

Das Buddhistische Haus

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## About rebirths

by Dr. Paul Dahlke

Dhammapada, verse 126 it is said:  
"Some find birth within a womb,  
evil-doers quicken in hell,  
good-farers to the heavens go,  
the Unpolluted wholly cool."

Buddhism teaches that this present life is the final link in a beginningless series of lives, and that each final link corresponds on the one hand to the work of the previous life, and that on the other hand the nature and character of the next life is determined by its work. So there is neither predestination without beginning, predestination, an inexplicable divine decision, nor a purely physical process in which one moment is determined by another, a mere gradient, comparable to a rolling stone or flowing water, but in reality, and thus also in the Buddhist doctrine of reality, there is a process of growth that is always determined anew from its preconditions; not a kismet of an omniscient God or an all-blind nature, but karma.

Karma, in Pâli Kamma, means action. Kamma is not another expression for a world judge or for an all-valid natural law, but it is this individual working in thoughts, words, deeds and only another expression for the Sankhâras, the activities. There are bodily activities (kaye-sankhâra), verbal activities (vacī-sankhâra) and mental activities (citta-sankhâra).

According to Buddhist insight, I am neither a spiritual-metaphysical entity, nor a purely physical-physical phenomenon of life, but I am a spiritual-bodily process, a conceptual entity, i.e. a something whose essence is absorbed in the various grasping forms (upâdâna-kkhandha). To the question: "What is personality?" the answer is: "The five grasping groups, namely the grasping group perception, the grasping group volitional impulses, the grasping group consciousness."

According to my nature I am spiritual, but not as a metaphysical entity existing in itself, as a soul, as an Atta, but as a conceptual process. As such I am neither an eternal, absolutely beginningless, absolutely endless, nor a transient, to which beginning and end are assigned by external circumstances, like a physical process that is dependent on other physical processes and is determined by them in its existence and duration, but I am a growth process that carries its preconditions in itself. Power is there, but it is not power as something that exists in itself, something eternal, but power is such that, in order to exist, it must, like the flame, spring up again and again from its own preconditions, must, so to speak, reaffirm itself again and again.

Power as an intrinsically existing, eternal thing, as faith believes it to be, would have to be something identical with itself (atta = I-self). Real power, as it experiences itself directly in comprehension, where one is taught correctly by the Buddha and has come to the right insight, is not something identical with itself, in that this spiritual growth process, which experiences itself as "comprehension" in the spiritual-bodily sense, offers no possibility for identification, which is why the Buddha calls it an-atta = non-self, i.e. an ametaphysical. Every attempt to identify oneself as an ego is nothing but an ever new grasping or grasping process, a further growth of the ego process, against which only one question remains: "If an identification of myself, i.e. an ego-self, always leads to a contradiction with itself, in

that the attempt to grasp oneself as an ego-self (atta) in right insight becomes the experience of the anatta itself, how is it then possible that the idea of the ego-self, i.e. the concept of the ego, exists at all?" To which the Buddha then gives the answer: "It is there in dependence on not-knowing about itself, and this not-knowing about itself is that in dependence on which the whole process of life is there." Not-knowing is not the sufficient reason for life, is not a kind of cosmic cause for life, in which case it could be there as such, i.e. conceptually, and could be replaced by another sufficient reason or another cosmic cause if necessary, but not-knowing is the ever new first point of application of the life process itself, just as, comparatively, the rain is the first point of application for the spring, this is the point of application for the stream, that for the river, etc. To separate ignorance from existence and leave it alone would be to separate the water from the wave and leave it, the wave, on its own. The process of existence develops in dependence on not-knowing, because not-knowing is always its first phase. If ignorance ceases on the basis of right teaching and the subsequent right insight, then existence also ceases, just as the stream ceases when the source ceases.

Just as life as a conceptual process, as anatta, is a pure ability to arise, it is also a pure ability to be forgiven, a cessation, and the ultimate goal of real thinking is the realization of this cessation, precisely through ever-repeating acts of cessation, of renunciation, of renunciation.

