

The Nibbāna Sermons 1 to 11 by Bhikkhu K Ñāṇananda

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Sermon 02

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

Etaṃ santam, etaṃ paṇītam, yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho
sabbūpadhipaṭinissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ.

"This is peaceful, this is excellent, namely the stilling of all preparations, the relinquishment of all assets, the destruction of craving, detachment, cessation, extinction".

With the permission of the Most Venerable Great Preceptor and the assembly of the venerable meditative monks.

The second sermon on *Nibbāna* has come up for today. Towards the end of our sermon the other day we raised the point: Why is it improper to ask such questions as: 'What is the purpose of *Nibbāna*? Why should one attain *Nibbāna*?' Our explanation was that since the holy life or the Noble Eightfold Path has *Nibbāna* as its ultimate aim, since it gets merged in *Nibbāna*, any questions as to the ultimate purpose of *Nibbāna* would be inappropriate.

In fact at some places in the canon we find the phrase *anuttara brahmacariyapariyosāna* used with reference to *Nibbāna*. It means that *Nibbāna* is the supreme consummation of the holy life. The following standard phrase announcing a new *Arahant* is very often found in the *suttas*:

Yassatthāya kulaputtā sammadeva agāasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajanti,
tadanuttaraṃ brahmacariyapariyosānaṃ diṭṭheva dhamme sayamaṃ abhiññā
sacchikatvā upasampajja vihāsi. "In this very life he realized by his own higher knowledge and attained to that supreme consummation of the holy life for the purpose of which clansmen of good family rightly go forth from home to homelessness."

Now what is the justification for saying that one attains to *Nibbāna* by the very completion of the holy life? This Noble Eightfold Path is a straight path:

Ujuko nāma so maggo, abhayā nāma sā disā. "This path is called the 'straight' and the direction it goes is called the 'fearless'."

Translation Bodhi (2000: 123):

“The straight way’ that path is called,
And ‘fearless’ is its destination.”

In the *Itivuttaka* we come across a verse which expresses this idea more vividly:

*Sekhassa sikkhamānassa,
ujumaggānusārino,
khayasmiṃ paṭhamaṃ ñāṇaṃ,
tato aññā anantarā.*

"To the learner, learning
In pursuit of the straight path,
First comes the knowledge of destruction
And then immediately the certitude."

Translation Ireland (1991: 43):

“For a learner who is training
In conformity with the direct path,
The knowledge of destruction arises first,
And final knowledge immediately follows.”

It is the fruit of *Arahant*-ship which gives him the certitude of the attainment of *Nibbāna*.

Here the word *anantarā* has been used. That concentration proper to the fruit of *Arahant*-ship is called *ānantarikā samādhi*. This means that the attainment of the fruit is immediate.

Though it may be so in the case of the *Arahant*, what about the stream-winner, the *sotāpanna*, one may ask. There is a general belief that in the case of a *sotāpanna* the vision of *Nibbāna* is like a glimpse of a distant lamp on a road with many bends and the *sotāpanna* has just negotiated the first bend.

But in accordance with the *Dhamma* it may be said that the norm of immediacy is applicable even to the knowledge of the first path. One who attains to the fruit of stream-winning may be a beggar, an illiterate person, or a seven year old child. It may be that he has heard the *Dhamma* for the first time. All the same, a long line of epithets is used with reference to him in the *suttas* as his qualifications: *Diṭṭhadhammo pattadhammo veditadhammo pariyogāhadhammo tiṇṇavicikiccho vigatakathaṃkatho vesārajjappatto aparappaccayo satthusāsane*.

Diṭṭhadhammo, he is one who has seen the *Dhamma*, the truth of *Nibbāna*. It is said in the *Ratanasutta* that along with the vision of the first path, three fetters are abandoned, namely *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*, the self-hood view, *vicikicchā*, sceptical doubt, and *sīlabbataparāmāsa*, attachment to holy vows and ascetic practices. --

Translation of *sīlabbata* by Bhikkhu Bodhi: “behavior and observances”

Dhp 271f:

Na sīlabbatamattena ...

bhikkhu vissāsamāpādi, appatto āsavakkhayaṃ.

Translation Norman (1997/2004: 40)

Not merely by virtuous conduct and vows ... has a bhikkhu attained confidence, as long as he has not attained the destruction of the āsavas.”

AN I 225, translated Bodhi 2012: 311:

Suppose one cultivates behaviour and observances, an [austere] lifestyle, and a spiritual life, setting them up as if they were the essence. If unwholesome qualities then increase and wholesome qualities decline, such behaviour and observances, an [austere] lifestyle, and spiritual life, set up as the essence, are fruitless. But if unwholesome qualities decline and wholesome qualities increase, then such behaviour and observances, an [austere] lifestyle, and spiritual life, set up as the essence, are fruitfull.

Some might argue that only these fetters are abandoned at this stage, because it is a glimpse of *Nibbāna* from a distance. But then there is this second epithet, *pattadhammo*, which means that he has reached the *Dhamma*, that he has arrived at *Nibbāna*. Not only that, he is *viditadhammo*, he is one who has understood the *Dhamma*, which is *Nibbāna*. He is *pariyogāḷhadhammo*, he has plunged into the *Dhamma*, he has dived into the *Dhamma*, which is *Nibbāna*. He is *tiṇṇavicikiccho*, he has crossed over doubts. *Vigatakathamkatho*, his waverings are gone. *Vesārajjappatto*, he has attained to proficiency. *Aparappaccayo satthusāsane*, in regard to the dispensation of the teacher he is not dependent on others. And that is to say that he could attain to *Nibbāna* even without another's help, though of course with the teacher's help he would attain it sooner.

