

*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 nibbānam.*¹

"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. This is the twenty-sixth sermon in the series of sermons on *Nibbāna*.

Even from what we have so far explained, it should be clear that the *Kālakārāmasutta* enshrines an extremely deep analysis of the concepts of truth and falsehood, generally accepted by the world. We had to clear up a lot of jungle to approach this discourse, which has suffered from neglect to such an extent, that it has become difficult to determine the correct one out of a maze of variant readings. But now we have exposed the basic ideas underlying this discourse through semantic and etymological explanations, which may even appear rather academic. The task before us now is to assimilate the deep philosophy the Buddha presents to the world by this discourse in a way that it becomes a vision.

The *Tathāgata* who had an insight into the interior mechanism of the six-fold sense-base, which is the factory for producing dogmatic views that are beaten up on the anvil of logic, *takkapariyāhata*, was confronted with the problem of mediation with the worldlings, who see only the exterior of the six-fold sense-base.

In order to facilitate the understanding of the gravity of this problem, we quoted the other day an extract from the *Phenapiṇḍūpamasutta* of the *Khandhasaṃyutta* where consciousness is compared to a magical illusion.

*Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, māyākāro vā māyākārantevāsī vā cātumma-
hāpathe māyaṃ vidamseyya, tam enaṃ cakkhumā puriso passeyya nij-
jhāyeyya yoniso upaparikkheyya. Tassa taṃ passato nijjhāyato yoniso
upaparikkhato rittakaññ' eva khāyeyya tucchakaññ' eva khāyeyya
asārakaññ' eva khāyeyya. Kiñhi siyā, bhikkhave, māyāya sāro.*

Evm eva kho, bhikkhave, yaṃ kiñci viññānaṃ atītānāgatapaccuppannaṃ, ajjhataṃ vā bahiddhā vā, oḷārikaṃ vā sukhumāṃ vā, hīnaṃ vā paṇūtaṃ vā, yaṃ dūre santike vā, taṃ bhikkhu passati nijjhāyati yoniso upaparikkhati. Tassa taṃ passato nijjhāyato yoniso upaparikkhato rittakaññ' eva khāyati tucchakaññ' eva khāyati asārakaññ' eva khāyati. Kiñhi siyā, bhikkhave, viññāṇe sāro.²

"Suppose, monks, a magician or a magician's apprentice should hold a magic show at the four crossroads and a keen sighted man should see it, ponder over it and reflect on it radically. Even as he sees it, ponders over it and reflects on it radically, he would find it empty, he would find it hollow, he would find it void of essence. What essence, monks, could there be in a magic show?

Even so, monks, whatever consciousness, be it past, future or present, in oneself or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, a monk sees it, ponders over it and reflects on it radically. Even as he sees it, ponders over it and reflects on it radically, he would find it empty, he would find it hollow, he would find it void of essence. What essence, monks, could there be in consciousness?"

So for the Buddha, consciousness is comparable to a magic show. This is a most extraordinary exposition, not to be found in any other philosophical system, because the soul theory tries to sit pretty on consciousness when all other foundations are shattered. But then, even this citadel itself the Buddha has described in this discourse as essenceless and hollow, as a magical illusion. Let us now try to clarify for ourselves the full import of this simile of the magic show.

A certain magician is going to hold a magic show in some hall or theatre. Among those who have come to see the magic show, there is a witty person with the wisdom eye, who tells himself: 'Today I must see the magic show inside out!' With this determination he hides himself in a corner of the stage, unseen by others. When the magic show starts, this person begins to discover, before long, the secrets of the magician, his deceitful stock-in-trade – counterfeits, hidden strings and buttons, secret pockets and false bottoms in his magic boxes. He observes clearly all the secret gadgets that the audience is unaware of. With this vision, he comes to the conclusion that there is no magic in any of those gadgets.

Some sort of disenchantment sets in. Now he has no curiosity, amazement, fright or amusement that he used to get whenever he watched those magic shows. Instead he now settles into a mood of equanimity. Since there is nothing more for him to see in the magic show, he mildly turns his attention towards the audience. Then he sees the contrast. The entire hall is a sea of craned necks, gaping mouths and goggle-eyes with 'Ahs' and 'Ohs' and whistles of speechless amazement. At this sorry sight, he even feels remorseful that he himself was in this same plight before. So in this way he sees through the magic show - an 'insight' instead of a 'sight'.

When the show ends, he steps out of the hall and tries to slink away unseen. But he runs into a friend of his, who also was one of the spectators. Now he has to listen to a vivid commentary on the magic show. His friend wants him to join in his appreciation, but he listens through with equanimity. Puzzled by this strange reserved attitude, the friend asks:

"Why, you were in the same hall all this time, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was."

"Then were you sleeping?"

"Oh, no."

"You weren't watching closely, I suppose."

"No, no, I was watching it all right, maybe I was watching too closely."

"You say you were watching, but you don't seem to have seen the show."

"No, I saw it. In fact I saw it so well that I missed the show."

The above dialogue between the man who watched the show with discernment and the one who watched with naive credulity should give a clue to the riddle-like proclamations of the Buddha in the *Kāḷa-kārāmasutta*. The Buddha also was confronted with the same problematic situation after his enlightenment, which was an insight into the magic show of consciousness.

That man with discernment hid himself in a corner of the stage to get that insight. The Buddha also had to hide in some corner of the world stage for his enlightenment. The term *paṭisallāna*, "solitude", has a nuance suggestive of a hide-away. It is in such a hide-away that the Buddha

witnessed the interior of the six-fold sense-base. The reason for his equanimity towards conflicting views about truth and falsehood in the world, as evidenced by this discourse, is the very insight into the six sense-bases.

First of all, let us try to compare our parable with the discourse proper. Now the Buddha declares:

Yaṃ, bhikkhave, sadevakassa lokassa samārakassa sabrahmakassa sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyā pajāya sadevamanussāya diṭṭhaṃ suttaṃ mutaṃ viññātaṃ pattaṃ pariyesitaṃ anuvicaritaṃ manasā, taṃ ahaṃ jānāmi.

Yaṃ, bhikkhave, sadevakassa lokassa samārakassa sabrahmakassa sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyā pajāya sadevamanussāya diṭṭhaṃ suttaṃ mutaṃ viññātaṃ pattaṃ pariyesitaṃ anuvicaritaṃ manasā, taṃ ahaṃ abhaññāsiṃ. Taṃ tathāgatassa viditaṃ, taṃ tathāgato na upaṭṭhāsi.³

"Monks, whatsoever in the world, with its gods, Māras and Brahmas, among the progeny consisting of recluses and Brahmins, gods and men, whatsoever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, sought after and pondered over by the mind, all that do I know.

Monks, whatsoever in the world, with its gods, Māras and Brahmas, among the progeny consisting of recluses and Brahmins, gods and men, whatsoever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, sought after and pondered over by the mind, that have I fully understood. All that is known to the *Tathāgata*, but the *Tathāgata* has not taken his stand upon it."

Here the Buddha does not stop after saying that he knows all that, but goes on to declare that he has fully understood all that and that it is known to the *Tathāgata*. The implication is that he has seen through all that and discovered their vanity, hollowness and essencelessness. That is to say, he not only knows, but he has grown wiser. In short, he has seen the magic show so well as to miss the show.

Unlike in the case of those worldly spectators, the released mind of the *Tathāgata* did not find anything substantial in the magic show of consciousness. That is why he refused to take his stand upon the sense-data, *taṃ tathāgato na upaṭṭhāsi*, "the *Tathāgata* has not taken his stand upon it". In contrast to the worldly philosophers, the *Tathāgatas* have no entanglement with all that, *ajjhositaṃ n' atthi tathāgatānaṃ*.

The dialogue we have given might highlight these distinctions regarding levels of knowledge. It may also throw more light on the concluding statement that forms the gist of the discourse.

Iti kho, bhikkhave, tathāgato diṭṭhā daṭṭhabbaṃ diṭṭhaṃ na maññati, adiṭṭhaṃ na maññati, daṭṭhabbaṃ na maññati, daṭṭhāraṃ na maññati. Sutā sotabbaṃ sutaṃ na maññati, asutaṃ na maññati, sotabbaṃ na maññati, sotāraṃ na maññati. Mutā motabbaṃ mutaṃ na maññati, amutaṃ na maññati, motabbaṃ na maññati, motāraṃ na maññati. Viññātā viññātappaṃ viññātaṃ na maññati, aviññātaṃ na maññati, viññātappaṃ na maññati, viññātāraṃ na maññati.

"Thus, monks, a *Tathāgata* does not imagine a visible thing as apart from seeing, he does not imagine an unseen, he does not imagine a thing worth seeing, he does not imagine a seer. He does not imagine an audible thing as apart from hearing, he does not imagine an unheard, he does not imagine a thing worth hearing, he does not imagine a hearer. He does not imagine a thing to be sensed as apart from sensation, he does not imagine an unsensed, he does not imagine a thing worth sensing, he does not imagine one who senses. He does not imagine a cognizable thing as apart from cognition, he does not imagine an uncognized, he does not imagine a thing worth cognizing, he does not imagine one who cognizes."

It is like the hesitation of that man with discernment who, on coming out of the hall, found it difficult to admit categorically that he had seen the magic show. Since the *Tathāgata* had an insight into the mechanism of the six-fold sense-base, that is to say, its conditioned nature, he understood that there is no one to see and nothing to see – only a seeing is there.

The dictum of the *Bāhiyasutta* "in the seen just the seen", *diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ*,⁴ which we cited the other day, becomes more meaningful now. Only a seeing is there. Apart from the fact of having seen, there is nothing substantial to see. There is no magic to see. *Diṭṭhā daṭṭhabbaṃ diṭṭhaṃ na maññati*, he does not imagine a sight worthwhile apart from the seen. There is no room for a conceit of having seen a magic show.

On the other hand, it is not possible to deny the fact of seeing, *adiṭṭhaṃ na maññati*. He does not imagine an unseen. Now that friend was curious whether this one was asleep during the magic show, but that was not the case either.

Daṭṭhabbaṃ na maññati, the *Tathāgata* does not imagine a thing worthwhile seeing. The equanimity of that witty man was so much that he turned away from the bogus magic show to have a look at the audience below. This way we can understand how the *Tathāgata* discovered that there is only a seen but nothing worthwhile seeing.

Likewise the phrase *daṭṭhāraṃ na maññati*, he does not imagine a seer, could also be understood in the light of this parable. All those who came out of that hall, except this discerning one, were spectators. He was not one of the audience, because he had an insight into the magic show from his hiding place on the stage.

The statement *tam ahaṃ 'na jānāmi'ti vadeyyaṃ, taṃ mama assa musā*, "if I were to say, that I do not know, it would be a falsehood in me", could similarly be appreciated in the light of the dialogue after the magic show. The discerning one could not say that he was not aware of what was going on, because he was fully awake during the magic show. Nor can he say that he was aware of it in the ordinary sense. An affirmation or negation of both standpoints would be out of place. This gives us a clue to understand the two statements of the *Tathāgata* to the effect that he is unable to say that he both knows and does not know, *jānāmi ca na ca jānāmi*, and neither knows nor does not know, *n' eva jānāmi na na jānāmi*.

All this is the result of his higher understanding, indicated by the word *abhaññāsiṃ*. The *Tathāgata* saw the magic show of consciousness so well as to miss the show, from the point of view of the worldlings.

Now we come to the conclusive declaration: *Iti kho, bhikkhave, tathāgato diṭṭha-suta-muta-viññātabbesu dhammesu tādī yeva tādī, tamhā ca pana tādimhā añño tādī uttaritaro vā pañītararo vā n' atthī'ti vadāmi*.

"Thus, monks, the *Tathāgata*, being such in regard to all phenomena, seen, heard, sensed and cognized, is such. Moreover than he who is such there is none other higher or more excellent, I declare."

The other day we discussed the implications of the term *tādī*.⁵ The term is usually explained as signifying the quality of remaining unshaken before the eight worldly vicissitudes. But in this context, it has a special significance. It implies an equanimous attitude towards dogmatic views and view-holders. This attitude avoids categorical affirmation or negation

regarding the question of truth and falsehood. It grants a relative reality to those viewpoints.

This is the moral behind the hesitation to give clear-cut answers to that inquisitive friend in our pithy dialogue. It is not the outcome of a dilly-dally attitude. There is something really deep. It is the result of an insight into the magic show. The reason for this suchness is the understanding of the norm of dependent arising, known as *tathatā*.