These acts of cessation, of renunciation, of renunciation, are not expedient acts of will, as for example in the religions of faith, which carry a purpose, a benefit, as which they simultaneously carry usefulness, but they are the mental harmony with reality that takes place. Because life is such that it can cease! because it is a cessation, therefore the act of cessation is no compulsion, no violent act of will, no brutal asceticism, but the fulfillment of the last possibility resting in existence, and a process that carries its blessing and the certainty of its fruitfulness in itself. "In being liberated is the knowledge of being liberated". The great harmony between thinking and being, between concept and object, experiences itself in cessation.

One who has reached here is called Arahant, a venerable one, one who has become cool, one who has been perfected in freedom of impulse. He resembles the flame that burns without taking in new oil. The oil of the flame of life is the urges, the thirst, the addiction, the ever new grasping and grasping. If this ceases, existence ceases! It is like a flame that burns towards extinction precisely because it no longer absorbs nourishment.

This brings us to the last sentence of our verse: "Those who are free of impulses (pari-nibbanti anāsava) are finally extinguished. Such a taintless one is one who, with this existence, ends the beginningless series of rebirths forever. Heaven no longer beckons him, hell no longer threatens him. For him there is no more this world, no more hereafter, only something between the two. Just as an extinguished star shines for a while in the distance of the world, so such an extinguished person continues to shine for a while until the old kamma, the result of earlier work, earlier thinking, which still holds this body together, is used up.

Such a person is one who "lays down the last body", not in the sense that he now lives on as a pure spirit, as faith believes, but he lays down the last body because the grasping and grasping that could experience the new body itself has ceased; such a person is "finally extinguished with consciousness that no longer has a foundation!" And extinction here is real, honest extinction, what the name says. Cessation here is real, honest cessation, what the name says. The suspicious double game of language, its original profundity, which always leads us astray, has ceased; the word now corresponds to the sense, the sense to the word, as a sign that we have arrived at the only pure reality that man can realize: cessation. But now the countless others who have not succeeded in the great work, who have not reached the great goal? All the countless others in whom a grasping, an addiction, a thirst for life continues to work? Where do the possibilities of reaching further open up for them?

In order to answer this question, we must create a spatial example, i.e. a picture of the universe, as it results from Buddhist insight and as the Buddha, by virtue of his Buddha knowledge, shows and teaches it as experienced by himself. For Buddhism, the universe is both the sum of life processes and the spatial possibilities within which these life processes, these processes of action, these kammās take place. In Buddhist terminology, both are summarized as samsāra, i.e. the changing world, literally the wandering together.

There is no temporal and spatial comprehension and grasping of samsāra. It is expressly said of samsara: "Inconceivable is the beginning of this samsara" (anamatagg'ayam samsāro). Others translate the word "anamatagga" as "without beginning, without end". What is meant by this is explained in the Amatagga-vagga, Samyutta Nikāya II p. 178 and 190.

"Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One was staying in Sāvatti, in the Jetavana, in Anāthpindika's

monks' home. Then the Blessed One addressed the monks: "Monks!" - "Sir!" those bhikkhus replied to the Blessed One. The Blessed One said thus: "Inconceivable is the beginning of this samsâra; a first beginning of the ignorance-impaired beings, the thirst-bound, hurrying, wandering ones is not recognizable.

As if, bhikkhus, a person were to take the grass, wood, and foliage of this Indian mainland, put them in a heap, cut them into pieces four fingers long, and set them aside: "This is my mother, this is my mother's mother. Unfinished, bhikkhus, the mothers of the mothers of this man would remain unfinished; but what there is of grass, wood, foliage in this Indian mainland would come to a complete end. And for what reason? The beginning of this samsara is inconceivable; a first beginning of the ignorance-impaired beings, the thirst-bound, hurrying, wandering ones is not recognizable."

And further: "Formerly, monks, Vepula Mountain was called Pâcînavamsa. At that time the people were called Tivarâ. These Tivarâ people had a lifespan of 40,000 years. These Tivarâ people climbed the Pâcînavamsa mountain in four days and descended in four days.

At that time, Kakusandha, the Exalted One, the Holy One, the Fully Awakened One was born in the world. Kakusandha, the Exalted One, the Blessed One, the Fully Awakened One, had named a pair of disciples Vidhura and Sjiva, an exquisitely excellent pair. See, bhikkhus: The name of this mountain has been forgotten, these people have passed away, and this Blessed One has ceased to exist.

