individual a thing. Consciousness never is only a mirror which only reflects the world, each person's consciousness is unique³, and it perceives only its own unique part of the outer world of objects (the phenomenal world)⁴ while it is blind towards whatever it has no interest in whatsoever. The intricacy therein lies, in the fact, that in the sense-sphere world, a person's consciousness is

³ This is a relative statement...each person's consciousness depends on his individual kamma and it is because of that, that the consciousness is an individual thing.

⁴ Actually of the inner world (of feelings, perceptions, etc.) too...

always bombarded by things coming through the senses... and towards some of these consciousness is forced to have an interest in, simply because it is a human consciousness, (which with living the human life, gradually realises the laws of the human world.) Thus, whether a person wants it or not, he continuously generates new (sense-sphere) kamma, which will produce its respective results in the future. But let's look more into what can be done with an understanding of the Law of Kamma... In the first instance, once you understand that basic mechanism that I have just talked about, which is actually an aspect of the law of becoming (Paticca Samuppada), you can make the process more deliberate, for example by, in the first instance putting yourself into an environment where your senses are contacting things that you would want to develop some further relationship with. For example, if you are living in a depressing dark environment...you more often contact bright places, until the desire to live in such a place ultimately leads you there. Or, if you seek wealth, you seek out an environment that represents wealth; if you want to become more natural, you go into nature; etc.. This way even only through physical means you can make use of the Law of Kamma to change the environment you find yourself in,... or to in general live in better circumstances in the future, or to become a healthier person, or to acquire friends, and so on. Then in regards to the mind, you can start making a plan, as to what qualities you want to develop in yourself, what skill you want to develop, or what field of study you want to learn. Actually, you can learn any thing only really when you understand at least to a little degree, that there is a certain lawfulness in this universe, and that by intelligently

making use of this law...you can shape your future. Of course, in civilised nations, this is reasonably well established now, but even there usually only the well-educated people clearly grasp it, while common people make use of it more or less unconsciously only.

Thus, one thing that has to be clearly grasped about the Law of Kamma is, that it is a law which works in consciousness. You can produce causes and you can receive effects both in regards to the mind and in regards to the physical world, but the mechanism lies in consciousness. This is precisely why you can become a master of that law by deeply understanding it. Here is one example:...

One example to show more clearly how the mechanism lies in consciousness: You give something to somebody. The result at some point in the future is, that you will receive. But the law is not functioning outwardly (as far as we can see...although there might be, as some claim, intelligences without whose duty it is to assist with the working out of kamma), but primarily it is thus, that there are always opportunities in life to receive, but only he who has given much will have a consciousness which easily accepts, without any mental complications, whatever he in his heart knows that he deserves it. kamma and virtue... A similar dynamic applies to being virtuous. If you are virtuous, one result is, that good people like and respect you. But that does not entirely come under the Law of Kamma but belongs more to the law of Dhamma...the law of the divine life. The kammical result proper is, that your body and mind will improve through that practice of virtue. Because in order to be virtuous you have to refine your body to be responsive to your will, while you have to

have some amount of control over your mind too. That is how consciousness affects mind and matter (viññāna paccaya nāma-rūpa). Thus, ultimately you will become more noble-looking and wise than without such training. Which in turn will make it ever more easy to be virtuous continuously. The outer effects of this particular kind of kamma, are the promise of the great religions, that living the divine life, you can come to live in heaven. Which for some may come to pass even while living on earth.

REBIRTH

Intimately connected with the Law of Kamma, is the fact of rebirth. Your Kamma does not just die with the death of your body. The stream of becoming flows on, bringing about a new consciousness in a new set of circumstances, which is setting the stage for new life experiences, which are yet conditioned by your kamma from the past.

The Human Realm

According to Buddhist Cosmology, there are many places you can go after death, apart from the realm of human beings. But before going further into that, it makes more sense to first of all consider about rebirth within the human realm. And there we might class human beings first of all rather loosely as those who go upwards after death, that is, those who attain a better rebirth; those who remain in roughly the same position, and those who go downwards after death.

But there is another scheme of classifying human beings, and positions within the human realm a person may be born in. And that is the ancient Indian scheme of the four human castes. Now we do not need to go into the fact that, what was made out of this scheme in India, has caused a lot of suffering for many people, because in here we only want to take up the idea in an ideal manner. And as such we find, that it is a very natural

scheme for ordering or classifying human beings within the human realm.

In that scheme, the lowest class of human beings are those, which neither possess any skill, nor any virtue and which are of very little intelligence.

In a human society, these would naturally occupy the lowest rung of the social ladder. And in as much they would actually fulfil a role within the society and not go against it, by crime or idleness, they would only fill jobs like cleaner, assembly line worker, perhaps bricklayer, or other simple jobs that require little skill.