So this string of epithets testifies to the efficacy of the realization by the first path. It is not a mere glimpse of *Nibbāna* from a distance. It is a reaching, an arrival or a plunge into *Nibbāna*. For purposes of illustration we may bring in a legend connected with the history of Sri Lanka. It is said that when King *Gajabāhu* invaded India, one of his soldiers, *Nīla*, who had Herculean strength, parted the seawater with a huge iron bar in order to make way for the king and the army. Now when the supramundane path arises in the mind the power of thought is as mighty as the blow of *Nīla* with his iron bar. Even with the first

blow the sea-water parted, so that one could see the bottom. Similarly the sweeping influxes are parted for a moment when the transcendental path arises in a mind, enabling one to see the very bottom - *Nibbāna*. In other words, all preparations (*saṅkhāras*) are stilled for a moment, enabling one to see the cessation of preparations.

We have just given a simile by way of illustration, but incidentally there is a *Dhammapada* verse which comes closer to it:

*Chinda sotam parakkamma,
kāme panuda brāhmaṇa,
saṅkhārānaṃ khayam ñatvā,
akataññū'si brāhmaṇa.*

"Strive forth and cut off the stream,
Discard, oh Brahmin, sense-desires,
Having known the destruction of preparations, oh Brahmin,
Become a knower of the un-made."

Translation Norman (2004: 56):

“O brahman, cut across the stream, making an effort;
Drive away sensual pleasures:
Knowing the termination of conditioned things,
You know the uncreated, o brahman.”

So this verse clearly indicates what the knowledge of the path does when it arises. Just as one leaps forward and cuts off a stream of water, so it cuts off, even for a moment, the preparations connected with craving. Thereby one realizes the destruction of preparations - *saṅkhārānaṃ khayam ñatvā*.

Like the sea water parted by the blow of the iron bar, preparations part for a moment to reveal the very bottom which is 'unprepared', the *asaṅkhata*. *Akata*, or the un-made, is the same as *asaṅkhata*, the unprepared. So one has had a momentary vision of the sea bottom, which is free from preparations. Of course, after that experience, influxes flow in again. But one kind of influxes, namely *diṭṭhāsavā*, influxes of views, are gone for good and will never flow in again.

Now how was it that some with keen wisdom like *Bāhiya* attained *Arahant*-ship even while listening to a short sermon from the Buddha? They had dealt four powerful blows in quick succession with the iron bar of the path-knowledge to clear away all possible influxes.

What is called *akata* or *asaṅkhata*, the un-made or the un-prepared, is not something out there in a distance, as an object of thought. It is not a sign to be grasped by one who wants to attain *Nibbāna*.

Language encourages us to think in terms of signs. Very often we find it difficult to get rid of this habit. The worldlings with their defilements have to communicate with each other and the structure of the language has to answer

their needs. So the subject-object relationship has become a very significant feature in a language. It always carries the implication that there is a thing to be grasped and that there is someone who grasps, that there is a doer and a thing done. So it is almost impossible to avoid such usages as: 'I want to see *Nibbāna*, I want to attain *Nibbāna*'. We are made to think in terms of getting and attaining.

However sometimes the Buddha reminds us that this is only a conventional usage and that these worldly usages are not to be taken too seriously. We come across such an instance in the *Sagāthavagga* of the *Samyutta Nikāya* where the Buddha retorts to some questions put by a certain deity. The deity named *Kakudha* asks the Buddha: "Do you rejoice, oh recluse?" And the Buddha retorts: "On getting what, friend?" Then the deity asks: "Then, recluse, do you grieve?" And the Buddha quips back: "On losing what, friend?" So the deity concludes: "Well then, recluse, you neither rejoice nor grieve!" And the Buddha replies: "That is so, friend."

It seems, then, that though we say we 'attain' *Nibbāna* there is nothing to gain and nothing to lose. If anything - **what is lost is an ignorance that there is something, and a craving that there is not enough** - and that is all one loses.

Now there are quite a number of synonyms for *Nibbāna*, such as *akata* and *asaṅkhata*. As already mentioned, there is even a list of thirty-three such epithets, out of which one is *dīpa*. Now *dīpa* means an island. When we are told that *Nibbāna* is an island, we tend to imagine some sort of existence in a beautiful island. But in the *Pārāyanavagga* of the *Sutta Nipāta* the Buddha gives a good corrective to that kind of imagining in his reply to a question put by the Brahmin youth *Kappa*, a pupil of *Bāvarī*. *Kappa* puts his question in the following impressive verse:

*Majjhe sarasmiṃ tiṭṭhatam,
oghe jāte mahabbhaye,
jarāmaccuparetānaṃ,
dīpaṃ pabrūhi mārisa,
tvañca me dīpaṃ akkhāhi,
yathayidaṃ nāparaṃ siyā.*

"Unto them that stand midstream,
When the frightful floods flow forth,
To them in decay-and-death forlorn,
An island, sire, may you proclaim.
An island which non else excels,
Yea, such an isle, pray tell me sire."

And the Buddha gives his answer in two inspiring verses:

*Majjhe sarasmiṃ tiṭṭhatam,
oghe jāte mahabbhaye,
jarāmaccuparetānaṃ,
dīpaṃ pabrūmi Kappa te.
Akiñcanaṃ anādānaṃ,
etaṃ dīpaṃ anāparaṃ,*

*nibbānaṃ iti naṃ brūmi,
jarāmaccuparikkhayaṃ.*

"Unto them that stand midstream,
When the frightful floods flow forth,
To them in decay-and-death forlorn,
An island, *Kappa*, I shall proclaim.
Owning naught, grasping naught,
The isle is this, none else besides.
Nibbāna, that is how I call that isle,
Wherein is decay decayed and death is dead."

Translation Bodhi (forthcoming):

"For those standing in the midst of the stream,
(*Kappa*," said the Blessed One),
"when a perilous flood has arisen,
for those oppressed by old age and death,
let me declare an island to you.

"Owning nothing, taking nothing:
this is the island with nothing further.
I call this 'nibbāna,'
the extinction of old age and death.

"Having understood this, those mindful ones
are quenched in this very life.
They do not come under *Māra*'s control,
nor are they *Māra*'s footmen."

Akiñcanaṃ means 'owning nothing', *anādānaṃ* means 'grasping nothing'.
Etaṃ dīpaṃ anāparaṃ, this is the island, nothing else. *Nibbānaṃ iti naṃ brūmi,
jarāmaccuparikkhayaṃ*, "and that I call *Nibbāna*, which is the extinction of
decay-and-death."