See, bhikkhus: The name of this mountain has been forgotten, these people have passed away, and this Blessed One has ceased to exist.

So impermanent, bhikkhus, are the formations, so impermanent, bhikkhus, are the formations, so desolate, bhikkhus, are the formations. This is enough, bhikkhus, for weariness of all fabrications, enough for purification, enough for liberation."

This image illustrates the temporal boundlessness of samsâra. The picture given in Samyutta Nikâya I p. 61 illustrates the spatial boundlessness. In the Rohita Sutta it says as follows:

Place Sâvatthi. The god's son Rohitassa, standing to one side, spoke to the Blessed One thus: "But where, O Lord, one is not born, does not grow old, does not die, does not vanish and reappear - is it possible, O Lord, to reach the end of the world by walking?"

"Where, brother, one is not born, does not age, does not die, does not vanish and reappear, I do not say that one could recognize, see or reach the end of the world by walking."

"Wunderbar, o Herr, erstaunlich, o Herr, wie dieses vom Erhabenen, wohl gesprochen ist. Ich war früher, o Herr, ein Rishi, Rohitassa genannt, der Sohn eines Besitzers, reich, zauberkräftig, fähig, in der Luft zu gehen. Mit einer derartigen Geschwindigkeit begabt, wie ein geschickter, geübter Bogenschütze mit Leichtigkeit quer über den Schatten einer Palme schießen könnte, und derart war meine Schrittweise, dass sie vom östlichen bis zum westlichen Ozean hinreichte. Da kam mir der Wunsch: Ich möchte durch Gehen das Ende der Welt erreichen. Mit einer derartigen Geschwindigkeit und einer derartigen Schrittweise begabt, ging ich, außer um zu essen und zu trinken, um das Werk der Notdurft zu verrichten und zu schlafen, hundert Jahre lang, während meines hundertjährigen Lebens und starb, ohne das Ende der Welt erreicht zu haben."

... "But I do not say, friend, that one can put an end to suffering without having reached the end of the world. It is in this six-foot-high body, the one endowed with perception and thought, that I teach the origination and destruction of the world and the path leading to the destruction of the world."

The conclusion of the sutta shows that the solution to the problem is not to be sought and found in the world out there, but that it can only be sought and found in the world that everyone experiences within themselves and over which they are master or can become master with the right insight, where "reaching the end of the world" means as much as "reaching the end of the world": To bring this ego-world to an end by ceasing to grasp and comprehend, i.e. by extinguishing it.

Now the world, the samsâra, which we experience as time and space, is divided in the objective sense into temporal and spatial sections, temporally into the kappas (sansk.: kalpas), i.e. into individual sections of the world, of whose inconceivable length Samyutta Nikâya II p. 181 gives a comparable picture:

Place Savatthi. Now there went ...

Sitting sideways ...

"How long do you think, lord, a kappa lasts?" - "Long, O monk, does a kappa last. You can't calculate it by: so many years, so many centuries, so many millennia, so many millennia." - "But can a comparison

be made?" - "One can, O monk," the Blessed One replied. "There would be a large rock, a mile long, a mile wide, a mile high, unsplit, unperforated, dense. If a person stroked it once every hundred years with a soft cloth, then, O monk, the great boulder would come to destruction faster than a kappa. That is how long, O monk, a kappa lasts, and of such long kappas, O monk, not just one has been passed, not a hundred, not a thousand, not a hundred thousand have been passed (in the samsâra). And what is the reason for this? Inconceivable is the beginning of this samsâra ..."

These unimaginably long periods are only moments, phases within the beginningless series of world events. These phases are divided into the stages of involution, the shrinking of the world, the samvatta-kappa, and the stages of evolution, the development, the new blossoming of the world, the vivatta-kappa. Just as the blossom follows the seed in ever new play, so the vivatta-kappa follows the samvatta-kappa in ever new play.