Above that we have the class usually called "householders", which we might in modern times call middle-class families. This in the natural scheme would be occupied by those who possess some skill, some virtues, and are of average intelligence. For the maintenance of these, they will let their life revolve around money and enjoyment.

Then we have human beings who possess more than average skill, greater virtue and a brighter intelligence. These were perhaps more so in times past, the aristocracy of society. Their work traditionally was that of the high-ranking military person, as well as barons, earls, the royal family and so on. But in modern times it would include also the manager, the pop star, and people who are generally referred to as the "high society".

While as the last, we have as the highest class in this scheme, people who possess more than average skill, high virtue, keen intelligence, plus, who possess some relation, some connection,

or some experience, of the higher planes, that is, the divine planes above the human kingdom. In a natural scheme, these would naturally be drawn towards occupations of a religious kind.

This is one natural way of classifying human beings, which allows us to easily show, how the human realm is embedded into a greater scheme, with brighter worlds stretching above and worlds of increasing darkness reaching further and further downwards. All of which are relatable to the nature of consciousness.

Animal Kingdom

Having described the realm of human beings from the perspective of consciousness, let us take a downward journey, and see what prospects await those who through their actions and minds in human life have proven themselves still unworthy of the human condition.

Below the realm of human beings, speaking with reference to the condition of consciousness, lies the animal kingdom.

The animal kingdom is of course very varied, much more so than the realm of human beings. But in regards to the condition of consciousness, we may classify them in here simply as comparatively intelligent, void of intelligence, and in between.

Animal species that are often quite intelligent are especially mammals, like monkeys, cats and dogs, horses and so on. With animals void, or almost void of intelligence are meant very simple structured animals such as worms, sea stars, (sea-) sponges, snells, and to some degree insects, and so on. They usually cognise very little of the world surrounding them and largely just feel themselves through life, more or less incidentally only stumbling upon food.

While in between these two extremes, we have animals like birds and reptiles. Which we might say possess some medium amount of intelligence.

This should suffice to classify animals in a manner which allows us to understand them from the perspective of consciousness.

The Ghost Realm

Beyond the realm of animals on the downward arch, we have the realm of ghosts. Ghosts are actually hierarchically not entirely below the animal realm. There are many differences amongst them. But what defines them for the most part, is, that they are caught up in a loop condition of some particular kamma of the past. For example, we find descriptions of suicides, who go again and again through the particular timespan that led up to their suicide, and the drama ending with the suicide they find themselves again at the start of it. Some ghosts find their body deformed in accordance with the nature of some particular kamma. Some ghosts find their body deformed in accordance with the nature of their present

condition. For example, some ever have been exceedingly greedy, but in the ghost realm, they can never find enough food. So their mouth gradually atrophies until it is as small as a pin-hole, while yet their belly is very big. Thus they live in the perpetual agony of an enormous unsatisfiable hunger. Some ghosts "functioning" as a group, continuously torment each other, perpetually attacking one another with sharp weapons.

Thus, the ghost realm is largely a realm of (in matters of consciousness) passively enduring the result of past kamma. Yet, not entirely so. There are also descriptions of ghosts living a somewhat more active life, still maintaining a connection to their old families, who (especially in Asian cultures) might support their existence by means of regular food offerings. But in matters of the hierarchy of consciousness, at least some of these would be actually classed better under the realm of the lower devas rather than as belonging to the realm of ghosts.

Demons

Still, let us go rather further downwards at first. Below the realm of ghosts, we have a class of beings which, in our scheme actually occupies various positions. But which due to its quality of evilness, and thus, its nearness to the realm of hell is often thought of as one class of beings. We speak of course about what in modern times we call demons. Demons are defined by their qualities of fierceness and evilness. Yet, some beings we would term demons, still enjoy the fruits of some good kamma and due to that possess, at times heavenly freedom, powers and various things for sensual enjoyment.

The class which definitely and unequivocally belongs in this place in our scheme is a class of demons, which is very akin to the ghosts, but which due to their particular fierce and evil nature should be classed separately. These will be ghost like beings which both torture and are being tortured, which attack and are yet themselves often under threat.

Then there are other demonic beings which occupy less unequivocal a position, such are those which act as wardens and torturers in hell. They may not be said to endure much suffering or active torture, although living amongst their kind and in an exceedingly unpleasant environment, they certainly also do not live a divine life. A similar thing will apply to those who haunt houses or particular places, or those who dwell in gambling places or places where many evil energies are being produced by the evil emotions of those who live or spend their time there. Some such beings might be quite powerful, which would somewhat place them above the realm of ghosts, but they still live quite a ghost-like existence and are very likely to fall into hell when they die.

On the other hand, there are also evil entities which possess all the powers of a divine being, while yet they are given to active evil. These are spread over various of the heavenly realms.