It is obvious from the expositions of the norm of dependent arising that there are two aspects involved, namely, *anuloma*, direct order, and *paṭiloma*, indirect order. The direct order is to be found in the first half of the twelve linked formula, beginning with the word *avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā*, "dependent on ignorance, preparations", while the indirect order is given in the second half with the words, *avijjāya tveva asesavirāganirodhā* etc., "with the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance" etc.

The implication is that where there is ignorance, aggregates of grasping get accumulated, which, in other words, is a heaping up of suffering. That is a fact. But then, when ignorance fades away and ceases, they do not get accumulated.

Now, with this magic show as an illustration, we can get down to a deeper analysis of the law of dependent arising. In a number of earlier sermons, we have already made an attempt to explain a certain deep dimension of this law, with the help of illustrations from the dramatic and cinematographic fields. The magic show we have brought up now is even more striking as an illustration.

In the case of the cinema, the background of darkness we compared to the darkness of ignorance. Because of the surrounding darkness, those who go to the cinema take as real whatever they see on the screen and create for themselves various moods and emotions.

In the case of the magic show, the very ignorance of the tricks of the magician is what accounts for the apparent reality of the magic performance. Once the shroud of ignorance is thrown off, the magic show loses its magic for the audience. The magician's secret stock-in-trade gave rise to the *saṅkhāras* or preparations with the help of which the audience created for themselves a magic show.

To that discerning man, who viewed the show from his hiding place on the stage, there were no such preparations. That is why he proverbially missed the show.

The same principle holds good in the case of the magical illusion, *māyā*, that is consciousness. A clear instance of this is the reference in the *MahāVedallasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* to *viññāna*, consciousness, and *paññā*, wisdom, as two conjoined psychological states. They cannot be separated one from the other, *samsatthā no visamsatthā*.⁶ But they can be distinguished functionally. Out of them, wisdom is to be developed, while consciousness is to be comprehended, *paññā bhāvetabbā, viññānaṃ pariññeyyaṃ*.

The development of wisdom is for the purpose of comprehending consciousness and comprehended consciousness proves to be empty, essenceless and hollow. It is such a transformation that took place within the person who watched the magic show with discernment. He watched it too closely, so much so, that the preparations, *saṅkhārā*, in the form of the secret stock-in-trade of the magician, became ineffective and nugatory.

This makes clear the connection between ignorance, *avijjā*, and preparations, *saṅkhārā*. That is why ignorance takes precedence in the formula of dependent arising. Preparations owe their effectiveness to ignorance. They are dependent on ignorance. To understand preparations for what they are is knowledge. Simultaneous with the arising of that knowledge, preparations become mere preparations, or pure preparations, *suddha saṅkhārā*.

This gives us the clue to unravel the meaning of the verse in the *Adhimutta Theragāthā*, quoted earlier.

*Suddhaṃ dhammasamuppādaṃ,
suddhaṃ saṅkhārasantatiṃ,
passantassa yathābhūtaṃ,
na bhayaṃ hoti gāmani.*⁷

"To one who sees

The arising of pure *dhammas*

And the sequence of pure preparations, as they are,

There is no fear, oh headman."

In a limited sense, we can say that graspings relating to a magic show did not get accumulated in the mind of that discerning person, while his friend was gathering them eagerly. The latter came out of the hall as if coming out of the magic world. He had been amassing graspings proper to a magic world due to his ignorance of those preparations.

From this one may well infer that if at any point of time consciousness is comprehended by wisdom, preparations, *saikhārā*, become mere preparations, or pure preparations. Being influx-free, they do not go to build up a prepared, *sankhata*. They do not precipitate an amassing of grasping, *upādāna*, to bring about an existence, *bhava*. This amounts to a release from existence.

One seems to be in the world, but one is not of the world. That man with discernment was in the hall all that time, but it was as if he was not there.

Let us now go deeper into the implications of the term *tādī*, "such", with reference to the law of dependent arising, known as *tathatā*, "suchness". From the dialogue that followed the magic show, it is clear that there are two points of view. We have here a question of two different points of view. If we are to explain these two viewpoints with reference to the law of dependent arising, we may allude to the distinction made for instance in the *Nidāna Saṃyutta* between the basic principle of dependent arising and the phenomena dependently arisen. We have already cited the relevant declaration.

*Paṭiccasamuppādañca vo, bhikkhave, desessāmi paṭiccasamuppanne ca dhamme.*⁸ "Monks, I shall preach to you dependent arising and things that are dependently arisen." Sometimes two significant terms are used to denote these two aspects, namely *hetu* and *hetusamuppannā dhammā*.

About the *ariyan* disciple, be he even a stream-winner, it is said that his understanding of dependent arising covers both these aspects, *hetu ca sudiṭṭho hetusamuppannā ca dhammā*.⁹ The cause, as well as the things arisen from a cause, are well seen or understood by him.

As we pointed out in our discussion of the hill-top festival in connection with the *Upatissa/Kolita* episode,¹⁰ the disenchantment with the hill-top festival served as a setting for their encounter with the venerable *Assaji*. As soon as venerable *Assaji* uttered the significant pithy verse -

*Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā,
tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha,
tesañca yo nirodho,
evaṃ vādī mahāsamaṇo.*¹¹

"Of things that proceed from a cause,
Their cause the *Tathāgata* has told,
And also their cessation,
Thus teaches the great ascetic"

- the wandering ascetic *Upatissa*, who was to become venerable *Sāriputta* later, grasped the clue to the entire *saṃsāric* riddle then and there, and discovered the secret of the magic show of consciousness, even by the first two lines. That was because he excelled in wisdom.

As soon as he heard the lines "of things that proceed from a cause, their cause the *Tathāgata* has told", he understood the basic principle of dependent arising, *yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ, sabbam taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ*, "whatever is of a nature to arise, all that is of a nature to cease". The wandering ascetic *Kolita*, however, became a stream-winner only on hearing all four lines.

This pithy verse has been variously interpreted. But the word *hetu* in this verse has to be understood as a reference to the law of dependent arising. When asked what *paṭicca samuppāda* is, the usual answer is a smattering of the twelve-linked formula in direct and reverse order. The most important normative prefatory declaration is ignored:

*Imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti,
imassa uppādā idaṃ upajjati,
imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti,
imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati.*

"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."

This statement of the basic principle of dependent arising is very often overlooked. It is this basic principle that finds expression in that pithy verse. The line *ye dhammā hetuppabhavā*, "of things that proceed from a cause", is generally regarded as a reference to the first link *avijjā*. But this is not the case. All the twelve links are dependently arisen, and *avijjā* is no

exception. Even ignorance arises with the arising of influxes, *āsavasamudayā avijjāsamudayo*.¹² Here we have something extremely deep.

The allusion here is to the basic principle couched in the phrases *imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti* etc. In such discourses as the *Bahudhātukasutta* the twelve-linked formula is introduced with a set of these thematic phrases, which is then related to the formula proper with the conjunctive "that is to say", *yadidaṃ*.¹³ This conjunctive clearly indicates that the twelve-linked formula is an illustration. The twelve links are therefore things dependently arisen, *paṭicca samuppannā dhammā*. They are all arisen from a cause, *hetuppabhavā dhammā*.

So even ignorance is not the cause. The cause is the underlying principle itself. 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. This is the norm, the suchness, *tathatā*, that the Buddha discovered.

That man with discernment at the magic show, looking down at the audience with commiseration, had a similar sympathetic understanding born of realization: 'I too have been in this same sorry plight before'.

Due to ignorance, a sequence of phenomena occurs, precipitating a heaping of graspings. With the cessation of ignorance, all that comes to cease. It is by seeing this cessation that the momentous inner transformation took place. The insight into this cessation brings about the realization that all what the worldlings take as absolutely true, permanent or eternal, are mere phenomena arisen from the mind. *Manopubbangamā dhammā*, mind is the forerunner of all mind-objects.¹⁴ One comes to understand that all what is arisen is bound to cease, and that the cessation can occur here and now.

In discussing the formula of *paṭicca samuppāda*, the arising of the six sense-bases is very often explained with reference to a mother's womb. It is the usual practice to interpret such categories as *nāma-rūpa*, name-and-form, and *saḷāyatana*, six sense-bases, purely in physiological terms. But for the Buddha the arising of the six sense-bases was not a stage in the growth of a foetus in the mother's womb.

It was through wisdom that he saw the six bases of sense-contact arising then and there, according to the formula beginning with *cakkhuñca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññāṇaṃ*, "dependent on eye and forms arises eye-consciousness" etc. They are of a nature of arising and ceasing, like that magic show. Everything in the world is of a nature to arise and cease.

The words *ye dhammā hetuppabhavā*, "of things that proceed from a cause" etc., is an enunciation of that law. Any explanation of the law of dependent arising should rightly begin with the basic principle *imasmim sati idaṃ hoti*, "this being, this comes to be" etc.

This confusion regarding the way of explaining *paṭicca samuppāda* is a case of missing the wood for the trees. It is as if the Buddha stretches his arm and says: 'That is a forest', and one goes and catches hold of a tree, exclaiming: 'Ah, this is the forest'. To rattle off the twelve links in the hope of grasping the law of *paṭicca samuppāda* is like counting the number of trees in order to see the forest.

The subtlest point here is the basic principle involved. "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".

Let us now examine the connection between the law of dependent arising, *paṭicca samuppāda*, and things dependently arisen, *paṭicca-samuppannā dhammā*. Worldings do not even understand things dependently arisen as 'dependently arisen'. They are fully involved in them. That itself is *samsāra*. One who has seen the basic principle of *paṭicca samuppāda* understands the dictum, *avijjāya sati saṅkhārā honti*, preparations are there only when ignorance is there.¹⁵ So he neither grasps ignorance, nor does he grasp preparations.

In fact, to dwell on the law of dependent arising is the way to liberate the mind from the whole lot of dependently arisen things. Now why do we say so? Everyone of those twelve links, according to the Buddha, is impermanent, prepared, dependently arisen, of a nature to wither away, wear away, fade away and cease, *aniccaṃ, saṅkhataṃ, paṭicca samuppannaṃ, khayadhammaṃ, vayadhammaṃ, virāgadhammaṃ, nirodhadhammaṃ*.¹⁶ The very first link *avijjā* is no exception. They are impermanent because they are made up or prepared, *saṅkhata*. The term *saṅkhataṃ* has nuances of artificiality and spuriousness. All the links are

therefore unreal in the highest sense. They are dependent on contact, *phassa*, and therefore dependently arisen. It is in their nature to wither away, wear away, fade away and cease.

When one has understood this as a fact of experience, one brings one's mind to rest, not on the things dependently arisen, but on the law of dependent arising itself.

There is something extraordinary about this. One must not miss the wood for the trees. When the Buddha stretches his arm and says: 'That is a forest', he does not expect us to go and grasp any of the trees, or to go on counting them, so as to understand what a forest is. One has to get a synoptic view of it from here itself. Such a view takes into account not only the trees, but also the intervening spaces between them, all at one synoptic glance.

In order to get a correct understanding of *paṭicca samuppāda* from a pragmatic point of view, one has to bring one's mind to rest on the norm that obtains between every two links. But this is something extremely difficult, because the world is steeped in the notion of duality. It grasps either this end, or the other end. Hard it is for the world to understand the stance of the *arahant* couched in the cryptic phrase *nev' idha na hurama ubhayam antare*, "neither here nor there nor in between the two".¹⁷

The worldling is accustomed to grasp either this end or the other end. For instance, one may grasp either ignorance, *avijjā*, or preparations, *saṅkhārā*. But here we have neither. When one dwells on the interrelation between them, one is at least momentarily free from ignorance as well as from the delusive nature of preparations.

Taking the magic show itself as an illustration, let us suppose that the magician is performing a trick, which earlier appeared as a miracle. But now that one sees the counterfeits, hidden strings and secret bottoms, one is aware of the fact that the magical effect is due to the evocative nature of those preparations. So he does not take seriously those preparations. His ignorance is thereby reduced to the same extent.

This is how each of those links gets worn out, as the phrase *khaya-dhammaṃ, vya-dhammaṃ, virāga-dhammaṃ, nirodha-dhammaṃ* suggests.

All the links are of a nature to wither away, wear away, fade away and cease. So, then, preparations are there only when ignorance is there. The preparations are effective only so long as ignorance is there. With the arising of ignorance, preparations arise. When ignorance is not there, preparations lose their provenance. With the complete fading away and cessation of ignorance, preparations, too, fade away and cease without residue. This, then, is the relationship between those two links

Let us go for another instance to illustrate this point further. *Saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇaṃ*, "dependent on preparations is consciousness". Generally, the worldlings are prone to take consciousness as a compact unit. They regard it as their self or soul. When everything else slips out from their grasp, they grasp consciousness as their soul, because it is invisible.