From this also we can infer that words like *akata*, *asañkhata* and *sabba-
sañkhārā-samatha* are full fledged synonyms of *Nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* is not some
mysterious state quite apart from them. It is not something to be projected into a
distance.

Some are in the habit of getting down to a discussion on *Nibbāna* by putting
sañkhata on one side and *asañkhata* on the other side. They start by saying that
sañkhata, or the 'prepared', is *anicca*, or impermanent. If *sañkhata* is *anicca*,
they conclude that *asañkhata* must be *nicca*, that is the unprepared must be
permanent. Following the same line of argument they argue that since *sañkhata*
is *dukkha*, *asañkhata* must be *sukha*. But when they come to the third step, they
get into difficulties. If *sañkhata* is *anattā*, or not-self, then surely
asañkhata must be *attā*, or self. At this point they have to admit that their

argument is too facile and so they end up by saying that after all *Nibbāna* is something to be realized.

All this confusion arises due to a lack of understanding of the law of Dependent Arising, *paṭicca samuppāda*. Therefore, first of all, we have to say something about the doctrine of *paṭicca samuppāda*.

According to the *Ariyapariyesanasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha, soon after his enlightenment, reflected on the profundity of the *Dhamma* and was rather disinclined to preach it. He saw two points in the doctrine that are difficult for the world to see or grasp. One was *paṭicca samuppāda*:

Duddasaṃ idaṃ ṭhānaṃ yadidaṃ idappaccayatā paṭiccasamuppādo. "Hard to see is this point, namely dependent arising which is a relatedness of this to that." And the second point was *Nibbāna*: *Idampi kho ṭhānaṃ duddasaṃ yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho sabbūpadhipaṭinissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ*. "And this point, too, is difficult to see, namely the stilling of all preparations, the relinquishment of all assets, the destruction of craving, detachment, cessation, extinction."

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 260):

“It is hard for such a generation to see this truth, namely, specific conditionality, dependent origination. And it is hard to see this truth, namely, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, *Nibbāna*.”

The Buddha’s hesitation and the ensuing intervention by Brahmā are not reported at all in the parallel MĀ 204 (Anālayo 2011: 178ff)

From this context we can gather that if there is any term we can use to define *paṭicca samuppāda*, a term that comes closer to it in meaning, it is *idappaccayatā*. The Buddha himself has described *paṭicca samuppāda* in this context as a relatedness of this to that, *idappaccayatā*. As a matter of fact the basic principle which forms the noble norm of this doctrine of dependent arising is this *idappaccayatā*. Let us now try to get at its meaning by examining the doctrine of *paṭicca samuppāda*.

In quite a number of contexts, such as the *Bahudhātukasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* and the *Bodhivagga* of the *Udāna* the law of *paṭicca samuppāda* is set out in the following manner:

*Iti imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti,
imassuppādā idaṃ uppajjati
imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti,
imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati -
yadidaṃ avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā, saṅkhārapaccayā viññānaṃ,
viññānapaccayā nāmarūpaṃ, nāmarūpapaccayā saḷāyatanam,
saḷāyatanapaccayā phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, vedanāpaccayā taṇhā,
taṇhāpaccayā upādānaṃ, upādānapaccayā bhavo, bhavapaccayā jāti,*

jātipaccayā jarāmarañam sokaparidevadukkhadomanassūpāyāsā sambhavanti. Evametassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti.

Avijjāyatveva asesavirāganirodhā saṅkhāranirodho, saṅkhāranirodhā viññānanirodho, viññānanirodhā nāmarūpanirodho, nāmarūpanirodhā salāyatananirodho, salāyatananirodhā phassanirodho, phassanirodhā vedanānirodho, vedanānirodhā taṇhānirodho, taṇhānirodhā upādānanirodho, upādānanirodhā bhavanirodho, bhavanirodhā jātinirodho, jātinirodhā jarāmarañam sokaparidevadukkhadomanassūpāyāsā nirujjhanti. Evametassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hoti.

"Thus: -This being - this comes to be
With the arising of this - this arises
This not being - this does not come to be
With the cessation of this - this ceases.

- and that is to say, dependent on ignorance, preparations come to be; dependent on preparations, consciousness; dependent on consciousness, name-and-form; dependent on name-and-form, the six sense-bases; dependent on the six sense-bases, contact; dependent on contact, feeling; dependent on feeling, craving; dependent on craving, grasping; dependent on grasping, becoming; dependent on becoming, birth; dependent on birth, decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair come to be. Thus is the arising of this entire mass of suffering.

But with the complete fading away and cessation of ignorance, comes the cessation of preparations; with the cessation of preparations, the cessation of consciousness; with the cessation of consciousness, the cessation of name-and-form; with the cessation of name-and-form, the cessation of the six sense-bases; with the cessation of the six sense-bases, the cessation of contact; with the cessation of contact, the cessation of feeling; with the cessation of feeling, the cessation of craving; with the cessation of craving, the cessation of grasping; with the cessation of grasping, the cessation of becoming; with the cessation of becoming, the cessation of birth; with the cessation of birth, the cessation of decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair cease to be. Thus is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering."

Jurewicz, J. 2000: "Playing with Fire: The Pratītyasamutpāda from the Perspective of Vedic Thought", *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, 26: 77-103.

This is the thematic statement of the law of *paṭicca samuppāda*. It is set out here in the form of a fundamental principle. *Imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti*, "this being, this comes to be." *Imassuppādā idaṃ uppajjati*, "with the arising of this, this arises." *Imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti*, "this not being, this does not come to be". *Imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati*, "with the cessation of this, this ceases." It resembles an algebraical formula.

And then we have the conjunctive *yadidaṃ*, which means "namely this" or "that is to say". This shows that the foregoing statement is axiomatic and implies that what follows is an illustration. So the twelve linked formula beginning with the words *avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā* is that illustration. No doubt the twelve-linked formula is impressive enough. But the important thing here is the basic principle involved, and that is the fourfold statement beginning with *imasmiṃ sati*.