Hell

However, we are still on our way downwards. And there we reach to the very bottom of existence, commonly referred to as hell. Buddhist texts mention and describe various hell realms,

but even with an understanding of consciousness and specifically so one (or many) which is in a hell-like condition already in human life, we can go far in calculating the incredibleness of suffering and torture that will await some after death where the limits to suffering determined by the limits of the body will fall away. The worst nightmare one might remember will only determine the limit of one's comprehension, but not the limit of possible suffering in hell. In matters of kamma, hell is largely a wearing off of previous evil kamma. The severity and extent of the committed evils will therein determine the length of time a person will have to endure in this place.

Once a person's evil kamma has expired he may be reborn again in a higher place.

This includes also the deva planes, which we will explore as our next subject.

The Heavenly Hierarchy

Buddhist Cosmology gives us knowledge of six heavens of ascending sublimity, which tower upon one another.¹

The lowest of these actually is level with the ground we human beings are treading. It is a plane of earth-bound deities (bhumma devas) of various kinds. These are divided into four, species we might call them, of which each is headed by a king. Hence, this realm is called the "Realm of the Four Great Kings" (Cātu-Mahārājika sagga).

¹ Note: The scheme worked out in here, especially of some of the heavenly realms further downwards, is largely based on the author's current personal understanding of consciousness. Its primary aim is to aid the reader in broadening his understanding of different conditions of consciousness and of kamma.

The four species of this realm are the Yakkhas, the Kumbhaṇḍas, the Gandhabba and the Nāgas.

The Yakkhas

The Yakkhas are said to be powerful, warrior-like beings, usually of a rather fierce nature, and more often depicted as evil. Due to their fierce nature, one might classify them as being of a nature which accords to the fire element.² Many beings in this realm will be actually properly designated as 'Demons'.

To gain some deeper comprehension of these entities, since they are still quite close to the human realm and usually will have been human beings themselves in the past, we may try to contrive their general kammic condition. First of all, they are said to be of an energetic, aggressive, and often impulsive, rowdy-like nature. Apart from soldiers, generals and so on, some of those subgroups in human life which emphasise strength and braveness, but are of a rough, usually rather unpleasant nature, such as one would find amongst Hooligans, Neo-nazis, Street-gangsters and so on, if they truly distinguish themselves in some particular virtue (such as braveness for example), which helps them to elevate themselves above human life, they might be reborn as a Yakkha in this realm.

The Kumbhandas

² In the texts, the four great kings are given a relation to each of the four great elements. But this is different from the ordering I use in here, which is derived only from my own understanding of the nature of the entity concerned.

Next, we have the Kumbhaṇḍas. These are said to be dwarfish, gnome-like beings, who are often said to dwell underground, looking after hidden treasures (hence, they are the class of beings which were (and perhaps are still) often tried to be contacted by magicians, seeking to make us of magic to gain wealth). But they too have some relation with, and are said to look after forests.

Their general nature may be said to be of an earthy kind. They are heavy natured, strong, and enduring. Kammically, in as much they have been born in this realm after dying as a human being, they might have been some somehow down-to-earth natured person who distinguished himself in some craft (perhaps some circus actor), or someone who had some very close relation to nature, while somehow also distinguishing himself to become elevated above human life. Perhaps especially gypsies who are of a very earthy nature might be reborn in this realm, if they possess some particular strength or virtue.

The Gandhabba

The Gandhabbas are said to be the more lofty type amongst these earth-bound devas. Hence, we can also see some natural affinity with the air element. They are the fairies and nature spirits. But they are also often said to be highly gifted musicians. In human life we might sometimes find some natural representation of their kamic type amongst the hippies, the vagabonds, perhaps also some of the gypsies, and generally the artistically inclined type of persons.

The Nāgas

At last, we have the Nāgas. These are beings whose outer appearance least resembles human beings. This could actually give us some clue, that it might be possible to attain to the deva status from the rank of an animal. Perhaps some divine beings, for some reason or another³, occasionally associate with some animals, and the animal feeling the presence of the deva might develop some inclination to also attain a divine status.

Nevertheless, we can also find in human life, people whose nature might incline to a rebirth as a Nāga, whose body is that of a giant serpent, or dragon. Nāgas are said to be largely solitary beings, who are especially associated with possessing magical powers.⁴ And there we might see some relation in the human types who strongly incline to magic. In the past, powerful shamans and magicians were actually often called Nāgas. Thus, in modern times also we find amongst the Gothics, Satanists, and those who rather embrace the old Pagan religions, a strong liking for the figure of the dragon or serpent. In matters of the four great elements, Nāgas are associated with the water element.

Tāvatiṃsa Heaven

³ Sometimes it is said that some deities so-to-say incarnate into a whole landscape area, taking it as their body and developing and looking after the beings in that area.

