

Time and streamwinning

The truth of relativity and impermanence

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For best effect:

Read this reflection first; then, watch the video (link below).

Then, read this reflection again.

The 1st time you read it, your views may find faults with it.

The 2nd time around, you are likelier to understand it better.

The Buddha discovered **relativity** long before Einstein scientifically theorized it. This is not to demean Einstein in anyway. His theory, when we reflect on it (or just watch the video whose link is found below), helps us understand better what **impermanence** really is.

We can say that from ancient times, people have some idea what impermanence is. However, it is the Buddha who has understood it so well that it brings him awakening to true reality. **True reality** is just a big word about impermanence. Now we can see this liberating truth for ourself.

Meditation and time

Hence, the Buddha Dhamma is said to have the quality (*guṇa*) of “timelessness” (*akālika*): it is “time-free,” or “has nothing to do with time.” Serious meditators tell us (or we may have noticed it in our own meditation) how **time** seems to move faster when we had a good meditation, but seems slower when we are struggling with it.

Relative stories

The early Buddhist suttas and Commentaries tell stories showing the relativity of **time**. In the **Pāyāsi Sutta** (D 23), for example, the monk Kumāra Kassapa explains to king Pāyāsi that “a hundred human years is but a single night and day amongst the devas of Tāvātimsa.”

He then tells the king to imagine that some of his relatives and friends were reborn in Tāvātimsa heaven (of the 33 devas), and enjoyed heavenly pleasures for 2 or 3 days.

Then, these devas return to earth to tell him about it. But they would be **not** able to do so —because the king and his generation would have been dead by then!

[See (D 23,11.1-4), SD 39.4.]

time zones

A similar story is told about the “husband-honourer”—**the Pati,pujikāya Vatthu** (DhA 4.4). A female deva, wife of the deva Māla,bhārī (garland-weaver) dies one morning as she sits in a tree plucking flowers. She is reborn as a woman in Sāvatti. Recalling her heavenly birth, she keeps the precepts and lives a virtuous life of giving alms and so on, aspiring to be reborn back in Tāvātimsa.

At the end of her human life, she is indeed reborn back in the same garden in Tāvātimsa where her deva husband is. Then, her husband, seeing her, asks her **where she has been all day**. She tells him of her human rebirth. He then says:

“If, as you say, humans live for only about a hundred years, and if they spend their time heedless, when will they ever be free from suffering?”

The lesson

The narrator (the Buddha) explains:

“Now, a hundred of our years are but a night and a day in the world of Tāvātimsa. Thirty such nights and days make a month. Twelve such months make a year. Their lifespan is a thousand such celestial years; or, in human reckoning, 36 million years.”

Therefore, the deva thought to himself:

“If human lifespan is so short, it is highly improper for them to indulge in a life of heedlessness.”

[DhA 4.4 (SD 54.15).]

The Commentary thus explains the relativity of time. Tāvātimsa is the 2nd lowest heaven, just beyond earth. There are many other deva worlds (in distant space-quadrants, if you like) whose life-spans are very much longer, spanning even thousands of world-cycles!

Yet, they are all impermanent.

[For the lifespans of other devas, see SD 54.3a (Table 3.5).]

Reflection on impermanence

The reflection on impermanence helps us understand better the relativity of time and space, of all existence. Above all, our evolving understanding of impermanence will bring us to attaining the path of awakening in this life itself—which is something that the theory of relativity in itself cannot do.

What if time is an illusion? <https://www.facebook.com/What.If.science/videos/127179361501382/>

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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