Spatially, the samsâra is divided into individual layers, just as a burning flame can be divided into individual layers according to differences in color. These layers are the individual lokas, the individual worlds of the various forms of life and existence, as they correspond to the individual forms of the workings of the kammâs (karmas). I am here in this world; I am born of this father, of this mother, because my work in the previous existence was such that I could be reborn here on the basis of elective affinity (as the chemist says: according to specific affinity), in short on the basis of real mutual attunement. The procreative material of the parents, the ova of the mother, the sperm of the father, represent certain unique values, certain dispositions, certain kammic possibilities, which are, so to speak, waiting for the power to develop. The parents only supply the material for the new form of life, the forming and vitalizing power itself, i.e. that which makes of this material that which says "I" and distinguishes itself as I from all others as a personal, as an individual, that is that which originates from the previous form of existence and continues to take hold in the disintegration of the previous form of existence, takes hold of its new life material anew in a new womb and continues to work there. And that which now says "I" will take hold anew when the body disintegrates, after death, when the outer form disintegrates, will take hold anew in the womb, where it can and must take hold according to real attunement. From which a new something, which says "I" anew, then develops. This brings us to the beginning of our verse. "In the womb some emerge", i.e. their work was such that it was attuned to human procreative material. Living in the human world, he is reborn in the human world because his work was human. Life, the ego, does not need an earthly power to judge it, whether this power is called God or karma or something else; it "judges itself", the word "judges itself" used in that terrible double sense in which the primal wisdom of language holds it out to us as a warning, like an oracle that shows and conceals in one.

This human world, this manussa-loka, is a layer of activity from which it continues upwards and downwards into the paraloka, the other world, according to the various modes of activity. Base, inhuman activity may mature in animal birth as a result; sublime, superhuman activity may have divine birth as a result.

All possibilities of life and existence in this world and the hereafter (idha vâ huraṃ vâ) are collectively referred to as Sattaloka, i.e. the "world of living beings". The Sattaloka comprehends all rebirth possibilities for living beings. The layers of the Sattaloka, ascending from the lowest to the highest, are as follows:

1. life in the fully tormented state, corresponding to what we call hell (niraya).
2. life in the animal state (tiraccānayaṇi).
3. life in the realm of ghosts and spirits (petaloka or petti-visaya).
4. life as asuras, as evil beings, as fiends.

These again are summarized as the four apāyâs, the four layers as places of unhappy rebirth, fallen state of life.

They are followed by all other layers as places of happy rebirth (saggalokas). The lowest of these saggalokas is our human world. Despite its delusional state, it belongs to the happy states of existence, because with it the possibility of liberation, of release from existence, begins. This is not to be understood as if a completely new, essentially different moment sets in with the human world, which is different from the other four states of existence: namely consciousness, life, however and wherever it may take place, always takes place in the interdependence of spirit form and consciousness, but the flame of consciousness may burn dimly or brightly. In the four fallen states, especially in the animal state of existence, the flame of consciousness burns too dimly, too polluted by animal desires; in human existence it burns sufficiently purified to become the bearer and vessel of a thought of salvation. This is why the Kevaddha Sutta says: "Consciousness that is light through and through" (viññānam sabbato pabham).

The human world occupies a special position insofar as Buddhas can only appear in the human world. The Bodhisatta, the Buddha aspirant, must descend from the Tusita heaven into the earthly womb in order to be able to blossom into the Sammasambuddha, the fully awakened one. In this respect, the satta-loka layered above the human world, i.e. the various layers of the worlds of the gods, the deva-lokas, do not represent a progressive sublimation process, which would then have to end with natural necessity in a complete volatilization and Nibbâna would become the result of an automatic progressive gradient in the theosophical way, but it is a self-willed growth process, which cannot be calculated logically-rationally in its further development, but from which the next phases of development arise on the basis of self-willed growth.

Of course, the various worlds of the gods are layered above the human world in a purely orderly manner, but not as a higher state in itself, which must necessarily be followed by the next higher state in the next higher world of the gods, but the work, the kamma, the kammic growth can lead out of these worlds of the gods again and lead back to the fall into the very lowest layers, into the animal kingdom and hell. Thus one can, purely schematically describing, set up a ladder from the lowest hell to the highest Brahma heaven, just as one can, purely schematically describing, set up a ladder from the lowest living being to man, but if one wanted to see a biological development in this ladder of the layers of existence, one would get into the same contradiction with reality that Darwinism gets into when it only draws the conclusion from its ladder that man is "descended from apes". Man is not descended from the ape, but from its activity, and it may well happen that in some particular case he is descended from the ape, but not as a logical rule and as a law of nature, but as a special case of activity, of kamma.