⁴ All of these beings are said to possess some magical powers, but the Nāgas are often mentioned as especially so. Particularly they are natural shapeshifters.

Above this whole "Realm of the four great Kings", we have the Tāvatiṃsa heaven, literally "The heaven of the 33". This in pre-buddhist India, was a heaven very akin to Mount Olympus with its 12 main Gods headed by Zeus of the Greeks. It was often called "Heaven of the 33 headed by Indra". But in Buddhist Cosmology it acquired an entirely new meaning. Although the name is retained, except for one main deity, called Sakka, who is the ruler or king of this realm, the rest of the 33 original gods have moved into the background or disappeared entirely from the descriptions of this realm. Thus, for our purpose of understanding Buddhist Cosmology in order to more deeply understand consciousness and kamma, the name has become irrelevant. The main characteristic of this heaven is, that it is the "heaven of the selfless". In fact most good Buddhists (and for that matter actually also most good Christians, Muslims and Jews,...) are likely to be reborn in this realm after their human life has expired. Rebirth into this heaven largely is attained through generosity, selfless service, social work, self-sacrifice, and goodness. The devas in this realm live in unity and enjoy a pleasant life of luxury and sense-pleasures, but are also said to possess (engage in) various occupations and duties.

Yāma Heaven

The third of the heavenly realms, the realm of Yāma devas, too changed from the meaning it had in pre-Buddhist religion. Originally the designation "Realm of Yāma" referred to the ghost and hell realms which were said to be ruled over by King Yāma, Lord of the Dead, who besides was also a divine judge, who

judged a recently deceased person in accordance with their deeds, and then sent them accordingly to heaven or hell.

In the Buddhist texts there also is a King Yāma, who executes a similar role, but in the Buddhist texts there also is a Yāma heaven, with Yāma devas, plural in number. The texts themselves give us no information regarding their characteristics or functions, but being determined to comprehend Buddhist Cosmology in its entirety, we should make some effort to see whether we can not get some clue about the function of this realm. Some clue about the hierarchy of existence we can get if we deeply probe into the natural unfolding of consciousness. We do have information about the realm below it, which we treated just beforehand, in that it is the "heaven of the selfless", and we have one bit of information about the realm above this realm, which is that it is the realm in which any "Buddha-to-be" will dwell before coming to earth to fulfil his final mission. Thus, we may contrive that the beings in this realm are somewhere between the person of a high moral nature, and a philosopher who is on his way to holiness, plus, it is somewhat related to a divine judge who possesses a high position of responsibility towards a great amount of beings (i.e. the dead). Considering thus, we want to offer an idea that this realm is for the person who both is capable of wielding great responsibility, as well as who has a bright intellect which has already deeply probed into the nature of good and evil with their respective natural results.⁵

⁵ The workout is admittedly contrived, as the Buddhist texts themselves give us close to no information. The main point in this regard is, that there can be little doubt that a righteous and skilled judge, for example will be reborn in a higher position than an ordinary good person who has a good will and lofty emotions, but comparatively little skill and intelligence.

Tusita

Going higher still in our scheme, we have the realm of the Tusita devas. About these, we get, apart from the above-mentioned fact, that any "Buddha-to-be" always comes from this realm, no other information from the Buddhist texts. Now, a "Buddha-to-be", we can calculate, that although he is not yet entirely holy, will have great wisdom (i.e. philosophical capacities) long before becoming a Buddha. He will already have some broad vision of the general scheme of things, such as that there are such things as heaven and hell, how beings fare according to their kamma, and the nature of good and evil. In fact, these are things that all saintly beings must have some comprehension of. Thus we may contrive that apart from a "Buddha-to-be" perhaps most other "Saints-to-be", especially such as will become the founders of religions, will also stay in this realm before descending to earth. Following that, we too can contrive that they equally must have some great feeling of responsibility for the greater scheme of a world and the evolution of its inhabitants. So perhaps we can say that the function of this realm might be that it is the training ground for philosophers to become holy beings. Therein it must not be that all those who mature in this training will go to earth to take the last step to holiness, rather it is more likely that only some, who have some attachment or special affection for human beings will follow this scheme of descending again.

Nimmānaratī Heaven

The fifth heavenly realm is usually translated as the realm of the devas who delight in creation. No other sensible information is given about them in Buddhist texts. Neither we are told what they create, nor what particular kamma will bring a being into this realm. Thus, we must again rely only on our own comprehension of the natural unfolding of consciousness, that is, if we want to grasp Buddhist Cosmology. Consequently, one easy fact we have as the first, is that this realm must be somewhat more sublime than the previous one. With the previous heavenly realms we have seen, that as consciousness broadens, the sense of existing as a single isolated unit, gradually diminishes, while there will usually come about a greater sense of responsibility for the larger scheme of the world.