This fact is very clearly brought out in a certain *sutta* in the *Nidānavagga* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*. There the Buddha addresses the monks and says:

Paṭiccasamuppādañca vo, bhikkhave, desessāmi paṭiccasamuppanne ca dhamme. "Monks, I will teach you dependent arising and things that are dependently arisen."

In this particular context the Buddha makes a distinction between dependent arising and things that are dependently arisen. In order to explain what is meant by dependent arising, or *paṭicca samuppāda*, he takes up the last two links in the formula, in the words: *jātipaccayā, bhikkhave, jarāmarañam*, "monks, dependent on birth is decay-and-death." Then he draws attention to the importance of the basic principle involved: *Uppādā vā Tathāgatānaṃ anuppādā vā Tathāgatānaṃ, ṭhitā va sā dhātu dhammaṭṭhitatā dhammaniyāmatā idappaccayatā* (etc.). Out of the long exhortation given there, this is the part relevant to us here.

Jātipaccayā, bhikkhave, jarāmarañam, "dependent on birth, oh monks, is decay-and-death", and that is to say that decay-and-death has birth as its condition. *Uppādā vā Tathāgatānaṃ anuppādā vā Tathāgatānaṃ*, "whether there be an arising of the *Tathāgatās* or whether there be no such arising". *Ṭhitā va sā dhātu dhammaṭṭhitatā dhammaniyāmatā idappaccayatā*, "that elementary nature, that orderliness of the *Dhamma*, that norm of the *Dhamma*, the relatedness of this to that does stand as it is."

Parallel SĀ 296:

"Whether a Buddha emerges in the world or whether he has not emerged in the world, this Dharma remains invariable. The Dharma which remains, the element of the Dharma, is what the Tathāgata realizes himself by accomplishing right awakening. He teaches it to people, elucidating and clarifying it, namely: Conditioned by ignorance are formations ...

So from this it is clear that the underlying principle could be understood even with the help of a couple of links. But the commentary seems to have ignored this fact in its definition of the term *idappaccayatā*. It says: *Imesaṃ jarāmarañādīnaṃ paccayā idappaccayā, idappaccayāva idappaccayatā*. The word *imesaṃ* is in the plural and this indicates that the commentator has taken the dependence in a collective sense. But it is because of the fact that even two links are sufficient to illustrate the law, that the Buddha follows it up with the

declaration that this is the *paṭicca samuppāda*. And then he goes on to explain what is meant by 'things dependently arisen':

Katame ca, bhikkhave, paṭiccasamuppannā dhammā? Jarāmaṇaṃ, bhikkhave, aniccaṃ saṅkhataṃ paṭiccasamuppannaṃ khayadhammaṃ vayadhammaṃ virāgadhammaṃ nirodhadhammaṃ. "What, monks, are things dependently arisen?" And then, taking up just one of the last links, he declares: "decay-and-death, monks, is impermanent, prepared, dependently arisen, of a nature to get destroyed, to pass away, fade away and cease."

By the way, the word *virāga* usually means detachment or dispassion. But in such contexts as *avijjāvirāgā* and *pītiyā ca virāgā* one has to render it by words like 'fading away'. So that *avijjāvirāga* could be rendered as: 'by the fading away of ignorance', and *pītiyā virāgā* would mean 'by the fading away of joy'.

It seems, then, that decay-and-death themselves are impermanent, that they are prepared or made up, that they are dependently arisen. Decay-and-death themselves can get destroyed and pass away. Decay as well as death can fade away and cease.

Then the Buddha takes up the preceding link *jāti*, or birth. And that too is given the same qualifications. In the same manner he takes up each of the preceding links up to and including ignorance, *avijjā*, and applies to them the above qualifications. It is significant that every one of the twelve links, even ignorance, is said to be dependently arisen.

Let us try to understand how, for instance, decay-and-death themselves can get destroyed or pass away. Taking the *idappaccayatā* formula as a paradigm, we can illustrate the relationship between the two links birth and decay-and-death. Instead of saying: this being, that comes to be (and so forth), now we have to say: birth being, decay-and-death comes to be. With the arising of birth, decay-and-death arises. Birth not being, decay-and-death does not come to be. With the cessation of birth, decay-and-death ceases.

Now birth itself is an arising. But here we can't help saying that birth 'arises'. It is like saying that birth is born. How can birth get born? Similarly death is a passing away. But here we have to say that death itself 'passes away'. How can death pass away? Perhaps, as we proceed, we might get the answers to these questions.

Now at this point let us take up for discussion a certain significant passage in the *MahāNidānasutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*. In the course of an exposition of the law of *paṭicca samuppāda*, addressed to Venerable *Ānanda*, the Buddha makes the following statement:

Ettāvatā kho, Ānanda, jāyetha vā jīyetha vā mīyetha vā cavetha vā upapajjetha vā. Ettāvatā adhivacanapatho, ettāvatā niruttipatho, ettāvatā paññattipatho, ettāvatā paññāvacaram, ettāvatā vaṭṭaṃ vattati itthattaṃ paññāpanāya yadidaṃ nāmarūpaṃ saha viññāṇena. "In so far only, *Ānanda*, can one be born, or grow old, or die, or pass away, or reappear, in so far only is there any pathway for verbal expression, in so far only is there any pathway for terminology, in so far only is there any pathway for designation, in so far only is

the range of wisdom, in so far only is the round kept going for there to be a designation as the this-ness, that is to say: name-and-form together with consciousness."

Translation Bodhi (1984: 51, *The Great Discourse on Causation*):

“It is to this extent, Ānanda, that one can be born, age, and die, pass away, and re-arise, to this extent there is a pathway for designation, to this extent that there is a pathway for language, to this extent that there is a pathway for description, to this extent that there is a sphere for wisdom, to this extent that this round turns for describing this state of being ...”