Now if someone is always aware that consciousness arises dependent on preparations, that with the arising of preparations consciousness arises - always specific and never abstract - consciousness ceases to appear as a monolithic whole. This particular eye-consciousness has arisen because of eye and forms. This particular ear-consciousness has arisen because of ear and sound, and so on. This kind of reflection and constant awareness of the part played by preparations in the arising of consciousness will conduce to the withering away, wearing away and fading away of consciousness. Disgust, disillusionment and dejection in regard to consciousness is what accounts for its complete cessation, sooner or later.

Consciousness is dependent on preparations, and name-and-form, *nāma-rūpa*, is dependent on consciousness. The worldling does not even recognize *nāma-rūpa* as such. We have already analyzed the mutual relationship between name-and-form as a reciprocity between nominal form and formal name.¹⁸ They always go together and appear as a reflection on consciousness. Here is a case of entanglement within and an entanglement without, *anto jaṭā bahi jaṭā*.¹⁹

We brought in a simile of a dog on a plank to illustrate the involvement with name-and-form. When one understands that this name-and-form, which the world takes as real and calls one's own, is a mere reflection on consciousness, one does not grasp it either.

To go further, when one attends to the fact that the six sense-bases are dependent on name-and-form, and that they are there only as long as

name-and-form is there, and that with the cessation of name-and-form the six sense-bases also cease, one is attuning one's mind to the law of dependent arising, thereby weaning one's mind away from its hold on dependently arisen things.

Similarly, contact arises in dependence on the six sense-bases. Generally, the world is enslaved by contact. In the *Nandakovādasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* there is a highly significant dictum, stressing the specific character of contact as such.

*Tajjaṃ tajjaṃ, bhante, paccayaṃ paṭicca tājā tājā vedanā up-pajjanti; tājassa tājassa paccayassa nirodhā tājā tājā vedanā nirujjhanti.*²⁰ "Dependent on each specific condition, venerable sir, specific feelings arise, and with the cessation of each specific condition, specific feelings cease".

The understanding that contact is dependent on the six sense-bases enables one to overcome the delusion arising out of contact. Since it is conditioned and limited by the six sense-bases, with their cessation it has to cease. Likewise, to attend to the specific contact as the cause of feeling is the way of disenchantment with both feeling and contact.

Finally, when one understands that this existence is dependent on grasping, arising out of craving, one will not take existence seriously. Dependent on existence is birth, *bhavapaccayā jāti*. While the magic show was going on, the spectators found themselves in a magic world, because they grasped the magic in it. Even so, existence, *bhava*, is dependent on grasping, *upādāna*.

Just as one seated on this side of a parapet wall might not see what is on the other side, what we take as our existence in this world is bounded by our parents from the point of view of birth. What we take as death is the end of this physical body. We are ignorant of the fact that it is a flux of preparations, *saṅkhārasantati*.²¹ Existence is therefore something prepared or made up. Birth is dependent on existence.

Sometimes we happen to buy from a shop an extremely rickety machine deceived by its paint and polish, and take it home as a brand new thing. The very next day it goes out of order. The newly bought item was born only the previous day, and now it is out of order, to our disappointment.

So is our birth with its unpredictable vicissitudes, taking us through decay, disease, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. This is the price we pay for this brand new body we are blessed with in this existence.

In this way we can examine the relation between any two links of the formula of dependent arising. It is the insight into this norm that constitutes the understanding of *paṭicca samuppāda*, and not the parrot-like recitation by heart of the formula in direct and reverse order.

Of course, the formulation in direct and reverse order has its own special significance, which highlights the fact that the possibility of a cessation of those twelve links lies in their arising nature itself. Whatever is of a nature to arise, all that is of a nature to cease, *yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ, sabbaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ*. As for the *arahant*, he has realized this fact in a way that the influxes are made extinct.

To go further into the significance of the formula, we may examine why ignorance, *avijjā*, takes precedence in it. This is not because it is permanent or uncaused. The deepest point in the problem of release from *saṃsāra* is traceable to the term *āsavā*, or influxes. Influxes are sometimes reckoned as fourfold, namely those of sensuality, *kāmāsavā*, of existence, *bhavāsavā*, of views, *diṭṭhāsavā*, and of ignorance, *avijjāsavā*.

But more often, in contexts announcing the attainment of *arahant*-hood, the standard reference is to three types of influxes, *kāmāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati, bhavāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati, āvijjāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati*, the mind is released from influxes of sensuality, existence and ignorance. This is because the influxes of ignorance could easily include those of views as well.

The term *āsavā* implies those corrupting influences ingrained in beings due to *saṃsāric* habits. They have a tendency to flow in and tempt beings towards sensuality, existence and ignorance.

It might be difficult to understand why even ignorance is reckoned as a kind of influxes, while it is recognized as the first link in the chain of dependent arising. Ignorance or ignoring is itself a habit. There is a tendency in *saṃsāric* beings to grope in darkness and dislike light. They have a tendency to blink at the light and ignore. It is easy to ignore and forget. This forgetting trait enables them to linger long in *saṃsāra*.

Ignorance as a kind of influxes is so powerful that even the keenest in wisdom cannot attain *arahant*-hood at once. The wheel of *Dhamma* has to turn four times, hence the fourfold distinction as stream-winner, once returner, non-returner and *arahant*. The difficulty of combating this onslaught of influxes is already insinuated by the term *sattakkhattuparama*, "seven more lives at the most",²² designating a stream-winner, and the term *sakadāgāmī*, "once-returner".

The way to cut off these influxes is the very insight into the law of dependent arising. Sometimes the path is defined as the law of dependent arising itself. That doesn't mean the ability to rattle off the twelve links by heart, but the task of bringing the mind to rest on the norm of *paṭicca samuppāda* itself.

*Imasmim sati idaṃ hoti,
imassa uppādā idaṃ upajjati,
imasmim asati idaṃ na hoti,
imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati.*

"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."

It is an extremely difficult task, because the mind tends to slip off. The habitual tendency is to grasp this one or the other. The worldling, for the most part, rests on a duality. Not to cling even to the middle is the ideal of an *arahant*. That is the implication of the conclusive statement in the advice to *Bāhiya*, *nev' idha na huraṃ na ubhayam antarena*, "neither here, nor there, no in between the two".²³

For clarity's sake, let us quote the relevant section in full:

Yato tvaṃ Bāhiya na tena, tato tvaṃ Bāhiya na tattha. Yato tvaṃ Bāhiya na tattha, tato tvaṃ Bāhiya nev' idha na huraṃ na ubhayam-antarena. Es' ev' anto dukkhassa.

"And when, *Bāhiya*, you are not by it, then, *Bāhiya*, you are not in it. And when, *Bāhiya*, you are not in it, then, *Bāhiya*, you are neither here nor there nor in between. This, itself, is the end of suffering."

So one who has fully understood the norm of *paṭicca samuppāda* is not attached to ignorance, nor is he attached to preparations, since he has seen the relatedness between them. He is attached neither to preparations nor to consciousness, having seen the relatedness between them. The insight into this dependent arising and ceasing promotes such a detached attitude.

It is this insight that inculcated in the *Tathāgata* that supreme and excellent suchness. His neutral attitude was not the result of any lack of knowledge, or tactical eel wriggling, as in the case of *Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta*.

Why does the *Tathāgata* not declare the sense-data categorically as true or false? He knows that, given ignorance, they are true, and that they are falsified only when ignorance fades away in one who sees the cessation. It is for such a person that the sense-bases appear as false and consciousness appears as a conjurer's trick.

Fortified with that understanding, he does not categorically assert the sense-data as true, nor does he reprimand those who assert them as the truth. That is why the Buddha advocates a tolerant attitude in this discourse. This is the typical attitude of an understanding elder to the questions put by an inquisitive toddler.

Generally, the dogmatists in the world are severally entrenched in their own individual viewpoints, as the line *paccekasaccesu puthū niviṭṭhā* suggests.²⁴ We explained the term *sayasaṃvuta* as on a par with the phrase *paccekasaccesu*. The problematic term *sayasaṃvuta* is suggestive of virulent self-opinionatedness. Why are they committed and limited by their own views? Our quotation from the *Cūḷa-Viyūhasutta* holds the answer.

*Na h' eva saccāni bahūni nānā,
aññatra saññāya niccāni loke,*²⁵

"There are no several and various truths,

That are permanent in the world, apart from perception".

According to one's level of perception, one forms a notion of reality. To those in the audience the tricks of the magician remained concealed. It is that ignorance which aroused preparations, *saṅkhārā*, in them.

A typical illustration of individual truths, *paccekasacca*, is found in the chapter titled *Jaccandha*, "congenitally blind", in the *Udāna*. There the Buddha brings up a parable of the blind men and the elephant.²⁶ A certain king got a crowd of congenitally blind men assembled, and having made them touch various limbs of an elephant, asked them what an elephant looks like. Those who touched the elephant's head compared the elephant to a pot, those who touched its ears compared it to a winnowing basket, those who touched its tusk compared it to a ploughshare and so forth.

The dogmatic views in the world follow the same trend. All that is due to contact, *phassapaccayā*, says the Buddha in the *Brahmajālasutta* even with reference to those who have supernormal knowledges, *abhiññā*.²⁷ Depending on name-and-form, which they grasped, they evolved dogmatic theories, based on their perceptions, spurred on by sense-contact. Their dogmatic involvement is revealed by the thematic assertion *idam eva saccaṃ, mogham aññaṃ*, "this alone is true, all else is false".

The Buddha had no dogmatic involvement, because he had seen the cessation of consciousness. Even the mind ceases, and mind-objects fade away. That is why the Buddha was tolerantly neutral. On many such issues, silence happens to be the answer.

This brings us to an extremely deep dimension of this *Dhamma*. Just as that man with discerning wisdom at the magic show had difficulties in coming to terms with the naive magic fan, so the Buddha, too, had to face situations where problems of communication cropped up.

We come across such an instance in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*. On his way to Kusinārā, to attain *parinibbāna*, the Buddha happened to rest under a tree for a while, to overcome fatigue. Pukkusa of Malla, a disciple of Āḷāra Kālāma, who was coming from Kusinārā on his way to Pāvā, saw the Buddha seated there and approached him. After worshipping him he made the following joyful utterance: *Santena vata, bhante, pabbajitā vihārena viharanti*, "Venerable Sir, those who have gone forth are indeed living a peaceful life".²⁸

Though it was apparently a compliment for the Buddha, he came out with an episode, which was rather in praise of his teacher Āḷāra Kālāma, who had attained to the plane of nothingness, *ākāraññāyatana*.

"While on a long journey, my teacher Āḷāra Kālāma sat under a wayside tree for noonday siesta. Just then five-hundred carts were passing by. After the carts had passed that spot, the man who was following them walked up to Āḷāra Kālāma and asked him:

‘Venerable sir, did you see about five-hundred carts passing by?’

‘No, friend, I didn’t see.’

‘But, Venerable sir, didn’t you even hear the sound?’

‘No, friend, I didn’t hear the sound.’

‘Venerable sir, were you asleep, then?’

‘No, friend, I was not asleep.’

‘Were you conscious, then, Venerable sir?’

‘Yes, friend.’

‘So, then, venerable sir, while being conscious and awake, you neither saw nor heard as many as five-hundred carts passing by. All the same your double robe is bespattered with mud.’

‘Yes, friend.’

And then, Venerable Sir, that man was highly impressed by it, and paid the following compliment to Āḷāra Kālāma:

‘It is a wonder, it is a marvel, what a peaceful life those who have gone forth are leading, so much so that one being conscious and awake would neither see nor hear as many as five-hundred carts passing by.’

When Pukkusa cited this incident in praise of Āḷāra Kālāma, the Buddha asked him:

"What do you think, Pukkusa, which of these two feats is more difficult to accomplish, that one being conscious and awake would neither see nor hear as many as five-hundred carts passing by, or that while being conscious and awake, one would not see or hear the streaks of lightening and peals of thunder in the midst of a torrential downpour?"

When Pukkusa grants that the latter feat is by far the more difficult to accomplish, the Buddha comes out with one of his past experiences.

"At one time, Pukkusa, I was staying in a chaff house at Ātumā, and there was a torrential downpour, with streaks of lightening and peals of thunder, during the course of which two farmers – brothers – and four bulls were struck down dead. A big crowd of people had gathered at the spot. Coming out of the chaff house, I was pacing up and down in open air

when a man from that crowd walked up to me and worshipped me, and respectfully stood on one side. Then I asked him:

‘Friend, why has this big crowd gathered here?’

‘Just now, Venerable Sir, while it was raining in torrents with streaks of lightening and peals of thunder, two farmers – brothers – and four bulls were struck down dead. That is why a big crowd has gathered here. But where were you, Venerable Sir?’