Following these hints, we may contrive that the Nimmāna-ratī devas might be creating things for the world. Therein we have to mention one fact which applies to all the deva worlds, which is, that the natural life-span in each of those realms is very long, and increases as we ascend the ladder of the planes. The lifespan of the beings of the Nimmānaratī devas is said to be several billion years. Hence, we may contrive that actually they might be creating the world itself, that is, that they build or model the condition of, in our case the earth, with its continents and so on, as well as perhaps at the very least the forms that its inhabitants shall have⁶. If that is the case, they too are likely to have their hands in creating the higher planes (the devas

⁶ They will not be able to create beings, which are born of kamma, but they may be able to create the outer forms which beings so to say will inhabit.

planes) as well. Of course, we should not think such creation to be like that of a potter modelling clay. They would be working with natural laws and model things on the higher planes which over the course of perhaps some million years will develop into the form set beforehand.

Paranimmitavasavatti Heaven

The highest heaven belonging to a world is the Paranimmitavasavatti heaven. Usually translated as the "Realm of the devas who wield control over others creations", we want to suggest an alternative to that. The Pali prefix "para" actually can mean either "other" which is how it is usually translated for this word, but it can equally mean "higher", "highest", or "beyond", as in Paramattha or in Para-nibbana, which this author rather prefers here.

Thus, our alternative rendering of the word "Paranimmitavasavatti", is "The devas who wield some control (vasa-vatti) over the higher part of creation". Wherein with creation (nimmita) we mean what we have attributed to be the work of the Nimmānaratī devas. Taking things in this way, we then actually find that things will fit quite nicely with our previously worked-out scheme. So let's explain.

If we agree to the idea that it makes sense to attribute to the previous class of devas the function of acting as building agents of the world, then, as that world will at some point bring about higher beings, such as humans, we may contrive that the function of the devas of this realm is to, to some degree control

or govern human beings and above. That is, all the deva realms (which quite certainly will have existed long before human beings came onto the scene), as well as the realm of human beings, are to some degree ruled over by the devas of this realm. Hence, it is the highest of the deva worlds.

This will then also give us some explanation why Mara, the Buddhist Devil or Lucifer, who is said to live in this realm, will have some grudge towards the Buddha and other enlightened beings. Because attaining Jhāna and higher knowledges, such beings will rise in status higher than the devas of this realm, who may pride themselves as being the highest beings belonging to a world. Still, the deva called Mara should not be seen as the best representative of this realm, as following our previous scheme, the devas in this realm will be of great broadness of mind and wisdom. Mara, according to some sources is said to be more like a rebel prince living on the borderlands of this realm, which would then also place him level with the fallen angel Lucifer of the Christian tradition. The name of the king or devarāja of this realm is said to be Vasavatti.

In which manner and to what ends the devas of this realm might wield control over devas and human beings, is so far beyond the capacity of the author to contrive.

Brahma

Traditional Buddhist Cosmology has neither a geocentric nor a heliocentric view of the world (worldview with the earth/ the sun

as the centre of the system), but rather a worldview in which a giant mountain called "Sineru", or sometimes "Meru" stands at the centre of the world. This is quite similar to the archaic worldviews of other cultures. We do not want to give any detailed explanations of this worldview in here⁷ but only want to state, that for our purposes it will not do. There will be few of even the most orthodox and dogmatic of Buddhists who will still hold onto this view; which gives us some justification to do away with it in our scheme, and take the nowadays generally accepted heliocentric worldview (worldview which has the sun as the centre of a sun-system, around which the earth and the other planets revolve) as the view for explaining the nature of the cosmos as a counterpart to the nature of consciousness. Hence, we will now exit the little sphere we call our world, and move onto a sphere which is much larger than that, both in magnitude and power. Buddhist texts often emphasise that there are many Brahmas, but nevertheless, it is to be found in the same scriptures that usually only one Brahma rules over one world-system (actually some Brahmas will wield power over "a thousandfold world-system", which will be equivalent to a modern days galaxy).

Actually, modern days descriptions of the nature of the sun, which is the ruler of a sun-system, and gives life and light to everything in its sphere of influence, fits perfectly with the descriptions of the nature of a Brahma. A Brahma is a god of pure light, who ordinarily does not possess the five senses which sense-sphere beings possess, yet he will be able to know

⁷ This can be found in the Visuddhimagga, as well as in the modern book "The Buddhist Cosmos" by Punnadhammo Mahāthera.

most of what is happening in the sphere of his influence. The inner nature of a Brahma is precisely what a meditator, bent on Jhāna is seeking to develop. And trying to comprehend the nature of the sun, which we take to be the body of Brahma, is going to do much for a meditator who is trying to comprehend the nature of Jhāna. The perfect centeredness, the radiance, and the power to attract and to some degree control⁸ people around them, which you will usually find in developed practitioners, are very easily relatable to certain qualities (especially) in modern times attributed to the sun⁹.