The layers of existence that lie above the human world are, as I said, the god worlds, the deva-lokas, which are again divided into the god worlds in the narrowest sense, i.e. the lower god worlds and the Brahma worlds, together twenty-six. The actual deva-lokas are six in number, followed by sixteen rūpabrahmalokas, the Brahma worlds of form, and four arūpabrahmalokas, the four Brahma worlds without form.

The six deva-lokas are:

1. the heaven of the Four Great Kings (catummahârâjika devaloka). They are the guardians of the world that surround the seat of the next higher heavens, the Tavatimsa:

Dhatarattha to the north, Virulhaka to the south, Vindhatta to the west, Vessavana to the east.

2. the tavatimsadevaloka, the heaven of the thirty-three gods, who play a major role in popular belief and of whom it is said: "It shines like the thirty-three!" The ruler of the thirty-three is Sakka or Indra, the best-known figure in the Indian pantheon, who also plays a major role in Buddhist literature, but who, like all the other gods, is not a god in himself, only the result of a certain individual action and as such a position within the Samsâra that anyone can occupy and from which anyone who has once occupied it must also leave again. Sakka, with the epithet devanam indo, i.e. the highest of the gods, is one of the gods who are eager to learn and inquisitive. He often asked the Buddha for advice, let himself be converted by him and proclaimed his praise, as for example in the Janavasabha Sutta (D. 18), where Sakka rejoices in the circle of his thirty-three that since the Exalted One has been teaching, the divine bodies (dibbâ kâyâ) have been filling up more and more and the unholy bodies (asurâ kâyâ) have been emptying more and more. When the Buddha is extinguished, he is the one who sings the gloriously beautiful verse from the heights of heaven:

"Transient are all things,  
Their nature is to arise and pass away!  
Once created, they fade away,  
The activity's calm, that is happiness!"

3. the yâma worlds (yâmadevaloka), whose ruler (up to and including the Brahma worlds) is Mâra, the god most frequently mentioned in the texts, this one with the epithet "the evil one" (pâpima mâra). It is not the place here to go into his meaning, which shimmers in all kinds of colors.

4. tusitadevaloka

5. nimmanaratidevaloka

6. paranimmitavasavatidevaloka.

With the latter two, even the meaning of the mere name is uncertain. The former are usually translated as "the gods who delight in their own creation", and the latter as "the gods who make use of the

creation of others". On the other hand, the first in the trinity. The Tusitadeva have a special position in that they are the designated abode of the Bodhisatta before he returns to the human world, taking up residence for the last time in the blessed womb.

In the Accariyabbutaddhamma Sutta (M. 123) it says: "From the mouth of the Blessed One I have heard it, from his mouth I have received it: Thoughtfully, fully aware, the bodhisatta arises in the body of the Tusita; thoughtfully, fully aware, he dwells in the body of the Tusita; thoughtfully, fully aware, he remains in the body of the Tusita during his lifetime; thoughtfully, fully aware, he departs from the body of the Tusita and descends into the womb."

The next higher, seventh stage marks the beginning of the Brahma heavens, the Brahmaloaka, over which the god Brahma rules, who plays the most peculiar and significant role of all the god figures in literature, a role which proves that even then the struggle between the Buddhist doctrine of reality and the religious-philosophical one-god system of the Upanishads was slowly, still half unconsciously, unfolding.

In the above-mentioned Janavasabha Sutta, Brahma as Brahma Sanankumâra, i.e. as 'Brahma Ever-young', confesses before the assembled Tavatimsa gods, to whom he has appeared in a mysterious glow of light: "I too have become so powerful, so sublime by following and practicing the four paths to higher faculties (the iddhipadas)." As Brahma Sahampati, he is the one who is the first to genuflect to the Buddha for the proclamation of the teaching, as it is told in the Mahavagga, and as the Buddha himself tells in M. 26 etc.: "There are beings of a less tainted nature who are lost if they do not hear the teaching! Let the Exalted One show the teaching! Understanders will be found!" He also sings his verse when the Buddha is extinguished as the heavenly leader, in which he praises the Buddha as the teacher, the incomparable being. Elsewhere, however, he appears as a powerful and sinister adversary who, sheltered in the mysticism of his existence, wants to rise above reality and put the human spirit in fetters and keep it in bondage.