We have rendered the term *itthatta* by 'this-ness', and what it means will become clear as we go on. In the above quotation the word *ettāvata*, which means 'in so far only', has as its point of reference the concluding phrase *yadidaṃ nāmarūpaṃ saha viññāṇena*, "that is to say: name-and-form together with consciousness". So the statement, as it is, expresses a complete idea. But some editions have an additional phrase: *aññamaññapaccayatā pavattati*, "exists in a mutual relationship". This phrase is obviously superfluous and is probably a commentarial addition.

What is meant by the Buddha's statement is that name-and-form together with consciousness is the rallying point for all concepts of birth, decay, death and rebirth. All pathways for verbal expression, terminology and designation converge on name-and-form together with consciousness. The range of wisdom extends only up to the relationship between these two. And it is between these two that there is a whirling round so that one may point out a this-ness. In short, the secret of the entire *saṃsāric* existence is to be found in this whirlpool.

Vaṭṭa and *āvṭṭa* are words used for a whirlpool. We shall be bringing up quotations in support of that meaning. It seems, however, that this meaning has got obscured in the course of time. In the commentaries and in some modern translations there is quite a lot of confusion with regard to the meaning of the phrase *vaṭṭaṃ vattati*. In fact one Sinhala translation renders it as '*saṃsāric* rain'. What rain has to do with *saṃsāra* is a matter for conjecture. What is actually meant by *vaṭṭaṃ vattati* is a whirling round, and *saṃsāra*, even literally, is that. Here we are told that there is a whirling round between name-and-form and consciousness, and this is the *saṃsāric* whirlpool to which all the aforesaid things are traceable.

Already in the first sermon we tried to show that name in name-and-form has to do with names and concepts. Now from this context it becomes clear that all pathways for verbal expression, terminology and designation converge on this whirlpool between name-and-form and consciousness.

Now that we have attached so much significance to a whirlpool, let us try to understand how a whirlpool is formed. Let us try to get at the natural laws underlying its formation. How does a whirlpool come to be?

Suppose a river is flowing downward. To flow downward is in the nature of a river. But a certain current of water thinks: "I can and must move upstream." And so it pushes on against the main stream. But at a certain point its progress is checked by the main stream and is thrust aside, only to come round and make a fresh attempt, again and again. All these obstinate and unsuccessful attempts gradually lead to a whirling round. As time goes on, the run-away current understands, as it were, that it cannot move forward. But it does not give up. It finds an alternative aim in moving towards the bottom. So it spirals downward, funnel-like, digging deeper and deeper towards the bottom, until an abyss is formed. Here then we have a whirlpool.

While all this is going on, there is a crying need to fill up the chasm, and the whirlpool develops the necessary force of attraction to cater to it. It attracts and grasps everything that comes within its reach and sends it whirling down, funnel like, into the chasm. The whirling goes on at a tremendous speed, while the circumference grows larger and larger. At last the whirlpool becomes a centre of a tremendous amount of activity.

While this kind of activity is going on in a river or a sea, there is a possibility for us to point it out as 'that place' or 'this place'. Why? Because there is an activity going on. Usually, in the world, the place where an activity is going on is known as a 'unit', a 'centre', or an 'institution'. Since the whirlpool is also a centre of activity, we may designate it as a 'here' or 'there'. We may even personify it. With reference to it, we can open up pathways for verbal expression, terminology and designation.

But if we are to consider the form of activity that is going on here, what is it after all? It is only a perversion. That obstinate current thought to itself, out of delusion and ignorance: I can and must move upstream. And so it tried and failed, but turned round only to make the same vain attempt again and again. Ironically enough, even its **progress** towards the bottom is a **stagnation**.

So here we have ignorance on one side and craving on the other, as a result of the abyss formed by the whirlpool. In order to satisfy this craving there is that power of attraction: grasping. Where there is **grasping**, there is **existence**, or **bhava**. The entire whirlpool now appears as a centre of activity.

Now the basic principle underlying this whirlpool is to be found in our bodies. What we call 'breathing' is a continuous process of emptying and filling up. So even the so-called 'life-principle' is not much different from the activity of a whirlpool. The functioning of the lungs and the heart is based on the same principle and the blood circulation is in fact a whirling round. This kind of activity is very often known as 'automatic', a word which has connotations of **self-sufficiency**. But at the root of it there is a perversion, as we saw in the case of the whirlpool. All these activities are based on a conflict between two opposite forces.

In fact existence in its entirety is not much different from the conflict of that obstinate current of water with the main stream. This characteristic of conflict is so pervasive that it can be seen even in the basic laws governing the existence of

a society. In our social life, rights and responsibilities go hand in hand. We can enjoy certain privileges, provided we fulfil our duties. So here too we have a tangle within and a tangle without.

Now this is about the existence of the society as such. And what about the field of economics? There too the basic principles show the same weakness. Production is governed by laws of supply and demand. There will be a supply so long as there is a demand. Between them there is a conflict. It leads to many complications. The price mechanism is on a precarious balance and that is why some wealthy countries are forced to the ridiculous position of dumping their surplus into the sea.

All this shows that existence is basically in a precarious position. To illustrate this, let us take the case of two snakes of the same size, trying to swallow up each other. Each of them tries to swallow up the other from the tail upwards and when they are half way through the meal, what do we find? A **snake cycle**. This snake cycle goes round and round, trying to swallow up each other. But will it ever be successful?

The precarious position illustrated by the snake cycle, we find in our own bodies in the form of respiration, blood circulation and so forth. What appears as the stability in the society and in the economy, is similarly precarious. It is because of this conflict, this unsatisfactoriness, that the Buddha concluded that the whole of existence is suffering.

When the arising aspect is taken too seriously, to the neglect of the cessation aspect, instead of a conflict or an unsatisfactoriness one tends to see something automatic everywhere. This body as well as machines such as water pumps and electrical appliances seem to work on an automatic principle. But in truth there is only a conflict between two opposing forces. When one comes to think of it, there is no **'auto'**-ness even in the automatic.