And as modern cosmology knows of differences in power, dimension, and sphere of influence of different suns in the universe, so Buddhist scriptures give us descriptions of various degrees of Jhānas and of Brahmas.

Actually, some of the latter ones are said to wield power over many thousands of sun systems, which might render them in our scheme as being the "Lord of a galaxy".

⁸ Such as you would have in meditation retreats, wherein ideally the meditation teacher will be able to maintain order solely through the force of his gravity.

⁹ Actually the relation has been there in many cultures throughout history, but not as such in traditional Buddhist Cosmology.

Arūpa Brahmas (Cosmic Gods)

Buddhist Cosmology does not end in attributing consciousness only to sun-systems and galaxies, but does so even to "Boundless Space" (Ākāśānañcāyatana Brahma)¹⁰.

As the nature of a Brahma of a sun-system is to purify their mind through purifying their energy (in modern times understood to be through some nuclear fusion processes), so might be the nature of a "Space Brahma" to purify their ideas by extending their mind through the infinite cosmos. Thus it is indeed a fact, that skilful meditators who can attain immaterial meditations (Arūpa Jhānas) often will incline to the contemplation of cosmological problems. But while his nature itself is boundless space, we may contrive, that the object of his consciousness actually is only the content of that space. This may add up to being the material universe, which he will be thinking and contemplating about.

The actual space of the cosmos, with, or without its content (viz. material universe), will be the object of perception of the "Consciousness Brahma" (Viññāṇañcāyatana Brahma), the Brahma still higher in order than the former one. One thing we may work out about the nature of this Brahma is, that he will possess no extension in space. Whatever he knows, that's where he is.

¹⁰ The term "Ākāśānañcāyatana" is sometimes translated as "Sphere of Boundless Space", and sometimes as "Sphere of Infinite Space". The word "ayatana" is usually translated as "Sphere" because it has no good English equivalent. It can mean either an organ of perception or the object of such organ. The author interprets things thus, that the ayatana of any of these Brahmas means, its main organ of perception. Thus, the organ of perception of the Brahma of boundless space, is that space, the organ of perception of the Brahma of (boundless) consciousness is, that consciousness, etc.

Still, the Buddhist Cosmos does not end with a Brahma whose very nature is consciousness itself, but goes on to yet more immaterial forms of existence. But from here we are getting into fuzzy waters. The Brahma which is said to be higher still than the Consciousness Brahma is one whose nature is Nothingness (or Voidness) (ākiñcaññāyatana) itself.

To come to terms with the nature of this Brahma, we need to do some paradigm shift. Actually, this whole scheme which we have given so far in here, can be thought of as a scheme, which although until now described in reverse direction, explains how a Cosmos with everything in it comes about, how it will evolve and ultimately how it will end. Hence, it is actually thus, that consciousness, perhaps slowly growing into infinity, is arising out of the womb of "Nothingness" (or Voidness), and it is actually some inclination within the Brahma of (Infinite) Consciousness, towards knowing something more concrete, which will bring about the infinity of space; this then gradually becomes "peopled" with Fine-material Brahmas, which have as their bodies galaxies or suns. This will be equally accommodated through a similar inclination or desire within the Brahma of Infinite Space, to experience something more tangible than space. While the Fine-material Brahma of a sun-system will gradually build up and form his sun-system. But he, being of a fine-material kind, will not be able to mould and form his sun-system only by inclination or desire, but will need to use his sun rays to coordinate and rule the devas of his system which will be the building agents of the world.

It should be noted therein however, that in each stage of this unfolding scheme, the previous Brahma will "create" (or trigger the coming into being) only the outer aspect of the cosmos; and by that give chances to beings from previous world periods or from planes above their own, whose kamma it is to be attracted to the respective plane, to thus work out their kamma in that plane or place of the Cosmos.

Still, continuing with our exploration of Brahma gods, Buddhist Cosmology knows yet of a higher condition of existence than the Brahma of Nothingness. The nature of that being is declared to be in a condition of "neither having perception, nor being void of perception" (*nevasaññā-n'asaññāyatana*). But here the author has to resign for the time being. Because according to the authors understanding perception constitutes an aspect of consciousness, but consciousness itself is said to be transcended by the Brahma of Nothingness. Hence, it is a form of existence most difficult to comprehend. I may only throw in inhere, that a condition of "neither having perception, nor being void of perception" would according to our understanding fit at best between a condition of "Nothingness" and "Consciousness" itself. The author still works on solving the riddle.¹¹

¹¹ Actually a person in dream is in a condition of Neither being conscious nor unconscious, which is the alternative rendering of the term "*nevasaññā-n'asaññāyatana*". The term *saññā* therein is variously used synonymously with the word "*viññāna*", the more common term for "consciousness".