But he is no match for the Buddha and his doctrine of reality; partly he has to bow to the force of facts, as in the discourse of Brahma's visitation (M. 49), where he has to take a back seat to the Buddha in terms of power (supernatural abilities) (M. I. p.326); partly he has to bow to the all-pervading height of Buddhist insight and the sublime humor resulting from it.

The prime example of this is the Kevaddha Sutta (D. XI), where a monk with the question of the complete annihilation of matter goes before the gods one after the other, starting with the lowest gods of heaven, the Four Great Kings, and is always referred by one to the next higher class of gods, until he arrives before the gods of the Brahma worlds, who refer him as the last instance to Brahma, the Maha-Brahma, the great Brahma, who is not directly accessible himself, but enthroned in mysterious seclusion, showing himself only in a divine glow of light.

And this divine splendor appeared and in it the Great Brahma became visible, so that the monk could also ask him his question. Instead of a real answer, Brahma only boasted with the attributes of his Brahmahood: "I am Brahma, the Great Brahma, the All-Surpassing, the Unconquered, the Lord, the Creator, etc." But the monk is not misled by this pompous answer until Maha-Brahma, cornered, finally admits that he cannot answer the question himself and advises the monk to turn to the Buddha. "Then the Great Brahma took that monk by the arm, led him away and said to him: "The Brahma gods certainly believe that nothing is hidden from Brahma, nothing is unknown to him, nothing is unworkable for him, so I did not want to answer you in their presence. But, monk, even I do not know where these four basic substances come to complete destruction. Therefore it is wrong of you, unseemly, that you seek an answer to this question by bypassing the Blessed One. Go, bhikkhu, to the Blessed One and ask him your question, and how he will answer it, so keep it!"

With this, the splendor of the Brahmanic doctrine of rebirth is broken; he too, the Great Brahma, the mysteriously shrouded peak to which the human longing for an eternal, unchanging existence takes refuge, he too becomes a process in samsâra in the all-surpassing height of Buddhist insight; even the highest Brahma heaven is not a heaven in itself, not a beyond, not an eternal, beyond this transient here, but also only a stage of dwelling. Not qualitatively, essentially, but only quantitatively, numerically distinguished from all others by the unheard-of length of its period of vibration.

This fall of Mahabrahma and his presumed eternity, which the Kevadda Sutta accomplishes through the power of humor, is accomplished by the Brahmajâla Sutta (D. I) in the truly gigantic picture of theogenesis, the history of Brahma's development, in which the Great Brahma is shown merely as the first precipitate of a cosmic evolution, a vivatta-kappa, as it follows a cosmic shrinking process, an involution process, a samvatta-kappa.

When, after Samvatta-kappa has expired, the world begins to blossom again, like the blossom from the shrunken germ, an empty Brahma sky appears, and the first being that drops out of the self-luminous splendor of the involutory period for lack of inner power and appears here is then inclined to regard

itself as the Brahma, as the creator of beings, because everything else appears after it. His whole Brahmahood thus amounts merely to a lack of recollection of the period of this present world-evolution. He knows nothing of the fact that the present world and its blossoming is only the setback of a previous process of shrinkage. That this game has been accomplishing itself in incomprehensible, boundless rhythms since the beginning. Even the inconceivable measurelessness of the heavens of the gods is nothing but the activity of samsara, a kammic play, corresponding to the activity of beings: As is the activity, so is the rebirth. But wherever this rebirth may take place, it always causes new work, always causes new rebirth and the ups and downs do not come to an end until the peace of the ultimate arrives, in which every longing for this world as well as for the hereafter has ceased.

We now continue with the enumeration of the different layers: The Brahma world is divided into twenty layers. Of these, sixteen fall into the formative brahmalokas (rûpa brahmaloka) and four into the formless brahmalokas (arûpa brahmaloka).