‘I was here itself, friend.’

‘But didn’t you see it, Venerable Sir?’

‘No, friend, I didn’t see it.’

‘But didn’t you hear the sound, Venerable Sir?’

‘No, friend, I did not hear the sound.’

‘But, then, Venerable Sir, were you asleep?’

‘No, friend, I was not asleep.’

‘But, Venerable Sir, were you conscious (*saññī*)?’

‘Yes, friend.’

And then, Pukkusa, that man expressed his surprise in the words: ‘It is a wonder, it is a marvel, what a peaceful life those who have gone forth are leading, so much so that while being conscious and awake one would neither see nor hear the streaks of lightening and peals of thunder in the midst of a torrential downpour’. With that he came out with his fervent faith in me, worshipped me, reverentially circumambulated me and left."

Some interpret this incident as an illustration of the Buddha’s attainment to the cessation of perceptions and feelings. But if it had been the case, the words *saññī samāno jāgaro*, "while being conscious and awake", would be out of place. That man expressed his wonder at the fact that the Buddha, while being conscious and awake, had not seen or heard anything, though it was raining in torrents with streaks of lightening and peals of thunder. Nor can this incident be interpreted as a reference to the realm of nothingness, *ākāṅkamaññāyatana*, in the context of the allusion to Āḷārā Kālāma and his less impressive psychic powers.

The true import of this extraordinary psychic feat has to be assessed with reference to the *arahattaphalasamādhī*, we have already discussed.²⁹

The incident had occurred while the Buddha was seated in *arahattaphalasamādhī*, experiencing the cessation of the six sense-spheres, equivalent to the cessation of the world. He had gone beyond the world - that is why he didn't see or hear.

We are now in a position to appreciate meaningfully that much-vexed riddle-like verse we had quoted earlier from the *Kalahavivādasutta*.

*Na saññasaññī, na viasaññasaññī,
no pi asaññī na vibhūtasaññī,
evaṃ sametassa vibhoti rūpaṃ,
saññānidānā hi papañcasaṅkhā.*³⁰

"He is not conscious of normal perception, nor is he unconscious,
He is not devoid of perception, nor has he rescinded perception,
It is to one thus constituted that form ceases to exist,
For reckonings through prolificity have perception as their source".

Perception is the source of all prolific reckonings, such as those that impelled the audience at the magic show to respond with the 'Ahs', and 'Ohs' and whistles. One is completely free from that prolific perception when one is in the *arahattaphalasamādhī*, experiencing the cessation of the six sense-spheres.

As we had earlier cited '... one is neither percipient of earth in earth, nor of water in water, nor of fire in fire, nor of air in air, nor is one conscious of a "this world" in this world, nor of "another world" in another world ...' and so on, but all the same 'one is percipient', *saññī ca pana assa*.³¹ Of what is he percipient or conscious? That is none other than what comes up as the title of these series of sermons, namely:

*Etaṃ santaṃ, etaṃ paṇītaṃ, yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho
sabbūpadhipaṭṭhānissaggo taṇhakkhaya virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ.*³²

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

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- ¹ M I 436, *MahāMālunkyasutta*.
² S III 142, *Phenapiṇḍūpamasutta*
³ A II 25, *Kālakārāmasutta*.
⁴ Ud 8, *Bāhīyasutta*.
⁵ See sermon 25.
⁶ M I 292, *MahāVedallasutta*.
⁷ Th 716, *Adhimutta Theragāthā*; see also sermon 8.
⁸ S II 25, *Paccayasutta*; see sermon 2.
⁹ A III 440, *Catuttha-abhabbaṭṭhānasutta*.
¹⁰ See sermon 5.
¹¹ Vin I 40, *Mahāvagga*.
¹² M I 54, *Sammādiṭṭhisutta*.
¹³ M III 63, *Bahudhātukasutta*.
¹⁴ Dh 1, *Yamakavagga*.
¹⁵ S II 78, *Ariyasāvakasutta*.
¹⁶ S II 27, *Paccayasutta*.
¹⁷ Ud 8, *Bāhīyasutta*.
¹⁸ See sermon 1.
¹⁹ S I 13, *Jaṭāsutta*.
²⁰ M III 273, *Nandakovādasutta*.
²¹ Th 716, *Adhimutta Theragāthā*.
²² E.g. A V 120, *Niṭṭhaṅgatasutta*.
²³ Ud 8, *Bāhīyasutta*.
²⁴ Sn 824, *Pasūrasutta*, see sermon 25.
²⁵ Sn 886, *Cūḷa-Viyūhasutta*.
²⁶ Ud 67, *Paṭhamanānātitthiyasutta*.
²⁷ D I 42, *Brahmajālasutta*.
²⁸ D II 130, *Mahāparinibbānasutta*.
²⁹ See sermons 16-19.
³⁰ Sn 874, *Kalahavivādasutta*.
³¹ A V 318, *Saññāsutta*, see sermon 16.
³² M I 436, *MahāMālunkyasutta*.

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

*Etaṃ santaṃ, etaṃ paṇītaṃ, yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho sab-
būpadhipaṭinissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ.*¹

"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. This is the twenty-seventh sermon in the series of sermons on *Nibbāna*. In our last sermon, we brought up some similes and illustrations to explain why the suchness of the *Tathāgata* has been given special emphasis in the *Kālakārāmasutta*.

Drawing inspiration from the Buddha's sermon, comparing consciousness to a magic show, we made an attempt to discover the secrets of a modern day magic show from a hidden corner of the stage. The parable of the magic show revealed us the fact that the direct and the indirect formulation of the Law of Dependent Arising, known as *tathatā*, suchness, or *idappaccayatā*, specific conditionality, is similar to witnessing a magic show from two different points of view. That is to say, the deluded point of view of the spectator in the audience and the discerning point of view of the wisdom-eyed critic, hidden in a corner of the stage.

The reason for the riddle-like outward appearance of the *Kālakārāmasutta* is the problem of resolving the conflict between these two points of view. However, the fact that the *Tathāgata* resolved this conflict at a supramundane level and enjoyed the bliss of emancipation comes to light in the first three discourses of the *Bodhivagga* in the *Udāna*.²

These three discourses tell us that, after the attainment of enlightenment, the Buddha spent the first week in the same seated posture under the Bodhi tree, and that on the last night of the week he reflected on the Law of Dependent Arising in the direct order in the first watch of the night, in the reverse order in the second watch, and both in direct and reverse order in the last watch.

These last-mentioned reflection, both in direct and reverse order, is like a compromise between the deluded point of view and the discerning point of view, mentioned above. Now, in a magic show to see **how** the magic is performed, is to get disenchanted with it, to make it fade away and cease, to free the mind from its spell. By seeing **how** a magician performs, one gets disgusted with **what** he performs. Similarly, seeing the arising of the six bases of sense-contact is the way to get disenchanted with them, to make them fade away and cease, to transcend them and be emancipated.

We come across two highly significant verses in the *Soṇasutta* among the Sixes of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* with reference to the emancipation of the mind of an *arahant*.

*Nekkhammaṃ adhimuttassa,
pavivekañca cetaso,
abhyāpajjhādhimuttassa,
upādānakkhayassa ca,
taṇhakkhayādhimuttassa,
asammohañca cetaso,
disvā āyatanuppādaṃ,
sammā cittaṃ vimuccati.*³

"The mind of one who is fully attuned
To renunciation and mental solitude,
Who is inclined towards harmlessness,
Ending of grasping,
Extirpation of craving,
And non-delusion of mind,
On seeing the arising of sense-bases,
Is fully emancipated."

To see how the sense-bases arise is to be released in mind. Accordingly we can understand how the magic consciousness of one who is enjoying a magic show comes to cease by comprehending it. Magic consciousness subsides. In other words, it is transformed into a non-manifestative consciousness, which no longer displays any magic. That is the mental transformation that occurred in the man who watched the magic show from a hidden corner of the stage. This gives us a clue to the cessation of consciousness in the *arahant* and the consequent non-manifestative consciousness attributed to him.

The *Dvāyatanānupassanasutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta* also bears testimony to this fact. The title itself testifies to the question of duality forming the theme of this discourse. Throughout the *Sutta* we find a refrain-like distinction between the arising and the ceasing of various phenomena. It is like an illustration of the two aspects of the problem that confronted the Buddha. Now that we are concerned with the question of the cessation of consciousness, let us quote the relevant couplet of verses.

*Yaṃ kiñci dukkhaṃ sambhoti,
sabbhaṃ viññāṇapaccayā,
viññāṇassa nirodhena
n'atthi dukkhassa sambhavo.*

*Etam ādīnavaṃ ñatvā,
'dukkhaṃ viññāṇapaccayā',
viññāṇūpasamā bhikkhu,
nicchāto parinibbuto.⁴*

"Whatever suffering that arises,
All that is due to consciousness,
With the cessation of consciousness,
There is no arising of suffering.

Knowing this peril:

'This suffering dependent on consciousness',
By calming down consciousness, a monk
Is hunger-less and fully appeased."

The comparison between the magic show and consciousness becomes more meaningful in the context of this discourse. As in the case of a magic show, the delusory character of the magic of consciousness is traceable to the perception of form. It is the perception of form which gives rise to the host of reckonings through cravings, conceits and views, which bring about a delusion.

Therefore, a monk intent on attaining *Nibbāna* has to get rid of the magical spell of the perception of form. The verse we cited from the *Kalahavivādasutta* the other day has an allusion to this requirement. That verse, beginning with the words *na saññasaññī*, is an attempt to answer the question raised in a previous verse in that *Sutta*, posing the query: *Kathaṃ sametassa vibhoti rūpaṃ*,⁵ "to one, constituted in which manner, does form cease to exist?" Let us remind ourselves of that verse.

*Na saññasaññī, na visaññasaññī,
no pi asaññī na vibhūtasaññī,
evaṃ sametassa vibhoti rūpaṃ,
saññānidānā hi papañcasāṅkhā.*

"He is not conscious of normal perception, nor is he unconscious,
He is not devoid of perception, nor has he rescinded perception,
It is to one thus constituted that form ceases to exist,
For reckonings through prolificity have perception as their source".

Here the last line states a crucial fact. Reckonings, designations and the like, born of prolificity, are traceable to perception in the last analysis. That is to say, all that is due to perception.

Another reason why form has received special attention here, is the fact that it is a precondition for contact. When there is form, there is the notion of resistance. That is already implicit in the question that comes in a verse at the beginning of the *Kalahavivādasutta*: *Kismiṃ vibhūte na phusanti phassā*, "when what is not there, do touches not touch?"⁶ The answer to that query is: *Rūpe vibhūte na phusanti phassā*, "when form is not there, touches do not touch".

We come across a phrase relevant to this point in the *Saṅgītisutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, that is, *sanidassanasappaṭiḅhaṃ rūpaṃ*.⁷ Materiality, according to this phrase, has two characteristics. It has the quality of manifesting itself, *sanidassana*; it also offers resistance, *sappaṭiḅha*. Both these aspects are hinted at in a verse from the *Jaṭāsutta* we had quoted at the very beginning of this series of sermons.

*Yattha nāmañca rūpañca,
asesaṃ uparujjhatī,
paṭiḅhaṃ rūpasaññā ca,
etthasā chijjate jaṭā*.⁸

The *Jaṭāsutta* tells us the place where the tangle within and the tangle without, *antojaṭā bahijaṭā*, of this gigantic *saṃsāric* puzzle is solved. And here is the answer:

"Wherein name and form
As well as resistance and the perception of form
Are completely cut off,
It is there that the tangle gets snapped."

The phrase *paṭighaṃ rūpasaññā ca* is particularly significant. Not only the term *paṭigha*, implying "resistance", but also the term *rūpasaññā* deserves our attention, as it is suggestive of the connection between form and perception. It is perception that brings an image of form. Perception is the source of various reckonings and destinations.

The term *saññā* has connotations of a "mark", a "sign", or a "token", as we have already pointed out.⁹ It is as if a party going through a forest is blazing a trail for their return by marking notches on the trees with an axe. The notion of permanence is therefore implicit in the term *saññā*.

So it is this *saññā* that gives rise to *papañcasaṅkhā*, reckonings through prolificity. The compound term *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā*, occurring in the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta*,¹⁰ is suggestive of this connection between *saññā* and *saṅkhā*. Reckonings, definitions and designations, arising from prolific perception, are collectively termed *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā*. The significance attached to *saññā* could easily be guessed by the following dictum in the *Guhaṭṭhakasutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*: *Saññāṃ pariññā vitareyya oghaṃ*,¹¹ "comprehend perception and cross the flood".