A modern revision of the Planes of Existence

	<u>Qualities/ Natural Distinctions:</u>	<u>Natural occupation/ Classes/ Examples:</u>
Immaterial Gods	<p>Neither Un-conscious nor Conscious</p> <p>Nothingness Brahma (Void of discernible qualities, continues to exist whether there is a physical universe or not)</p> <p>Infinity of Consciousness Brahma (Brahmā of unbound Consciousness)</p> <p>Infinity of Space (Brahmā of unbound body)</p>	<p>Subtlest and most incomprehensible Brahma god</p> <p>Existing prior to a manifest universe</p> <p>Knowing and contemplating infinite space</p> <p>Knowing and contemplating the material universe</p>
Brahma Gods	<p>Brahmas presiding over many sun-systems</p> <p>Brahmas presiding over one Sun-system (but with greater power and greater internal stability)</p> <p>Brahmas presiding over one Sun-system (but with imperfect power and imperfect internal stability)</p>	<p>Sustainer and Supporter of many Sun-systems</p> <p>Sustainer and Supporter of one Sun-system</p>
Heavenly Beings (Devas/ Angels)	<p>Divine Beings who control, form and manipulate life (they influence, and to some degree govern human and divine life; shape the destinies of empires, etc.)</p> <p>Divine Beings who fashion the world (they fashion the earth, create new species, new empires, new trends in human or earth life in germ form)</p> <p>Divine Beings, distinguished through purity of life and understanding</p> <p>Divine Beings, distinguished through great understanding of right and wrong</p> <p>Divine Beings both of the greatest benevolence (distinguished through their generosity and selfless service (Helpers of humanity), and of the greatest malevolence (distinguished through acts of great malevolence [as masters of black magic, etc.]</p> <p>Earthbound Spirits</p>	<p>Paranimmitavasavatti (Divine Formers/ Fashioners)</p> <p>Nimmānarati (Divine Creators/Architects)</p> <p>Tusita Gods (Divine Philosophers)</p> <p>Yāma Gods (Heavenly [karmical] Judges, often pronouncing judgement to the deceased in the underworld)</p> <p>Sakka (Indra), Gods of the Tāvātimsa Heaven; and Asūras -evil gods (or fallen angels)</p> <p>Yakkha (Warrior Spirits), Gandhabbas (Fairies), Kumbhāṇḍas (Gnomes), Nāgas (Dragons)</p>
Humans	<p>Of high intelligence and virtue, and higher knowledge (knowledge of spiritual things)</p> <p>Of high intelligence and virtue</p> <p>Of medium intelligence and virtue</p> <p>Of inferior intelligence and virtue</p>	<p>Priest, Philosopher, Monk, Scientist</p> <p>Warrior, Aristocrat, President, King, Minister, Pop-star</p> <p>Merchant, Businessman, Artisan, Common Teacher</p> <p>Ordinary worker, Street-sweeper, Field-worker</p>
Animals	<p>Greater possession of Life-force, beginning of mind and intelligence</p> <p>In-between</p> <p>Lesser possession of Life-force, of little intelligence</p>	<p>Mammals</p> <p>Birds, Fish and Reptiles</p> <p>Insects</p>
Ghosts (Peta)	<p>Lack of Life-force (possessing only lifeless energy); Suffering, always void of happiness, without power; live in a loop condition of compulsively going through the same suffering again and again</p>	<p>Hungry Ghosts, Ghosts that aimlessly drift about in a certain place, often repeating their near death activity</p>
Demons	<p>Lack of Life-force (possessing only lifeless energy); great suffering, always void of happiness, but with power</p>	<p>Demons (Asūras), Haunters of cursed places and places of vice, Wardens and Torturer in Hell</p>
Hell	<p>Perpetual Suffering</p>	<p>Beings in Hell/ Sufferers of unbearable suffering</p>

DHAMMA

Now, when we come to Dhamma, it is somewhat helpful to put it into opposition with non-dhamma, or A-Dhamma, in order to clearly draw out what is meant by the term.

We can not say whether the two once were one, or not, but we can see there are these two conditions: one is the phenomenal, the changing, the chaotic, while the other is the eternal, the harmonious, the lawful. One is what is meant by Non-Dhamma. The other is what is meant by Dhamma.

There is matter, that can scarcely be denied, yet, that matter is subject to law, it does not exist independent from law...You throw a stone into the air, the force of attraction to the greater body of earth will make it come back and fall to the ground. That is how matter is subject to lawfulness, and it is that which in Buddhism we call Utu Niyāma, the law of matter.

But it may equally be called the Dhamma of matter, because Dhamma means law, and these facts of lawfulness in matter are the way Dhamma is expressed or reflected in matter. And he who understands the lawfulness of matter, may thereby rule over matter, if he intelligently makes use of that knowledge.