Listing the individual names here is of no value, as we do not even know the literal meaning of all these names. This is obviously an ancient Indian inheritance that was taken over, absorbed and processed by Buddhism. The highest Brahma heavens are summarized as the heavens of the gods of the Pure Abode (suddhavasadeva). In them the Anâgâmi, the non-returner, appears, i.e. the one who has entered the third of the four paths and who, on dying, no longer returns to this world, but is completely extinguished from the heaven of the Pure Household Gods. From this heaven there is no more rebirth, therefore the Buddha says to Sâriputta (M.12): "There is no place in which I would not have rebirth in the doings of samsâra, except the Purehouse Gods. For if I were to be reborn with them, I would not return to this world."

Die vier letzten Stufen, die vier Arûpabrahmalokas sind, soweit ich verstehe, die Wiedergeburtstätte derjenigen, die in diesem Dasein Kraft der Versenkung, Kraft des Samâdhi, die vier Formfreiheiten erreicht haben: die Raumunendlichkeit, die Bewusstseinsunendlichkeit, die Nichtetwasheit, die Weder-Wahrnehmungs-noch-Nicht-Wahrnehmungsheit. Dass sie, obwohl sie der Stufenleiter nach die höchsten sind, dem Sinne nach nicht die höchsten sind, geht ja zur Genüge aus der Tatsache hervor, dass die fünf obersten Rûpabrahma-Himmel es sind, aus denen es keine Rückkehr zur Welt mehr gibt, die also die letzte Schwingung vor dem Nibbâna sind, während aus den vier Arûpabrahma-Himmeln, soviel ich verstehe, eine Wiederkehr in diese Welt, ein Rückschlag zur Welt, sehr wohl möglich ist.

Thus the Sattaloka, the world of beings, is divided into 31 layers: 4 Apâyas, i.e. fallen states, 1 human world and 26 worlds of the gods. All are divided from a different point of view into

1. kâmaloka, the world of sensuality
2. rûpaloka, the world of pure forms and
3. arûpaloka, the world of freedom of form. The Kâmaloka comprises the four sunken states, the human world and the lowest six worlds of the gods, i.e. the worlds of the gods up to Brahma heaven, a total of 11 layers. This is followed by the Rûpaloka with the sixteen layers of the Rûpabrahma world and the Arûpaloka with the four layers of the Arûpabrahma world.

This gives us a rough overview of the universe, the samsâra, as it presents itself as the playground of rebirths, as the field of possibilities for the activity of beings, for kamma.

You ask where the reality of this teaching lies and whether there is any reality at all? We all know nothing about this from our own experience. All we know is that everything that happens is self-regulating, self-layering. Just as the water in the fall repeatedly clusters into drops, just as the growing rock layers itself, just as the sounds and colors layer themselves, the worlds may also layer themselves. It is certainly an arbitrary and limited idea that the possibilities are exhausted with this world here, which we know from experience as such. Just as a musical scale goes up and down indefinitely, the possibilities of the universe may also go up and down as far as we are concerned. We are not dealing here with fixed worlds that exist in themselves, creations of a god, but with worldly processes that are formed like everything else, depending on internal preconditions and external circumstances.

So even if we cannot say anything about all these things from experience, we can say with complete certainty that the work of living beings in thought, word and deed is of sole, decisive importance for the possibilities of rebirth. As the work, so the rebirth. Which anatomical-physical possibilities open up here remains undecided and is not our primary concern. First and foremost, we are concerned with the insight: As is the work here, so is the rebirth there! Good work here, good rebirth there. Bad work here, bad rebirth there. This should be a warning to us all that the moment of disintegration, of death, finds us in good shape, in good work, in good reality. In one of his conversations shortly before his death, W. von Humboldt said: "I do not consider it at all indifferent what thoughts a person is occupied with when he is dying." Well, yes! That is a dim reflection like a cloudy mirror, a dim

guessing and guessing of what the Buddha clearly and definitely teaches us. Let everyone make the best of it. It is never too late for the right insight and the right decision, and it may well be that purity may still arise from the last moment of thought like a white lotus.

Above all, however, we adhere to the splendid sentence in the Mahâsudassana Sutta: "Misery is dying with the one in whom there is desire. Unworthy is the dying of him in whom there is craving." So let us strive to be unencumbered by cravings and desires when we die, may they go to the sublime, may they go to the common. Like a wanderer who sets out on his journey free of ballast. Calm, clear, your eyes consciously set on the final destination:  
The final extinction.