

# Our World System

Gift of Dhamma



## Introduction:

All beings, within the 31 planes of existence, do exist for real, both in celestial and terrestrial worlds, just like we all are in the human world. That is our world system and that is what we believe in. Our world system is not permanent; it is subject to natural phenomenon - volcanic destruction. In this auspicious kalpa, there is another world system to come - the fifth world cycle where **Meitreyya Buddha** will arise to teach the same Dhamma.

## Pali canon said:

The world system, according to the Pali Canon (**Abhidhamma-sangha**), consists of both celestial and terrestrial beings within the four cardinal classification of existence. Some can be seen; and some cannot be seen through our normal naked eyes:

- ? The plane of formless - **Arupavacara bhumi**
- ? The plane of forms - **Rupavacara bhumi**

- ? The plane of desires - [Kamasugatibhumi](#)
- ? The plane of misery - [Apayabhumi](#) - [Kamadugatibhumi](#)

Out of the four classifications, it can be separated again into 31 planes of existence. In Burmese is called - [31 phon](#). When an individual has lives through its given life span in one plane and could possibly take a rebirth in the same or in another plane in accordance with one's own merit either at a lower or a higher plane. A being in the human world may possibly take his next rebirth in the Apaya world and another being in the Brahma world may take the rebirth in the human world. This vicious cycle of birth and rebirth will continue on and on as long as one is ignorant to strive for the path leading to the cessation of this cycle. This cycle of birth and rebirth is named by Buddhist as [Samsara](#). This natural process is being applied equally on all beings, including Devas, Brahmas, Human and Apaya.

Buddha, the self-enlightened one, in around [600 BC](#), discovered the "[four Noble truths](#)" why being go through the cycle of rebirths and how one can bring an end to the process. He then laid out the "[Eightfold Noble Paths](#)" leading to the cessation of sufferings. Following the paths, one could easily escape from the Samsara which is called the state of awakening Nibbana. Since his discovery is applied to all beings with the 31 planes of existence (four cardinal classification of existence), he delivered his teachings to both human and to Devas and Brahmas. The fundamental tenet of his teaching was - "When one could end one's craving and attachment, we could end the cycle of birth and rebirth."

The Pali Canon further describes how a being take birth in each of these 31 planes of existence. In the celestial world

of Devas and Brahmas, a being take rebirth in a spontaneous up rising process. When a man comes to the end of his life span in the human world and is destined to take rebirth in the Deva world, he will spontaneously appear in the Deva world the moment his life has been ended in the human world.



The same process takes place in the world of Hell. However, in the human and some in the animal kingdom take birth through the womb. There are, some taking birth through an egg. There are some rising through moisture - pesticides like worms from rotten carcasses.

In taking rebirth, within the Samsara, there are four different types of birth:

- ? A being born from an egg (**andaja**). . Animals.
- ? A being born from a womb (**jalabuja**). Human and some animals
- ? A being born of moisture (**sansedaja**). Worms rising from rotten meats
- ? A spontaneous uprising (**opapatika**). Devas or gods in heaven, and those who are born in hell belong to this type of birth.

## Our Belief

All beings within the 31 planes of existence do exist for real, including [Ghosts](#), [tree-spirits](#), [Ogres \(Yakka\)](#) etcs that co-exist with us in the terrestrial system and the Devas and Brahmas in the celestial system. Buddha in the [Mahasamaya Sutta](#) presents the “who is who” of all the celestial and terrestrial beings by name.

We Buddhist believe that the human world is not the only world where living beings exist; there are many other planes of existence where some forms of life flourish. In these planes of existence, there are beings not visible to the human eyes, but are closely related to our world, including the world of spirits.

According to Buddhism, the nature of one’s future birth is conditioned by kamma performed in the present life. From here one may, after death, go “upwards” to the plane of happiness or “downwards” to the realm of misery. So far as kamma is concerned, our present world seems to be the centre of all other worlds and this present life is the determining factor of future lives.

We present here the 31 planes of existence as stated in Pali Canon.

#### [A. Arupavacara -bhumi or the Plane of the Formless](#) (World of Formless Brahmas)

The formless abodes of Brahmas accept those who intensely practice the fifth through the Eighth jhanas. The life span for the formless Brahmas is considered to be so long that it seems like an eternal. However, they also have an end to

their life span. They too are subject to rebirth in another world.

1. Akasanancayatana
2. Vinnanancayatana
3. Akincannayatana
4. Nevasannanasannayatana

## B. Rupavacara-bhumi or the Plane of Form

The abodes of Brahmas accept those who intensely practice the first through the fourth jhanas. The life span for the form (Rupa) Brahmas is considered to be so long that it seems like an eternal. However, they also have an end to their life span.



1. Hindu Brahma God

2. Rebirth in the Pathama jhana-bhumi  
(Brahmaparisajja, Brahmapurohita and Mahabrahma)
3. Rebirth in the Duaya jhana-bhumi  
(Parittabha, Appamanabha and Abhassara)
4. Rebirth in the Tatiya jhana-bhumi  
(Parittosubha, Appamanasubha and Subhakinha or Subhakinna)
5. Rebirth in the Catuttha jhana-bhumi  
(Vehapphala, Asannasatta, Aviha, Atappa, Sudassa, Sudassi and Akanittha)

## Buddha teaching to the MahaBrahma.

### *Mahâ Brahmâ*

The stories of a Buddha going to teach a brahmâ take place on the plane of Mahâ Brahmâ, the third of the fine-material planes (No. 14). Many people worship Mahâ Brahmâ as the supreme and eternal creator God, but for the Buddha he is merely a powerful deity still caught within the cycle of repeated existence. In point of fact, "Mahâ Brahmâ" is a role or office filled by different individuals at different periods.