All that is there, is a bearing up with difficulty. And this in fact is the meaning of the word *dukkha*. *Duḥ* stands for 'difficulty' and *kha* for 'bearing up'. **Even with difficulty one bears it up, and though one bears it up, it is difficult.**

Now regarding the question of existence we happened to mention that because of a whirlpool's activity, one can point out a **'here'** with reference to it. We can now come back to the word *itthattaṃ*, which we left out without comment in the quotation *ettāvatā vaṭṭaṃ vattati itthattaṃ paññāpanāya*, "in so far only does the whirlpool whirl for the designation of an *itthatta*." Now what is this *itthatta*? *Ittha* means 'this', so *itthattaṃ* would mean 'this-ness'. The whirling of a whirlpool qualifies itself for a designation as a 'this'.

There are a couple of verses in the *Dvayatānupassanāsutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta* which bring out the meaning of this word more clearly:

*Jāti maraṇa saṃsāraṃ,
ye vajanti punappunaṃ,
itthabhāvaññathābhāvaṃ,
avijjāyeva sā gati.
Taṇhā dutiyo puriso,*

*dīgham addhāna saṃsāraṃ,
itthabhāvaññathābhāvaṃ,
saṃsāraṃ nātivattati.*

Ye jāti maraṇa saṃsāraṃ punappunaṃ vajanti, "they that go on again and again the round of birth and death". *Itthabhāvaññathābhāvaṃ* "which is a this-ness and an otherwise-ness", or "which is an alternation between a this-ness and an otherwise-ness". *Sā gati avijjāya eva*, "that going of them, that faring of them, is only a journey of ignorance." *Taṇhā dutiyo puriso*, "the man with craving as his second" (or his companion). *Dīgham addhāna saṃsāraṃ*, "faring on for a long time in *saṃsāra*". *Itthabhāvaññathābhāvaṃ, saṃsāraṃ nātivattati*, "does not get away from the round which is a this-ness and an otherwise-ness", or "which is an alternation between a this-ness and an otherwise-ness". What is meant by it, is the transcendence of *saṃsāra*.

Translation Bodhi (forthcoming):

“Those who travel again and again
in the saṃsāra of birth and death,
with its becoming thus, becoming otherwise:
that journey is due to ignorance” ...

“With craving as partner, a person,
wandering on this long journey,
does not transcend saṃsāra,
with its becoming thus, becoming otherwise.”

Verse on *taṇhā dutiyo puriso ... itthabhāvaññathābhāvaṃ* recurs in AN II 10, where the PTS prose speaks of craving that is *itibhavābhava hetu*, translated Bodhi 2012: 396: “for the sake of life here or elsewhere”.

We saw above how the concept of a 'here' arose with the birth of a whirlpool. In fact one's birth is at the same time the birth of a 'here' or 'this place'. And that is what is meant by *itthabhāva* in the two verses quoted above. *Itthabhāva* and *itthatta* both mean 'this-ness'. In both verses this 'this-ness' is coupled with an otherwise-ness, *aññathābhāva*. Here too we see a conflict between two things, this-ness and otherwise-ness. The cycle of *saṃsāra*, represented by birth and death, *jāti maraṇa saṃsāraṃ*, is equivalent to an alternation between this-ness and otherwise-ness, *itthabhāvaññathābhāva*. And as the first verse says, this recurrent alternation between this-ness and otherwise-ness is nothing but a journey of ignorance itself.

Though we have given so much significance to the two terms *itthabhāva* and *aññathābhāva*, the commentary to the *Sutta Nipāta* treats them lightly. It explains *itthabhāvaṃ* as *imaṃ manussabhāvaṃ*, which means "this state as a human being", and *aññathābhāvaṃ* as *ito avasesa aññanikāyabhāvaṃ*, "any

state of being other than this". This explanation misses the deeper significance of the word *itthatta*.

In support of this we may refer to the *Pāṭikasutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*. There we are told that when the world system gets destroyed at the end of an aeon, some being or other gets reborn in an empty Brahma mansion, and after being there for a long time, thinks, out of a feeling of loneliness: *Aho vata aññepi sattā itthattaṃ āgaccheyyūṃ*. "How nice it would be if other beings also come to this state". In this context the word *itthatta* refers to the Brahma world and not the human world. From the point of view of the Brahmas, *itthatta* refers to the Brahma world and only for us here, it means the human world.

However this is just a narrow meaning of the word *itthatta*. When the reference is to the entire round of existence or *saṃsāra*, *itthatta* does not necessarily mean 'this human world'. The two terms have a generic sense, because they represent some basic principle. As in the case of a whirlpool, this-ness is to be seen together with an otherwise-ness. This illustrates the conflict characteristic of existence. Wherever a this-ness arises, a possibility for an otherwise-ness comes in. *Itthabhāva* and *aññathābhāva* go together.

Aniccatā, or impermanence, is very often explained with the help of the phrase *vipariṇāmaññathābhāva*. Now here too we have the word *aññathābhāva*. Here the word preceding it, gives a clue to its true significance. *Vipariṇāma* is quite suggestive of a process of evolution. Strictly speaking, *pariṇāma* is evolution, and *pariṇata* is the fully evolved or mature stage. The prefix *vi* stands for the anti-climax. The evolution is over, now it is becoming other. Ironically enough, this state of 'becoming-other' is known as otherwise-ness, *aññathābhāva*. And so this twin, *itthabhāva* and *aññathābhāva*, tell us the nature of the world. Between them, they explain for us the law of impermanence.

In the Section-of-the-Threes in the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* the three characteristics of a *saṅkhata* are explained in this order: *Uppādo paññāyati, vayo paññāyati, thitassa aññathattaṃ paññāyati*, "an arising is manifest, a passing away is manifest and an otherwise-ness in the persisting is manifest."

von Rospatt, Alexander von 1995: *The Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness: A Survey of the Origins and Early Phase of this Doctrine up to Vasubandhu*.
Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.