Full comprehension of the nature of perception enables one to cross the four great floods of defilements in *saṃsāra*. In other words, the penetrative understanding of perception is the way to deliverance.

Let us now go a little deeper into the connotations of the term *saññā*. In the sense of "sign" or "token", it has to have something to signify or symbolize. Otherwise there is no possibility of designation. A sign can be significant only if there is something to signify. This is a statement that might need a lot of reflection before it is granted.

A sign properly so called is something that signifies, and when there is nothing to signify, it ceases to be a sign. So also is the case with the symbol. This is a norm which is well explained in the *Mahāvedallasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*. In the course of a dialogue between Venerable Mahākoṭṭhita and Venerable Sāriputta, we find in that *Sutta* the following pronouncement made by Venerable Sāriputta:

*Rāgo kho, āvuso, kiñcano, doso kiñcano, moho kiñcano, te khīṇāsa-vassa bhikkhuno pahīnā ucchinnamūlā tālavatthukatā anabhāvakatā āyatim anuppādadhammā.*¹²

"Lust, friend, is something, hate is something, delusion is something. They have been abandoned in an influx-free monk, uprooted, made like a palm tree deprived of its site, made extinct and rendered incapable of sprouting again."

So lust is a something, hate is a something, delusion is a something. Now a sign is significant and a symbol is symbolic only when there is something. Another statement that occurs a little later in that dialogue offers us a clarification.

Rāgo kho, āvuso, nimittakaraṇo, doṣo nimittakaraṇo, moho nimittakaraṇo, "lust, friend, is significative, hate is significative, delusion is significative."

Now we can well infer that it is only so long as there are things like lust, hate and delusion that signs are significant. In other words, why the *Tathāgata* declared that there is no essence in the magic show of consciousness is because there is nothing in him that signs or symbols can signify or symbolize.

What are these things? Lust, hate and delusion. That is why the term *akiñcana*, literally "thing-less", is an epithet for the *arahant*. He is thing-less not because he no longer has the worldly possessions of a layman, but because the afore-said things lust, hate and delusion are extinct in him. For the *Tathāgata*, the magic show of consciousness has nothing substantial in it, because there was nothing in him to make the signs significant.

That man with discernment, who watched the magic show from a hidden corner of the stage, found it to be hollow and meaningless, since he had, in a limited and relative sense, got rid of attachment, aversion and delusion. That is to say, after discovering the tricks of the magician, he lost the earlier impulses to laugh, cry and fear. Now he has no curiosity, since the delusion is no more. At least temporarily, ignorance has gone down in the light of understanding. According to this norm, we can infer that signs become significant due to greed, hate and delusion in our own minds. Perceptions pander to these emotive tendencies.

The concluding verse of the *Māgandiya Sutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta* is particularly important, in that it sums up the *arahant's* detachment regarding perceptions and his release through wisdom.

*Saññāvirattassa na santi ganthā,
paññāvimuttassa na santi mohā,
saññāñca diṭṭhiñca ye aggahesuṃ,
te ghaṭṭayantā vicaranti loke.*¹³

"To one detached from percepts there are no bonds,
To one released through wisdom there are no delusions,
Those who hold on to percepts and views,
Go about wrangling in this world."

It is this state of detachment from perceptions and release through wisdom that is summed up by the phrase *anāsavaṃ cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ* in some discourses. With reference to the *arahant* it is said that he has realized by himself through higher knowledge in this very life that influx-free deliverance of the mind and deliverance through wisdom, *anāsavaṃ cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ diṭṭhevadhamme sayāṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā*.¹⁴

So we could well infer that the *arahant* is free from the enticing bonds of perceptions and the deceptive tricks of consciousness. It is this unshakeable stability that finds expression in the epithets *anejo*, "immovable", and *ṭhito*, "stable", used with reference to the *arahant*.¹⁵

The *Āneñjasappāyasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* opens with the following exhortation by the Buddha:

*Aniccā, bhikkhave, kāmā tucchā musā mosadhammā, māyākatam etaṃ, bhikkhave, bālalāpanaṃ. Ye ca diṭṭhadhammikā kāmā, ye ca samparāyikā kāmā, yā ca diṭṭhadhammikā kāmasaññā, yā ca samparāyikā kāmasaññā, ubhayam etaṃ Māradheyyaṃ, Mārass'esa visayo, Mārass'esa nivāpo, Mārass'esa gocaro.*¹⁶

"Impermanent, monks, are sense pleasures, they are empty, false and deceptive by nature, they are conjuror's tricks, monks, tricks that make fools prattle. Whatever pleasures there are in this world, whatever pleasures that are in the other world, whatever pleasurable percepts there are in this world, whatever pleasurable percepts that are in the other world, they all are within the realm of Māra, they are the domain of Māra, the bait of Māra, the beat of Māra."

This exhortation accords well with what was said above regarding the magic show. It clearly gives the impression that there is the possibility of attaining a state of mind in which those signs are no longer significant.

The comparison of consciousness to a magic show has deeper implications. The insinuation is that one has to comprehend perception for what it is, in order to become dispassionate towards it, *saññaṃ pariññā vitareyya oghaṃ*, "comprehend perception and cross the flood". When perception is understood inside out, disenchantment sets in as a matter of course, since delusion is no more.

Three kinds of deliverances are mentioned in connection with the *arahants*, namely *animitta*, the signless, *appaṇihita*, the undirected, and *suññata*, the void.¹⁷ We spoke of signs being significant. Now where there is no signification, when one does not give any significance to signs, one does not direct one's mind to anything. *Paṇidhi* means "direction of the mind", an "aspiration". In the absence of any aspiration, there is nothing 'essence-tial' in existence.

There is a certain interconnection between the three deliverances. *Animitta*, the signless, is that stage in which the mind refuses to take a sign or catch a theme in anything. Where lust, hate and delusion are not there to give any significance, signs become ineffective. That is the signless. Where there is no tendency to take in signs, there is no aspiration, expectation or direction of the mind. It is as if dejection in regard to the magic show has given rise to disenchantment and dispassion. When the mind is not directed to the magic show, it ceases to exist. It is only when the mind is continually there, directed towards the magic show or a film show, that they exist for a spectator. One finds oneself born into a world of magic only when one sees something substantial in it. A magic world is made up only when there is an incentive to exist in it.

Deeper reflection on this simile of the magic show would fully expose the interior of the magical illusion of consciousness. Where there is no grasping at signs, there is no direction or expectation, in the absence of which, existence ceases to appear substantial. That is why the three terms signless, *animitta*, undirected, *appaṇihita* and void *suññata*, are used with reference to an *arahant*. These three terms come up in a different guise in a discourse on *Nibbāna* we had discussed earlier. There they occur as *appatitthaṃ*, *appavattaṃ* and *anārammaṇaṃ*.¹⁸

Appatiṭṭhaṃ means "unestablished". Mind gets established when there is desire or aspiration, *paṇidhi*. Contemplation on the suffering aspect, *dukkhānupassanā*, eliminates desire. So the mind is unestablished. Contemplation on not-self, *anattānupassanā*, does away with the notion of substantiality, seeing nothing pithy or 'essence-tial' in existence. Pith is something that endures. A tree that has pith has something durable, though its leaves may drop off. Such notions of durability lose their hold on the *arahant's* mind. The contemplation of impermanence, *aniccānupassanā*, ushers in the signless, *animitta*, state of the mind that takes no object, *anārammaṇaṃ*.

The simile of the magic show throws light on all these aspects of deliverance. Owing to this detachment from perception, *saññāviratta*, and release through wisdom, *paññāvimutta*, an *arahant's* point of view is totally different from the wordling's point of view. What appears as real for the wordling, is unreal in the estimation of the *arahant*. There is such a wide gap between the two viewpoints. This fact comes to light in the two kinds of reflections mentioned in the *Dvayatānupassanāsutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*.

*Yaṃ, bhikkhave, sadevakassa lokassa samārakassa sabrahmakassa sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyā pajāya sadevamanussāya 'idaṃ saccaṃ' ti upanijjhāyitaṃ, tadam ariyānaṃ 'etaṃ musā' ti yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya suddiṭṭhaṃ - ayaṃ ekānupassanā. Yaṃ, bhikkhave, sadevakassa lokassa samārakassa sabrahmakassa sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyā pajāya sadevamanussāya 'idaṃ musā' ti upanijjhāyitaṃ, tadam ariyānaṃ 'etaṃ saccaṃ' ti yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya suddiṭṭhaṃ - ayaṃ dutiyānupassanā.*¹⁹

"Monks, whatsoever in the world with its gods, Māras and Brahmas, among the progeny consisting of recluses, Brahmins, gods and men, whatsoever is pondered over as 'truth', that by the *ariyans* has been well discerned with right wisdom, as it is, as 'untruth'. This is one mode of reflection. Monks, whatsoever in the world with its gods, Māras and Brahmas, among the progeny consisting of recluses, Brahmins, gods and men, whatsoever is pondered over as 'untruth', that by the *ariyans* has been well discerned with right wisdom, as it is, as 'truth'. This is the second mode of reflection."

From this, one can well imagine what a great difference, what a contrast exists between the two stand-points. The same idea is expressed in the verses that follow, some of which we had cited earlier too.

*Anattani attamāniṃ,
passa lokaṃ sadevakam,
nivittṭham nāmarūpasmim,
idaṃ saccan'ti maññati.*

*Yena yena hi maññanti,
tato taṃ hoti aññathā,
taṃ hi tassa musā hoti,
mosadhammaṃ hi ittaraṃ.*

*Amosadhammaṃ nibbānaṃ,
tad ariyā saccato vidū,
te ve saccābhisamayā,
nicchātā parinibbutā.²⁰*

"Just see the world, with all its gods,
Fancying a self where none exists,
Entrenched in name-and-form it holds
The conceit that this is real.

In whatever way they imagine,
Thereby it turns otherwise,
That itself is the falsity,
Of this puerile deceptive thing.

Nibbāna is unfalsifying in its nature,
That they understood as the truth,
And, indeed, by the higher understanding of that truth,
They have become hunger-less and fully appeased."

Let us go for a homely illustration to familiarize ourselves with the facts we have related so far. Two friends are seen drawing something together on a board with two kinds of paints. Let us have a closer look. They are painting a chess board. Now the board is chequered. Some throw-away chunks of wood are also painted for the pieces. So the board and pieces are ready.

Though they are the best of friends and amicably painted the chess-board, the game of chess demands two sides - the principle of duality. They give in to the demand and confront each other in a playful mood. A hazy idea of victory and defeat, another duality, hovers above them. But they are playing the game just for fun, to while away the time. Though it is for fun, there is a competition. Though there is a competition, it is fun.

While the chess-game is in progress, a happy-go-lucky benefactor comes by and offers a handsome prize for the prospective winner, to enliven the game. From now onwards, it is not just for fun or to while away the time that the two friends are playing chess. Now that the prospect of a prize has aroused greed in them, the innocuous game becomes a tussle for a prize.

Worthless pieces dazzle with the prospect of a prize. But just then, there comes a pervert killjoy, who shows a threatening weapon and adds a new rule to the game. The winner will get the prize all right, but the loser he will kill with his deadly weapon.

So what is the position now? The sportive spirit is gone. It is now a struggle for dear life. The two friends are now eying each other as an enemy. It is no longer a game, but a miserable struggle to escape death.

We do not know, how exactly the game ended. But let us hold the post mortem all the same. We saw how those worthless chunks of wood picked up to serve as pieces on the chessboard, received special recognition once they took on the paint. They represented two sides.

With the prospect of a prize, they got animated in the course of the game, due to cravings, conceits and views in the minds of the two players. Those impulses were so overwhelming that especially after the death knell sounded, the whole chess board became the world for these two friends. Their entire attention was on the board - a life and death struggle.

But this is only one aspect of our illustration. The world, in fact, is a chessboard, where an unending chess game goes on. Let us look at the other aspect. Now, for the *arahant*, the whole world appears like a chessboard. That is why the *arahant* Adhimutta, when the bandits caught him while passing through a forest and got ready to kill him, uttered the following instructive verse, which we had quoted earlier too.

*Tiṇakaṭṭhasamaṃ lokam,
yadā paññāya passati,*

*mamattaṃ so asaṃvindaṃ,
'natthi me'ti na socati.*²¹

"When one sees with wisdom,
This world as comparable to grass and twigs,
Not finding anything worthwhile holding onto as mine,
One does not grieve, saying: 'O! I have nothing!'"