The Buddha has directly seen the origins of Mahâ Brahmâ and understands what it requires to be reborn in his world. In the Brahmâjâla Sutta (DN 1) the Buddha describes how a supposed Creator God came to believe himself omnipotent and how others came to rely on his sovereignty. His description was based, not on speculation or hearsay, but on his own direct knowledge. The Buddha explains that when our world system disintegrates, as it regularly does after extremely long periods of time, the lower sixteen planes are all destroyed. Beings disappear from all planes below the seventeenth, the plane of the Abhassara gods. Whatever beings cannot be born on the seventeenth or a higher brahmâ plane then must take birth on the lower planes in other remote world systems.

Eventually the world starts to re-form. Then a solitary being passes away from the Abhassara plane and takes rebirth on the plane of Mahâ Brahmâ. A palace created by his kamma awaits him there: "There he dwells, mind-made, feeding on rapture, self-luminous, moving through the air, abiding in glory. And he continues thus for a long, long time." After ages pass, he becomes lonely and longs for other beings to join him. It just so happens that shortly after the brahmâ starts craving for company, other beings from the Abhassara plane, who have exhausted their lifespans there, pass away and are reborn in the palace of Brahmâ, in companionship with him.

Because these beings seemed to arise in accordance with the first brahmâ's wish, he becomes convinced that he is the almighty God: "I am

the Great Brahmâ, the Vanquisher ¼ the Lord, the Maker and Creator, the Supreme Being." The other brahmâs, seeing that he was already present when they took birth in his world, accept his claim and revere him as their creator.

Eventually this misconception of a Creator God spreads to the human plane. One of the other brahmâs passes away and is reborn here. He develops concentration and learns to recollect his previous life with Mahâ Brahmâ, but none of his lives before that. Recollecting that existence he recalls that Mahâ Brahmâ was considered the "father of all that are and are to be ¼ permanent, stable, eternal." As he is unable to remember further back, he believes this to be absolute truth and propounds a theistic doctrine of an omnipotent Creator God (Net 69-70, 155-66).

The Venerable Ledi Sayadaw, a highly renowned Myanmar scholar-monk of the first part of this century, gave a careful analysis of the powers of Mahâ Brahmâ in his *Niyâma Dîpani* (MB pp. 138-39). He states that although Mahâ Brahmâ can perform all sorts of transformations, he cannot actually create independent creatures, change the kammic law of cause and effect, or keep anyone from growing old or dying. Brahmâ can use his special powers to transport a man to the brahmâ plane for a short visit, but he cannot ensure that someone will be reborn there.

### C.Kamasugati-bhumi or the Plane of Happiness Connected with Desires



Alavaka



## 1. Devas and Devis

2. The realm of Human Beings
3. Catummaharajika Heaven or the Heaven of the Four Great Kings .
4. (**Dhatarattha**, who rules as king of the Eastern Direction, as lord of the **gandhabbas**: **Virulhaka**, who rules as king of the Southern Direction, as lord of the **kumbandas**; **Virupakkha**, who rules as king of the Western Direction, as lord of the **nagas**: **Kuvera**, who rules as king of the Northern Direction, as lord of the **yakkhas**)
5. **Tavatimsa or the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods**  
(**Sakka**, a devotee of the Buddha, presides over this realm. Many devas dwelling here live in mansions in the air.)
6. **Yama-bhumi (the Abode of a Devaraja named Yama)**
7. **Tusita-bhumi (the realm where every Bodhisatta to be born here before the last one in which he attains to Buddhahood)**
8. **Nimmanaraa-bhumi**  
(the Abode of a Devaraja named Sunimmita or Nimmita)
9. **Paranimmitavasavata-bhumi**  
(the Abode of a Devaraja named Paranimimita)

Here is an example of Buddha teaching to the Deva -

*Subrahmā deva*

Subrahmā deva was not a very sophisticated god; he delighted in sensuality, like many other devas of the sensuous sphere. He had been playing in sport with his thousand nymphs when half of them suddenly vanished. Subrahmā used his deva vision to find where they had gone and he saw that they had died and been reborn in a hell realm. Anxious that he and his remaining nymphs might soon suffer the same fate, he came to the Buddha looking for a way to end his fear:

"Always frightened is this mind,  
The mind is always agitated  
About problems not yet arisen  
And about those that have appeared.  
If there exists release from fear,  
Being asked, please explain it to me."

The Buddha does not offer simplistic short-term solutions to the suffering beings go through when their loved ones die; he did not console the deva. Instead, he told Subrahmā that only by developing wholesome mental states through meditation and by giving up all attachments can anyone find security:

**"Not apart from enlightenment and austerity,  
Not apart from sense restraint,  
Not apart from relinquishing all,  
Do I see any safety for living beings."**

(KS I, 77; SN 2:17)

The deva and his remaining nymphs apparently comprehended these words, as the commentary says that at the end of this discourse they all became stream-enterers.

#### **D. Apaya-bhumi or the Plane of Misery**

**In the terrestrial realm, we co-exist along with spirits of all forms - Ghosts, tree spirits, Yakkas, etc. In Mahasamaya Sutta, Buddha gave an account of all the celestial and terrestrial beings by name so we understand that these beings exist for real in our world system.**

1. Niraya or Hell
2. Tiracchanayoni or Animal Birth
3. Pettivisaya (Petayoni) or the realm of the Unhappy Ghost
4. Asurayoni or the Birth of the Titans

This is what we Buddhist believe - life flourishes in other planes of existence in our world system within which we all must go through the cycle of rebirth (Samsara) before we attain our liberation, Nibbana.

*Ananta Metta*

*Maung Paw*