Now, in Buddhism there are actually four Niyāma, four cosmic laws, which somewhat stand before the Dhamma Niyāma, but which in another way of thinking, may be said to be only different ways of talking or considering about Dhamma.

Thus, we can say, that, Dhamma when it is reflected in coarse matter becomes Utu Niyāma, Dhamma when it is reflected in life

phenomena, becomes Bija Niyāma, Dhamma, in the sphere of mental phenomena becomes Citta Niyāma, and Dhamma which expresses itself in the efficacy of will, is called Kamma Niyāma.

But then there is also pure Dhamma, as it exists independent from these different kinds of phenomena. What exactly that means, may not be put into phenomenal language. Only it should be clear, that it is something which transcends even the loftiest conditions of phenomenal existence.

But what has been made clear, is the path to the realisation of it. This path is that aspect of the law, which leads to a disentanglement from matter, life, mind, and kamma; that is, from the whole gamut of changing phenomena.

The Buddha knew, that being born a human being, we can not avoid dealing with matter, life, mind, and/or kamma and just focus on the eternal Dhamma. It is not possible to merely ignore the former ones. Rather, we have to understand them and learn to deal with them in a skillful manner, in order to grow out of them into the Dhamma.

To that end, the Buddha gave us certain teachings to consider.

In order to come to grips with matter, the Buddha taught the four elements, he taught that all matter is impermanent, dukkha (suffering), and non-self; he taught restraint of the senses, moderation in food, and general intelligence and carefulness in the usage of the (necessary) material requisites of life.

Then, he also gave us certain teachings, designed to help us overcome the various difficulties of life. He taught certain modes of conduct, which, if properly followed, can help us avoid many

of the problems that naturally arise in inter-human relationships. These fall naturally under the headings of "right action", "right speech", and "right livelihood", of the noble eightfold path.

Apart from that, he also taught us to cultivate virtues such as patience, compassion, sympathetic joy, benevolence, and so on, and he extolled his followers to develop a capacity to endure hardships and unpleasant speech.

Of course, many of the teachings stated above in relation to matter, are also relevant for overcoming life problems.

Further in regards to the mind,... in order to disentangle the entanglements many a mind finds itself in, the Buddha gave certain teachings designed to help the mind to acquire a sane perspective on life, so that it will cease to see everything only from the small perspective of "one little I" against the world, or the world against "one little I", and begins to reflect on kamma, on rebirth and the way of Dhamma.

Finally, in the end, even kamma making, that is, even kamma making of the most skillful kind, has to be given up, by him who seeks the eternal, unchanging perfection of pure Dhamma. For that end, the Buddha equally gave out various means.

Nevertheless, at first the capacity of skillfully accomplishing kamma has to be perfected, else the Law of Kamma can not be transcended, but again will catch up on him who sought to escape its clutches.

For that end, the Buddha taught a path of gradual training, which gives the mind, or the will, successive goals to accomplish. With each goal being linked to successively higher

forms of existence, as each develops successively purer and more sublime forms of consciousness.

The first things to develop are virtues such as generosity, morality, self-restraint, respectfulness, and so on. These, when established, correspond to the manner of thought of divine beings. Hence, he who becomes accomplished in it, will accomplish, even as a human being, the divine life.

Based on this establishment in virtue and good conduct, the Buddha would give then, as a next step to accomplish the development of heart/mind¹. With that, a person will enter a sphere of kamma making which is so spacious in time that, throughout all ages in which there were people who could enter it, a great many thought it to be the attainment of something immortal and eternal. And that is not entirely unjustified, for, what could happen kammically to one accomplished in virtue, who has seen and participated in the life of beings whose life spans aeons of time, in which they can dwell undisturbed by all coarse events. Perhaps nothing could happen for that person for the duration of one or more aeons of time, but if something has an end, it is not eternal.

That why the Buddha advised those who would listen, to develop discernment and wisdom of impermanence in regards to anything phenomenal whatsoever.

And that is the next step of his training.

Of course, to get a direct experience of all phenomena whatsoever isn't small a thing to ask for, but that actually also

¹ The Pali (Buddhist) word *citta* has a meaning somewhere between these two English words. Occasionally, it is even used as a synonym for *samādhi*.

isn't exactly what he asked for. The mind can make deductions. It can deduce from one thing to a thing which bears some similar characteristics. So, the Buddha taught certain formulas, which summarize certain aspects of experience. And he encouraged us to classify our experience by means of these formulas. Which we then should contemplate as impermanent, suffering, and void of self. That is the Buddhist strategy for overcoming the world of phenomena.

However, there is also the strategy of remaining out of the sphere of conditioned phenomena. And that is the strategy of, speaking, acting and thinking (or in general, using the mind) always and unfailingly, in a way which aligns with the highest law of Dhamma, the law divine. And he who can do that ever remains unaffected by the changing, transient and imperfect.