Venerable Adhimutta's fearless challenge to the bandit chief was extraordinary: You may kill me if you like, but the position is this: When one sees with wisdom the entire world, the world of the five aggregates, as comparable to grass and twigs, one does not experience any egoism and therefore does not grieve the loss of one's life.

Some verses uttered by the Buddha deepen our understanding of the *arahant's* standpoint. The following verse of the *Dhammapada*, for instance, highlights the conflict between victory and defeat.

*Jayaṃ veraṃ passavati,
dukkhaṃ seti parājito,
upasanto sukhaṃ seti
hitvā jayaparājayaṃ.*²²

"Victory breeds hatred,
In sorrow lies the defeated,
The one serene is ever at peace,
Giving up victory and defeat."

As in the chess game, the idea of winning gives rise to hatred. The loser in the game has sorrow as his lot. But the *arahant* is at peace, having given up victory and defeat. Isn't it enough for him to give up victory? Why is it said that he gives up both victory and defeat?

These two go as a pair. This recognition of a duality is a distinctive feature of this *Dhamma*. It gives, in a nutshell, the essence of this *Dhamma*. The idea of a duality is traceable to the vortex between consciousness and name-and-form. The same idea comes up in the following verse of the *Attadaṇḍasutta* in the *Sutta Nipāta*.

*Yassa n' atthi 'idaṃ me'ti
'paresaṃ' vā pi kiñcanaṃ,
mamattaṃ so asaṃvindaṃ,
'n' atthi me'ti na socati.*²³

"He who has nothing to call 'this is mine',
Not even something to recognize as 'theirs',
Finding no egoism within himself,
He grieves not, crying: O! I have nothing!"

So far in this series of sermons on *Nibbāna*, we were trying to explain what sort of a state *Nibbāna* is. We had to do so, because there has been quite a lot of confusion and controversy regarding *Nibbāna* as the aim of the spiritual endeavour in Buddhism. The situation today is no better. Many of those who aspire to *Nibbāna* today, aim not at the cessation of existence, but at some form of quasi existence as a surrogate *Nibbāna*.

If the aiming is wrong, will the arrow reach the target? Our attempt so far has been to clarify and highlight this target, which we call *Nibbāna*. If we have been successful in this attempt, the task before us now is to adumbrate the salient features of the path of practice.

Up to now, we have been administering a purgative, to dispel some deep-rooted wrong notions. If it has worked, it is time now for the elixir. In the fore-going sermons, we had occasion to bring up a number of key terms in the *suttas*, which have been more or less relegated into the limbo and rarely come up in serious *Dhamma* discussions. We have highlighted such key terms as *suññatā*, *dvayatā*, *tathatā*, *atammayatā*, *idappaccayatā*, *papañca*, and *maññanā*. We have also discussed some aspects of their significance. But in doing so, our main concern was the dispelling of some misconceptions about *Nibbāna* as the goal.

The aim of this series of sermons, however, is not the satisfying of some curiosity at an academic level. It is to pave the way for an attainment of this goal, by rediscovering the intrinsic qualities of this *Dhamma* that is well proclaimed, *svākkhāto*, visible here and now, *sandiṭṭhiko*, timeless, *akāliko*, inviting one to come and see, *ehi-passiko*, leading one onwards, *opanayiko*, and realizable personally by the wise, *paccattaṃ vedītabbo viññūhi*. So the few sermons that will follow, might well be an elixir to the minds of those meditators striving hard day and night to realize *Nibbāna*.

*Lobho, doso ca moho ca,
purisaṃ pāpacetasam,
hiṃsanti attasambhūtā,
tacasāraṃ va samphalaṃ.*²⁴

"Greed and hate and delusion too,
Sprung from within work harm on him
Of evil wit, as does its fruit
On the reed for which the bark is pith."

The main idea behind this verse is that the three defilements - greed, hatred and delusion - spring up from within, that they are *attasambhūta*, self-begotten. What is the provocation for such a statement?

It is generally believed that greed, hatred and delusion originate from external signs. The magic show and the chess game have shown us how signs become significant. They become significant because they find something within that they can signify and symbolize.

Now this is where the question of radical reflection, *yoniso manasikāra*, comes in. What the Buddha brings up in this particular context, is the relevance of that radical reflection as a pre-requisite for treading the path.

The worldling thinks that greed, hatred and delusion arise due to external signs. The Buddha points out that they arise from within an individual and destroy him as in the case of the fruit of a reed or bamboo. It is this same question of radical reflection that came up earlier in the course of our discussion of the *Madhupiṇḍikasutta*, based on the following deep and winding statement.

*Cakkhuñc'āvuso paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuvīññānaṃ, tiṅṅaṃ saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti, yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi, yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti, yaṃ papañceti tatonidānaṃ purisaṃ papañcasaññāsāṅkhā samudācaranti atītānāgatapaccuppannesu cakkhuvīññeyyesu rūpesu.*²⁵

"Dependent on eye and forms, friend, arises eye-consciousness; the concurrence of the three is contact; because of contact, feeling; what one feels, one perceives; what one perceives, one reasons about; what one reasons about, one proliferates; what one proliferates, owing to that, reckonings born of prolific perceptions overwhelm him in regard to forms cognizable by the eye relating to the past, the future and the present."

Eye-consciousness, for instance, arises depending on eye and forms. The concurrence of these three is called contact. Depending on this contact arises feeling. What one feels, one perceives, and what one perceives, one reasons about. The reasoning about leads to a proliferation that brings about an obsession, as a result of which the reckonings born of prolific perceptions overwhelm the individual concerned.

The process is somewhat similar to the destruction of the reed by its own fruit. It shows how non-radical reflection comes about. Radical reflection is undermined when proliferation takes over. The true source, the matrix, is ignored, with the result an obsession follows, tantamount to an entanglement within and without, *anto jaṭā bahi jaṭā*.²⁶

The paramount importance of radical reflection is revealed by the *Sūcilomasutta* found in the *Sutta Nipāta*, as well as in the *Sagāthakavagga* of the *Samyutta Nikāya*. The *yakkha* Sūciloma poses some questions to the Buddha in the following verse.

*Rāgo ca doso ca kutonidānā,
aratī ratī lomahaṃso kutojā,
kuto samuṭṭhāya manovitakkā,
kumārakā vaṃkam iv' ossajanti?*²⁷

"Lust and hate, whence caused are they,
Whence spring dislike, delight and terror,
Whence arising do thoughts disperse,
Like children leaving their mother's lap?"
The Buddha answers those questions in three verses.

*Rāgo ca doso ca itonidānā,
aratī ratī lomahaṃso itojā,
ito samuṭṭhāya manovitakkā,
kumārakā vaṃkam iv' ossajanti.*

*Snehajā attasambhūtā
nigrodhasseva khandhajā,
puṭhū visattā kāmesu
māluvā va vitatā vane.*

*Ye naṃ pajānanti yatonidānaṃ,
te naṃ vinodenti, suṇohi yakkha,
te duttaram ogham imaṃ taranti,
atiṇṇapubbaṃ apunabbhavāya.*

"It is hence that lust and hate are caused,
Hence spring dislike, delight and terror,
Arising hence do thoughts disperse,
Like children leaving their mother's lap.
Moisture-born and self-begotten,
Like the banyan's trunk-born runners
They cleave to diverse objects of sense,
Like the *māluvā* creeper entwining the forest.
And they that know wherefrom it springs,
They dispel it, listen, O! Yakkha.
They cross this flood so hard to cross,
Never crossed before, to become no more."

In explaining these verses, we are forced to depart from the commentarial trend. The point of controversy is the phrase *kumārakā dhaṅkam iv' ossajanti*, recognized by the commentary as the last line of Sūciloma's verse. We adopted the variant reading *kumārakā vaṅkam iv' ossajanti*, found in some editions. Let us first try to understand how the commentary interprets this verse.

Its interpretation centres around the word *dhaṅka*, which means a crow. In order to explain how thoughts disperse, it alludes to a game among village lads, in which they tie the leg of a crow with a long string and let it fly away so that it is forced to come back and fall at their feet.²⁸ The commentary rather arbitrarily breaks up the compound term *manovitakkā* in trying to explain that evil thoughts, *vitakkā*, distract the mind, *mano*. If the variant reading *kumārakā vaṅkam iv' ossajanti* is adopted, the element *v* in *vaṅkam iv' ossajanti* could be taken as a hiatus filler, *āgama*, and then we have the meaningful phrase *kumārakā aṅkam iv' ossajanti*, "even as children leave the lap".

Lust and hate, delight and terror, spring from within. Even so are thoughts in the mind, *manovitakkā*. We take it as one word, whereas the commentary breaks it up into two words. It is queer to find the same commentator analyzing this compound differently in another context. In explaining the term *manovitakkā* occurring in the *Kummasutta* of the *Devatā Saṃyutta* in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, the commentary says 'manovitakke'ti manamhi uppannavitakke, "manovitakka, this means thoughts arisen in the mind".²⁹

The commentator was forced to contradict himself in the present context, because he wanted to justify the awkward simile of the game he himself had introduced. The simile of leaving the mother's lap, on the other hand, would make more sense, particularly in the light of the second verse uttered by the Buddha.

*Snehajā attasambhūtā
nigrodhasseva khandhajā,
puthū visattā kāmesu
māluvā va vitatā vane.*

The verse enshrines a deep idea. *Sneha* is a word which has such meanings as "moisture" and "affection". In the simile of the banyan tree, the trunk-born runners are born of moisture. They are self-begotten. Thoughts in the mind cleave to diverse external objects. Just as the runners of a banyan tree, once they take root would even conceal the main trunk, which gave them birth, so the thoughts in the mind, attached to external objects of sense, would conceal their true source and origin. Non radical reflection could easily come in. The runners are moisture-born and self-begotten from the point of view of the original banyan tree. The main trunk gets overshadowed by its own runners.

The next simile has similar connotations. The *māluvā* creeper is a plant parasite. When some bird drops a seed of a *māluvā* creeper into a fork of a tree, after some time a creeper comes up. As time goes on, it overspreads the tree, which gave it nourishment.

Both similes illustrate the nature of non radical reflection. Conceptual proliferation obscures the true source, namely the psychological mainsprings of defilements. Our interpretation of children leaving the mother's lap would be meaningful in the context of the two terms *snehajā*, "born of affection", and *attasambhūtā*, "self-begotten". There is possibly a pun on the word *sneha*. Children are affection-born and self-begotten, from a mother's point of view.

The basic theme running through these verses is the origin and source of things. The commentator's simile of the crow could ill afford to accommodate all the nuances of these pregnant terms. It distracts one from the main theme of these verses. The questions asked concern the

origin, *kuto nidānā*, *kutojā*, *kuto samuṭṭhāya*, and the answers are in full accord: *ito nidānā*, *itojā*, *ito samuṭṭhāya*.

With reference to thoughts in the mind, the term *snehajā* could even mean "born of craving", and *attasambhūtā* conveys their origination from within. As in the case of the runners of the banyan tree and the *māluvā* creeper, those defiling thoughts, arisen from within, once they get attached to sense objects outside, obscure their true source. The result is the pursuit of a mirage, spurred on by non-radical reflection.

The last verse is of immense importance. It says: But those who know from where all these mental states arise, are able to dispel them. It is they who successfully cross this flood, so hard to cross, and are freed from re-becoming.

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- ¹ M I 436, *MahāMālunkyasutta*.
² Ud 1-2, *Bodhivagga*.
³ A III 378, *Soṇasutta*.
⁴ Sn 734, *Dvāyatanānupassanasutta*.
⁵ Sn 873, *Kalahavivādasutta*.
⁶ Sn 871, *Kalahavivādasutta*.
⁷ D III 217, *Saṅgītisutta*.
⁸ S I 13, *Jaṭāsutta*, see sermon 1.
⁹ See sermon 12.
¹⁰ M I 109, *Madhupiṇḍikasutta*.
¹¹ Sn 779, *Guhaṭṭhaka Sutta*.
¹² M I 298, *Mahāvedalla Sutta*.
¹³ Sn 847, *Māgandiya Sutta*.
¹⁴ E.g. D I 156, *Mahāli Sutta*.
¹⁵ Ud 27, *Yasoja Sutta*.
¹⁶ M II 261, *Āneñjasappāya Sutta*.
¹⁷ Vin III 92, *Pārājikakaṇḍa*.
¹⁸ Ud 80, *Paṭhamanibbānapaṭisaṃyuttasutta*; see sermon 17.
¹⁹ (Prose before) Sn 756, *Dvayatānupassanasutta*.
²⁰ See sermons 6 and 21.
²¹ Th 717, *Adhimutta Theragāthā*, see sermon 8.
²² Dh 201, *Sukhavagga*.
²³ Sn 951, *Attadaṇḍasutta*.
²⁴ SN I 70, *Purisasutta*.
²⁵ MN I 111, *Madhupiṇḍikasutta*, see sermon 11.
²⁶ S I 13, *Jaṭāsutta*, see sermon 1.
²⁷ Sn 270, *Sūcilomasutta*, cf. also SN I 207.
²⁸ Spk I 304.
²⁹ Spk I 36, commenting on SN I 7, *Kummasutta*.