This implies that the persistence is only apparent and that is why it is mentioned last. There is an otherwise-ness even in this apparently persistent. But later scholars preferred to speak of three stages as *uppāda, thiti, bhaṅga*, "arising, persistence and breaking up". However the law of impermanence could be sufficiently understood even with the help of two words, *itthabhāva* and *aññathābhāva*, this-ness and otherwise-ness. Very often we find the Buddha summing up the law of impermanence in the two words *samudaya* and *vaya*, "arising" and "passing away".

There is an apparent contradiction in the phrase *thitassa aññathatta*, but it reminds us of the fact that what the world takes as static or persisting is actually not so. The so-called 'static' is from beginning to end an otherwise-ness. Now if we are to relate this to the two links *jāti* and *jarāmaraṇam* in *paṭicca samuppāda*, we may say that as soon as one is born the process of otherwise-ness sets in. Wherever there is birth, there is death. One of the traditional *Pāli* verses on the reflections on death has the following meaningful lines:

Uppattiyā sahevedaṃ, maraṇam āgataṃ sadā, "always death has come, even with the birth itself." Just as in a conjoined pair, when one is drawn the other follows, even so when birth is drawn in, decay-and-death follow as a matter of course.

Before the advent of the Buddha, the world believed in the possibility of a birth devoid of decay-and-death. It believed in a form of existence devoid of grasping. Because of its ignorance of the pair-wise relatedness of this-to-that, *idappaccayatā*, it went on with its deluded search. And that was the reason for all the conflict in the world.

According to the teaching of the Buddha, the concept of birth is equivalent to the concept of a 'here'. As a matter of fact, this birth of a 'here' is like the first peg driven for the measurement of a world. Because of the pair-wise relationship, the very first '**birthday-present**' that one gets as soon as one is born, is - **death**. The inevitable death that he is entitled to. This way we can understand the deeper significance of the two words *itthabhāva* and *aññathābhāva*, this-ness and otherwise-ness.

We have to say the same thing with regard to the whirlpool. Apparently it has the power to control, to hold sway. Seen from a distance, the whirlpool is a centre of activity with some controlling power. Now, one of the basic meanings of the concept of self is the ability to control, to hold sway. And a whirlpool too, as seen from a distance, seems to have this ability. Just as it appears automatic, so also it seems to have some power to control.

But on deeper analysis it reveals its **not-self** nature. What we have here is simply the conflict between the main stream and a run-away current. It is the outcome of the conflict between two forces and not the work of just one force. It is a case of relatedness of this-to-that, *idappaccayatā*. As one verse in the *Bālavagga* of the *Dhammapada* puts it:

Attā hi attano natthi, "even oneself is not one's own."

So even a whirlpool is not its own, there is nothing really automatic about it. This then is the *dukkha*, the suffering, the conflict, the unsatisfactoriness. What the world holds on to as existence is just a process of otherwise-ness, as the Buddha vividly portrays for us in the following verses of the *Nandavagga* of the *Udāna*.

*Ayaṃ loko santāpajāto, phassapareto
rogaṃ vadati attato,
yena yena hi maññati,
tato taṃ hoti aññathā.*

*Aññathābhāvī bhavasatto loko,
bhavapareto bhavam evābhinandati,
yad'abhinandati taṃ bhayaṃ,
yassa bhāyati taṃ dukkhaṃ,
bhava vippahānāya kho panidaṃ brahmacariyaṃ vussati.*

"This anguished world, fully given to contact,
Speaks of a disease as self.
In whatever terms it conceives of,
Even thereby it turns otherwise.

The world, attached to becoming, Given fully to becoming,
Though becoming otherwise, Yet delights in becoming.
What it delights in is a fear
What it fears from is a suffering.
But then this holy life is lived for the abandoning of that very becoming."

Translation Ireland (1991: 50):

"This world is subject to torment;
Afflicted by contact, it calls a disease 'self':
For however it is conceived
It is ever other than that.

Becoming something other,
The world is held by being,
Is afflicted by being yet delights in being.
But what it delights in brings fear,
And what it fears is suffering.

Now this holy life is lived,
In order to abandon being."

Just a few lines - but how deep they go! The world is in anguish and is enslaved by contact. What it calls self is nothing but a disease. *Maññati* is a word of deeper significance. *Maññanā* is conceiving under the influence of craving, conceit and views. Whatever becomes an object of that conceiving, by that very conception it becomes otherwise. That is to say that an opportunity arises for an otherwise-ness, even as 'death' has come together with 'birth'.

So conceiving, or conception, is itself the reason for otherwise-ness. Before a '**thing**' becomes '**otherwise**', it has to become a '**thing**'. And it becomes a '**thing**' only when attention is focussed on it under the influence of craving, conceit and views and it is separated from the whole world and grasped as a '**thing**'. And that is why it is said:

*Yaṃ yañhi lokasmim upādiyanti,
teneva Māro anveti jantum.*

"Whatever one grasps in the world,

By that itself *Māra* pursues a being."

Translation Bodhi (forthcoming):

"Whatever they cling to in the world,
by this itself *Māra* pursues a person."

The world is attached to becoming and is fully given to becoming. Therefore its very nature is otherwise-ness, *aññathābhāvī*. And then the Buddha declares the inevitable outcome of this contradictory position: *yad abhinandati taṃ bhayaṃ*, whatever one delights in, that is a fear, that is a danger. What one delights in, is 'becoming' and that is a source of fear. And *yassa bhāyati taṃ dukkhaṃ*, what one fears, or is afraid of, that is suffering. And of what is one afraid? One is afraid of the otherwise-ness of the thing that one holds on to as existing. So the otherwise-ness is the suffering and the thing grasped is a source of fear.

For instance, when one is walking through a town with one's pockets full of gems, one is afraid because of the valuables in one's pockets. Even so, the existence that one delights in is a source of fear. What one fears is change or otherwise-ness, and that is suffering. Therefore it is that this holy life is lived for the abandonment of that very becoming or existence.

So from this quotation it becomes clear that the nature of existence is 'otherwise-ness'. It is the insight into this nature that is basic in the understanding of *idappaccayatā*. What is known as the arising of the *Dhamma*-eye is the understanding of this predicament in worldly existence. But that *Dhamma*-eye arises together with a solution for this predicament:

Yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ sabbaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ. "Whatever is of a nature to arise, all that is of a nature to cease".