*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 nibbānam.*¹

"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. This is the twenty-eighth sermon in the series of sermons on *Nibbāna*.

Right view, the first factor of the noble eightfold path, is defined as the knowledge of all the four noble truths, namely that of suffering, its arising, its cessation, and the path leading to its cessation. This is a pointer to the fact that some understanding of cessation, or *Nibbāna*, is essential for the practice of the path.

According to a discourse among the Twos of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, there are two conditions for the arising of this right view:

*Dve 'me, bhikkhave, paccayā sammādiṭṭhiyā uppādāya. Katame dve? Parato ca ghoso yoniso ca manasikāro.*² "Monks, there are these two conditions for the arising of right view. Which two? Hearing from another and radical reflection."

Strictly speaking, *yoniso manasikāra*, or "radical reflection", is attention by way of source or matrix. The deeper dimensions of its meaning would have come to light in our discussion of *paṭicca samuppāda* with reference to a quotation from the *Mahāpadānasutta*, in one of our earlier sermons. There we saw how the bodhisatta Vipassī went on reflecting from the very end of the formula of *paṭicca samuppāda*, of dependent arising, in reverse order and gradually arrived at the true source.³

Kimhi nu kho sati jarāmaṇaṃ hoti, kiṃ paccayā jarāmaṇaṃ? Jātiyā kho sati jarāmaṇaṃ hoti, jātipaccayā jarāmaṇaṃ. "What being there, does decay and death come to be? Conditioned by what, is decay-and-death? Birth being there does decay-and-death come to be, conditioned by birth is decay-and-death."

In this way, he directed his radical reflection gradually upwards, beginning from decay-and-death, and at last came to the *samsāric* vortex between consciousness and name-and-form, which we discussed at length. This is an illustration of the deepest sense of *yoniso manasikāra* as an attitude essential for seeing the law of dependent arising within one's own experience.

By now we have already laid bare some first principles for the arising of this radical reflection in the form of similes like the magic show and the chess game. Those similes have illustrated for us the first principle that a thing originates from, and its 'thingness' depends on, the psychological responses and mental traits of the person concerned.

The magic show and the chess game have exposed the fact that the signs and symbols which we conceive to be out there owe their significance and symbolic nature to the deep-rooted psychological mainsprings of lust, hate and delusion.

It was while discussing how the *Sūcilomasutta* presents the question of radical reflection that we were forced to stop our last sermon. To the question of Yakkha Sūciloma as to the source of lust, hate, delight and terror, the Buddha replied that they arise 'hence', from 'hence' itself. In the Pāli verses the Yakkha's questions *kutonidānā, kutojā, kuto samuṭṭhāya* met with the replies *itonidānā, itojā, ito samuṭṭhāya* from the Buddha's side.⁴

This *ito*, "hence", means from within one's self. This is clear from the term *attasambhūta*, "self-begotten", in the reply given by the Buddha. It is to illustrate this self-begotten nature that the Buddha brings in the similes of the banyan tree and the *māluvā* creeper. When the runners coming down from the branches of a banyan tree reach the ground and get rooted, after a time, it will be difficult to distinguish the original trunk of the tree from its offsprings. So also is the case with the parasitic *māluvā* creeper. When the seed of a *māluvā* creeper takes root in the fork of a tree and grows up, it not only kills the tree, but also overspreads it in such a way as to obscure its origin.

From these similes we can infer that the self-begotten nature of those psychological states are also generally overlooked or ignored. They are revealed only to radical reflection, to attention by way of source or matrix. That is why the Buddha emphasizes the need for discerning the true

source. That it is an injunction directly relevant to the practice is clearly expressed in the last verse in the *Sūcilomasutta*.

*Ye naṃ pajānanti yatonidānaṃ,
te naṃ vinodenti, suṇohi yakkha,
te duttaram ogham imaṃ taranti,
atiṅṅapubbaṃ apunabbhavāya.*⁵

"And they that know wherefrom it springs,
They dispel it, listen, O! Yakkha.
They cross this flood so hard to cross,
Never crossed before, to become no more."

The commentary takes the term *yatonidānaṃ* in this verse as a reference to the second noble truth of craving. The term *attasambhūta* is explained as "arisen within oneself", *attani sambhūtā*, but not much attention is given to it.⁶ However, if we are to elicit the deeper meaning of these lines, we have to take up for comment this term, occurring in the preceding verse.

We came across this term earlier, too, in our discussion of a verse in the *Kosala Saṃyutta*.⁷

*Lobho, doso ca moho ca
purisaṃ pāpacetaṃ
hiṃsanti attasambhūtā
tacasāraṃ va samphalaṃ.*⁸

"Greed and hate and delusion too,
Sprung from within work harm on him
Of evil wit, as does its fruit
On the reed for which the bark is pith."

In this context, too, the term *attasambhūta* is mentioned. When we reflect deeply on the significance of this term, we are first of all reminded of the vortex simile we employed to explain the reciprocal relationship between consciousness and name-and-form in our discussion of the law of dependent arising as stated in the *MahāNidānasutta* at the very outset of this series of sermons.⁹

Attasambhūta, literally rendered, would mean "originating from oneself". But this so-called oneself conceived as a unit or centre of activity, is actually based on a duality. The notion of a self is to be traced to an interrelation between two conditions, that is, the reciprocal

relationship between consciousness and name-and-form, which we discussed earlier too.

*Viññāṇapaccayā nāmarūpaṃ, nāmarūpapaccayā viññāṇaṃ,*¹⁰ "dependent on consciousness is name-and-form", "dependent on name-and-form is consciousness". As the *bodhisatta Vipassī* understood through radical reflection, consciousness turns back from name-and-form, it does not go beyond, *paccudāvattati kho idaṃ viññāṇaṃ nāmarūpamhā, nāparaṃ gacchati.*

Here is a vortex, a turning round. The delusion or ignorance is the non-understanding of the reciprocal relationship between these two. The understanding of it is the insight into the true source of all defilements.

To hark back to our simile of the chess game, this non-understanding is like the split into two sides. The two friends quite amicably prepared the chess board and the pieces. But for them to play the game, there should be two sides. It is after this bifurcation and confrontation as two sides that the actual game starts, with its vicissitudes of winning and losing.

Preparations grow yielding the consequences of wish fulfilments and disappointments to the competitors. This is the norm underlying this bifurcation. So ignorance is the non-understanding of the fact that the basis of this *attasambhava* or springing up from within, namely, the dichotomy, is in fact a mutual interrelation between two conditions.

In other words, the ignorance which gives rise to those preparations that go to create the vortex between consciousness and name-and-form is the non-understanding of the mutual interrelation implicit in this vortical interplay. That is why one is instructed in insight meditation to reflect on preparations relating to name-and-form. An insight into those preparations reveals this mutual interrelation. There is such a dichotomy implicit in the term *attasambhava*.

The commentary explains the correlative *yathonidānaṃ*, "whence arising", as a reference to *taṇhā* or craving. But it is actually an allusion to ignorance. The true source is non-understanding. That is why the Buddha, in presenting the formula of *paṭicca samuppāda*, went beyond craving and placed ignorance at the head of the series of twelve links.

Very often, the commentators mention this as a possible point of controversy. But the real reason for its precedence is the fact that ignorance is more primary than craving as a condition. It is more basic than craving. When one probes into the conditions for craving, one discovers ignorance as its root. That is why, in stating the law of *paṭicca samuppāda* in the reverse order, the Buddha used the expression *avijjāya tv'eva asesavirāganirodhā*, etc., "with the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance" etc.¹¹ It is with the cessation of ignorance that the entire series of conditions move in the opposite direction. So ignorance is primary as a condition.

We can explain this primacy in another way. Now *upādāna* is that grasping of the object of craving. Actually it signifies a holding onto something. What gives the impression that the object of craving is something that can be grasped is a lack of a deep understanding of the principle of duality. Craving finds something to hold onto precisely because one presumes that there actually exists a thing to be grasped. That is how it gets object status. This way, we can explain the basic reason for the recurrent birth in *samsāra* as the non-understanding of the mutual interrelation between conditions. This sustains the notion of a duality.

There is a verse in the *MahāParinibbānasutta* which throws more light on the meaning of the term *attasambhava*. The verse, which is found also in the section on the Eights in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, as well as in the *Udāna*, runs as follows:

*Tulam atulañ ca sambhavaṃ
bhavasāṅkhāram avassajī muntī
ajjhatarato samhāhito
abhindi kavacam iv'attasambhavaṃ.*¹²

"That preparation for becoming,
The Sage gave up,
Whence arise an 'equal' and an 'unequal',
Inwardly rapt and concentrated,
He split like an armour
The origin of self."

At the spot called *cāpāla cetiya* the Buddha renounced the preparations pertaining to the life span and declared that he will attain *parinibbāna* three months hence. There was an earth tremor immediately afterwards and the Buddha uttered this paean of joy to explain its significance. However, this verse has puzzled many scholars, both eastern and western. The commentators themselves are in a quandary. They advance alternative interpretations, particularly in connection with the riddle-like terms *tulam atulaṃ* as evidenced by the commentaries to the *Dīgha Nikāya* and *Aṅguttara Nikāya*.¹³

According to the first interpretation given, *tulaṃ* stands for whatever pertains to the sense-sphere, and *atulaṃ* refers to the fine-material and immaterial spheres. The second interpretation, prefixed by an "or else", *athavā*, takes *tulaṃ* to mean both the sense-sphere and the fine-material sphere and *atulaṃ* to refer only to the immaterial sphere. In a third interpretation, *tulaṃ* is taken to mean 'of little karmic result', and *atulaṃ* to mean 'of great result'.

A fourth interpretation tries to tackle the difficult term in a different way altogether: '*tulan'ti tulento tūrento, 'atulañ ca sambhavan'ti nibbānañ ceva sambhavañ ca*. "*Tulaṃ* means comparing, determining, *atulañ ca sambhavaṃ* means *Nibbāna* and becoming." Here the word *tulaṃ* is presumed to be a present participle.

To add to the confusion, *Nettipakaraṇa* advances yet another interpretation.¹⁴ '*Tulan'ti saṅkhāradhātu, 'atulan'ti nibbānadhātu, "tulaṃ* means *saṅkhāra*-element, *atulaṃ* means *Nibbāna*-element."

It seems, however, that we have to approach the whole problem from a different angle altogether. The twin term *tulam atulaṃ* most probably represents the principle of duality we have discussed at length in this series of sermons. *Tulaṃ* and *atulaṃ* in a pair-wise combination convey the idea of equality and inequality as antonyms.

The phrase *tulam atulañ ca sambhavaṃ* is suggestive of that dichotomy which forms the basis of the self idea. *Attasambhava* or the origin of the self-notion is traceable to this dichotomy, which is like the two friends confronting each other in a game of chess. The two sides of the game may be taken as two halves of the same thing, standing opposite to each other. This is the 'tragi-comedy' of the situation. It is on these two halves or this dichotomy that the origin of the notion of self is based.

A clear enunciation of this truth is found in the *Sutta Nipāta*. For instance, the following verse of the *Māgandiyasutta* brings out the principle of dichotomy rather rhetorically:

*'Saccan' ti so brāhmaṇo kiṃ vadeyya
'musā' ti vā so vivadetha kena
yasmīṃ samaṃ visamañ cāpi n'atthi
sa kena vādaṃ paṭisamyujeyya.*¹⁵

"What could that Brahmin speak of as 'truth',
How could he debate calling something 'false',
By what criterion could he, in whom there is no distinction
Between equal and unequal, join issue in a debate?"
We come across a similar verse in the *Attadaṇḍasutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*.

*Na samesu na omesu,
na ussesu vadate muni
santo so vītamaccharo
nādeti na nirassati.*¹⁶

"The sage does not grade himself,
Among equals, inferiors or superiors,
Being at peace and with selfishness gone,
He neither takes up nor throws away."

Here again the issue is the triple conceit. It is by dispelling conceit that the sage entertains no inclinations to grade himself among equals, inferiors or superiors. Peaceful and unselfish as he is, he neither acquires nor rejects. Here we see a reference to that dichotomy.

The same idea comes up in another guise in the following verse of the *Tuvaṭṭakasutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*, which can be an incentive to the recollection of peace, *upasamānussati*.