As far as the arising aspect is concerned, this whirlpool is formed due to the grasping through craving, conceit and views. Once this *samsāric* whirlpool is formed, it keeps on attracting all that is in the world, all that is within its reach, in the form of craving and grasping. But there is a cessation to this process. It is possible to make it cease. Why? Because it is something arisen due to causes and conditions. Because it is a process based on two things, without a self to hold sway. That is why we have mentioned at the very outset that everything is impermanent, prepared and dependently arisen, *aniccaṃ, saṅkhatam, paṭicca samuppannaṃ*.

Everyone of the twelve links in the formula, including ignorance, is dependently arisen. They are all arisen due to causes and conditions, they are not permanent, *aniccaṃ*. They are only made up or prepared, *saṅkhatam*. The word *saṅkhatam* is explained in various ways. But in short it means something that is made up, prepared, or concocted by way of intention. *Paṭicca samuppannaṃ* means conditionally arisen and therefore it is of a nature to get

destroyed, *khayadhamma*. It is of a nature to pass away, *vayadhamma*. It is of a nature to fade away, *virāgadhamma*. It is of a nature to cease, *nirodhadhamma*.

It seems that even the colour or shade of decay-and-death can fade away and that is why we have pointed out their relevance to the question of concepts. This nature of fading away is understood by one who has had an insight into the law of arising and cessation.

Samsāra is a whirlpool as far as the ordinary beings caught up in it are concerned. Now what about the *Arahants*? How is the idea of this whirlpool presented in the case of the *Arahants*? It is simply said that for them there is no whirling round for there to be a designation: *vaṭṭam tesam natthi paññāpanāya*. So in their case, there is no whirling round to justify a designation.

This, then, is something deeper than the whirlpool itself. The whirlpool can be pointed out because of its activity. But not so easily the emancipated ones and that is why there is so much controversy regarding the nature of the *Tathāgatha*. The image of the whirlpool in its relation to the emancipated ones is beautifully presented in the following verse from the *Cūlavagga* of the *Udāna*:

*Acchecchi vaṭṭam byagā nirāsam,
visukkhā saritā na sandati,
chinnam vaṭṭam na vattati,
es' ev' anto dukkhassa.*

"He has cut off the whirlpool
And reached desirelessness,
The stream dried up now no longer flows.
The whirlpool cut off whirls no more.
This, even this, is suffering's end."

Translation Ireland (1991: 101):

"He has cut the round, won the desireless,
The dried up river flows no more:
The severed round does not revolve-
This is the end of suffering."

What has the *Arahant* done? He has cut off the whirlpool. He has breached it and has reached the desireless state. The stream of craving is dried up and flows no more. The whirlpool cut off at the root no more whirls. And this is the end of suffering. The cutting off of the whirlpool is the realization of cessation, which is *Arahant*-hood.

It is because of the accent on the arising aspect that the current tries to move against the main stream. When that attempt is given up, the rest happens as a matter of course. This idea is even more clearly brought out by the following two verses in the *Sagāthavagga* of the *Samyutta Nikāya*. They are in the form of a dialogue between a deity and the Buddha. The deity asks:

Kuto sarā nivattanti,

*kattha vaṭṭaṃ na vattati,
kattha nāmañca rūpañca
asesaṃ uparujjhati?*

"From where do currents turn back,
Where whirls no more the whirlpool,
Where is it that name-and-form
Is held in check in a way complete?"

The Buddha gives the answer in the following verse:

*Yattha āpo ca paṭhavī,
tejo vāyo na gādhati,
ato sarā nivattanti,
ettha vaṭṭaṃ na vattati,
ettha nāmañca rūpañca,
asesaṃ uparujjhati.*

"Where earth and water, fire and wind no footing find,
From there it is that currents turn back.
There the whirlpool whirls no more
And there it is that name-and-form
Is held in check in a way complete."

Translation Bodhi (2000: 103):

"Where water, earth, fire, and air
Do not gain a footing:
It is from here that the streams turn back,
Here that the round no longer revolves;
Here name-and-form ceases,
Stops without remainder."

The reference here is to *Nibbāna*. Whether it is called *sabbasaṅkhārasamatha*, the stilling of all preparations, or *asaṅkhatadhātu*, the unprepared element, it means the state of cessation. And when the *Arahant's* mind is in that state, the four elements, which are like ghosts, do not haunt him. They do not get a '**footing**' in that consciousness. When they fade away, due to detachment, those currents do not flow and the whirlpool whirls no more. Name and form are fully held in check there.

Now as far as the meaning of *rūpa* in *nāma-rūpa* in this reference is concerned, its definition as *cattāri ca mahābhūtāni, catunnañca mahābhūtānaṃ upādāyarūpaṃ* is quite significant. It draws attention to the fact that the four great primaries underlie the concept of form. This is something unique, since before the advent of the Buddha the world thought that in order to get away from *rūpa* one has to grasp *arūpa*. But the irony of the situation is that, even in *arūpa*, *rūpa* is implicit in a subtle form. Or in other words, *arūpa* takes *rūpa* for granted.

Supposing someone, walking in the darkness of the night, has a hallucination of a devil and runs away to escape from it. He thinks he is running away from the devil, but he is taking the devil with him. The devil is in his mind, it is something imagined. Similarly, until the Buddha came into the scene, the worldlings grasped *arūpa* in order to get away from *rūpa*. But because of the dichotomy between *rūpa* and *arūpa*, even when they swung as far as the highest formless realms, they were still in bondage to *saṅkhāras*, or preparations. As soon as the momentum of their swing of *saṅkhāras* got fully spent, they swung back to *rūpa*. So here too we see the question of duality and dichotomy.

This sermon has served its purpose if it has drawn attention to the importance of the questions of duality, dichotomy and the relatedness of this to that, *idappaccayatā*. So this is enough for today.

Salient point:

- Dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*)