*Ajjhattaṃ eva upasame,
nāññato bhikkhu santim eseyya
ajjhattaṃ upasantassa
n'atthi attā, kuto nirattaṃ.*¹⁷

"Let the monk inwardly calm himself,
Let him not seek peace from outside,
To one who is inwardly calm,
There is nothing taken up or rejected."

We came across the two terms *attaṃ nirattaṃ* earlier too, in our discussion of a verse in the *Duṭṭhatṭhakasutta*.¹⁸ There, the line *attaṃ nirattaṃ na hi tassa atthi* meant the absence of the idea of taking up and rejecting in an *arahant*. Very often scholars interpret the term *attaṃ* in this context as "self", which in our opinion is incorrect. The phrase *nādeti na nirassati* gives a clear hint as to the etymology of this term. It is derived from *dā* prefixed by *ā*, giving *ādatta*, which by syncopation becomes *ātta*, which again by shortening of the vowel comes as *atta*. *Niratta* is derived from *nirassati*.

These two terms, suggestive of a duality, remind us of the water pump we mentioned in our discussion of the vortex.¹⁹ There is nothing really automatic even in a water pump, which takes in and throws out. Due to these two aspects in the mechanism of a water pump, we call it a unit. From the point of view of a water pump, it is capable of performing both functions. It is from this point of view that we attribute a unitary significance to it. In this very concept of a unit, one can discern the delusion involved.

Delusion is the apex of the vicious triangle greed, hate and delusion. Greed and hate are the two feelers directed from the apex delusion. Though we regard them as two functions, the taking in and throwing out are simply two aspects of the same function. All this points to the depth of the idea of duality and to the vortex simile, which our commentarial tradition seems to have ignored.

It is the same theme of duality that comes up in the first two lines of that cryptic verse of the *Brāhmaṇa Vagga* in the *Dhammapada*, we had occasion to quote earlier. *Yassa pāraṃ apāraṃ vā, pārāpāraṃ na vijjati*.²⁰ To that Brahmin, that is the *arahant*, there is neither a farther shore nor a

hither shore nor both. There is something extraordinary about this statement.

Against this background, we can now advance a plausible interpretation to the puzzling verse we had quoted earlier in this discussion. The first two lines *tulam atulañ ca sambhavaṃ, bhavasāṅkhāram avassajī munī* could be understood as follows: "The Sage renounced the preparations for becoming, which give rise to a distinction between equal and unequal", that is to say, the Supreme Sage gave up those preparations productive of the dichotomy between the concepts of equal and unequal.

Now the next two lines *ajjhatarato samhāhito abhindi kavacam iv'attasambhavaṃ* could be explained as follows: "Inwardly content and concentrated he broke up the point of origin of self like an armour". This breaking up of the armour happened not at the moment he uttered this verse, but at the moment he attained perfect enlightenment. Then what is the provocation for making such a declaration at this juncture?

The Buddha renounced the preparations pertaining to the life span, *āyusāṅkhārā*, after several requests to that effect by Māra. It may seem that the Buddha bowed down to Māra's request and that he came under Māra's sway when he declared that the Tathāgata's Parinibbāna will take place three months hence. But the true implication of the verse in question is that the armour of Māra, the armour of self-origin, *attasambhava*, has been broken down already and as such he is not within the clutches of Māra.

Some scholars seem to identify this giving up of preparations for becoming, *bhavasāṅkhārā*, with the renouncing of preparations pertaining to the lifespan, *āyusāṅkhārā*. But there is a distinction between these two.

The former, that is *bhavasāṅkhārā*, are preparations productive of existence, which go to build up a *bhava*. These the Buddha had already done away with by breaching the *saṃsāric* vortex between *viññāṇa* and *nāmarūpa*. *Chinnaṃ vaṭṭaṃ na vattati*, "the whirlpool cut off whirls no more".²¹ Those eddies are no longer active in that consciousness.

Preparations pertaining to the life span, *āyusāṅkhārā*, have to be explained differently. The term *āyusāṅkhārā*, mentioned in the *Mahā-Parinibbānasutta*, refers to the ability the Buddha possessed by virtue of developing the four bases of success, *iddhipāda*, of lengthening his life span. Because Venerable Ānanda did not invite him at the correct moment

to make use of that ability, he renounced it at *cāpāla cetiya*. That renouncing is compared in that *Sutta* itself to a vomiting. The Buddha tells Ānanda that it is not in the nature of a Tathāgata to take in what he has already vomited, even for the sake of life.²²

So then, *āyusañkhārā* and *bhavañkhārā* have to be distinguished between. Preparations pertaining to the life span are not the same as preparations productive of existence or becoming.

Understood in this way, it becomes clear that all the attachments, aversions and delusions in the world stem from a non-understanding of the fact that the duality we have discussed so far is actually an interrelation. It is as if the two friends, who amicably prepared the chess board, forgot their friendship when they confronted each other as two sides.

This duality is a very subtle problem. The Buddha has pointed out how to resolve it through understanding by means of various meditation techniques. Perhaps the best illustration is the meditative attention by way of elements as stated in the *suttas*. We have already mentioned about this to some extent in a previous sermon while discussing the *Dhātuvibhaṅgasutta*.²³ If we are to analyse this technique of meditative attention by way of elements from a practical point of view, we may cite the relevant section from the *MahāHatthipadopamasutta* preached by Venerable Sāriputta. Addressing his fellow monks, Venerable Sāriputta says:

Katamā c'āvuso paṭhavīdhātu? Paṭhavīdhātu siyā ajjhattikā siyā bāhirā. Katamā c'āvuso ajjhattikā paṭhavīdhātu? Yaṃ ajjhattaṃ paccattaṃ kakkhaḷaṃ kharigataṃ upādiṇṇaṃ, seyyathīdaṃ kesā lomā nakhā dantā taco maṃsaṃ nahāru aṭṭhī aṭṭhimiñjā vakkhaṃ hadayaṃ yakanāṃ kilomakaṃ pihakaṃ papphāsaṃ antaṃ antaguṇaṃ udariyaṃ karīsaṃ, yaṃ vā paṇ'aññaṃ pi kiñci ajjhattaṃ paccattaṃ kakkhaḷaṃ kharigataṃ upādiṇṇaṃ, ayaṃ vuccat'āvuso ajjhattikā paṭhavīdhātu.

*Yā c'eva kho pana ajjhattikā paṭhavīdhātu yā ca bāhirā paṭhavīdhātu paṭhavīdhātudev'esā. Taṃ n'etaṃ mama n'eso 'ham asmi, na meso attā 'ti evaṃ etaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ. Evaṃ etaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya disvā paṭhavīdhatuyā nibbindati, paṭhavīdhatuyā cittaṃ virājeti.*²⁴

"What, Friends, is the earth element? The earth element may be either internal or external. What, Friends, is the internal earth element? Whatever is internal, belonging to oneself, hard, solid and clung to, that is, head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidney, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, faeces, or whatever else is internal, belonging to oneself, hard, solid and clung to, this is called, Friends, the internal earth element.

Now whatever is the internal earth element and whatever is the external earth element, both are simply the earth element; and that should be seen as it actually is with right wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.' Having seen it as it actually is with right wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the earth element, becomes dispassionate towards the earth element."

Venerable Sāriputta has not given here instances of the external earth element, because it is obvious enough, that is: whatever is external to the body.

A statement that is of paramount importance here is the following: *Yā c'eva kho pana ajjhattikā paṭhavīdhātu yā ca bāhirā paṭhavīdhātu paṭhavīdhātuvev'esā*, "now whatever is the internal element and whatever is the external earth element, both are simply the earth element". When regarded as earth element, both are the same. This is the premise from which insight takes off.

"That should be seen as it actually is with right wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'" With this insight into the earth element with right wisdom one gets disenchanted with it and becomes dispassionate.

As we pointed out earlier too, the term *virāga*, usually rendered by "detachment" or "dispassion", has a nuance suggestive of a "fading away".²⁵ Here the verb *virājeti* clearly brings out that nuance. Thus *paṭhavīdhatuyā cittaṃ virājeti* seems to imply something like "he makes the earth element fade away from his mind". We have already quoted such instances as *pītiyā ca virāgā*, "with the fading away of joy", and *avijjāvīrāgā*, "with the fading away of ignorance", to highlight this nuance of the term *virāga*.

In this context, too, it seems the function of disenchantment, *nibbidā*, is to see that whatever colour the earth element had infused in the mind is made to fade away. It is a detachment as well as a decolouration.

What, then, is the true purpose of resolving the distinction between internal and external with regard to the earth element? The purpose is the breaking up of the foundation for cravings, conceits and views.

For 'me' to acquire some object out of craving that object has to exist apart from 'me' and 'I' have to stand apart from it. The statement 'this is mine' presupposes a duality between 'me' and 'mine'. Similarly, the statement 'this am I', expressive of conceit, smacks of duality. For instance, one gazing at a mirror is imperceptibly involved in this duality when he tries to compare his face with its reflection on the mirror. This is the irony of the situation in ordinary life. But what we have here, in this *Sutta*, is the opposite viewpoint. Not: 'this is mine', not: 'this am I', not: 'this is my self'.

What fosters this opposite point of view is the very absence of the distinction between the internal and the external. The fundamental basis for acquisition or measuring is gone. It is as if the unending game of chess with all its vicissitudes has ended in a peaceful draw.

As a matter of fact, our entire *samsāric* existence is a chess game between the organic, *upādiṇṇa*, and the inorganic, *anupādiṇṇa*. For instance, the four elements within this body, the grasped par excellence, or the clung to, and the four elements as nutrition and atmosphere are always in conflict in their game of chess. This chess game has as its vicissitudes the disturbances of the three humours wind, bile and phlegm, on the physical side, and greed, hate and delusion on the mental side.

These disturbances are to a great extent the outcome of this false dichotomy. The task before a meditator, therefore, is the resolving of this conflict by a penetrative understanding of the mutual interrelation between the two sides, internal and external. When the gap between the two is removed, the mind becomes equanimous.

We are told that the contemplation of the four elements is an effective means of developing equanimity. Among the parts of our body, there are some we pride on and cherish, some others, like excreta and urine, we

abhor and detest. When regarded as mere elements, attachment and revulsion give place to equanimity. The description of the contemplation on elements, as found in the *Satipatthānasutta*, clearly illustrates this fact. The relevant section runs as follows:

Puna ca paraṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhu imam eva kāyaṃ yathāṭhitaṃ yathāpaṇihitaṃ dhātuso paccavekkhati: Atthi imasmiṃ kāye paṭhavīdhātu āpodhātu tejodhātu vāyodhātū'ti.

Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, dakkho goghātako vā goghātakantevāsī vā gāviṃ vadhitvā cātummahāpathe bilaso paṭvivhajitvā nisinno assa; evaṃ eva kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhu imam eva kāyaṃ yathāṭhitaṃ yathāpaṇihitaṃ dhātuso paccavekkhati: Atthi imasmiṃ kāye paṭhavīdhātu āpodhātu tejodhātu vāyodhātū'ti.²⁶

"Again, monks, a monk reflects on this same body as it stands and as it is disposed as consisting of elements thus: 'In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element'.

Just as a skilled butcher or his apprentice, having killed a cow were seated at the crossroads with it cut up into small pieces, so, too, a monk reflects on this same body as it stands and as it is disposed as consisting of elements thus: 'In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element'."

It is noteworthy that the monk is instructed to reflect on this same body as it stands and as it is disposed, *imam eva kāyaṃ yathāṭhitaṃ yathāpaṇihitaṃ*. These words are particularly significant, in that they do not imply an atomistic or microscopic analysis. The four elements are already there in the body, and though it is mentioned in brief here, in other discourses the organic instances for each of them are described at length.

The simile used in connection with this analysis is highly significant. When a butcher or his apprentice kills a cow, cuts it into small pieces and sits at the crossroads ready to sell the meat, he is no longer particular about the cow from which it came. He is conscious of it merely as a heap of meat. Similarly, the contemplation by way of elements inculcates an equanimous attitude.

Just as the distinction between the *upādiṇṇa* and the *anupādiṇṇa* is suggestive of the duality between the organic and the inorganic, the distinction between *ajjhatta* and *bahiddhā* has relevance to the duality between one's own and another's. This aspect of the reflection on elements emerges in the summary like section that follows:

Iti ajjhattaṃ vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati, bahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati, ajjhatabhiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati, "in this way he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body externally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body both internally and externally."

Here, too, the aim is to break down the dichotomy between one's own and another's. This contemplation is of a purpose to the extent that by it one realizes the fact that, whether internal or external, it is just the four elements. This norm is succinctly expressed as *yathā idaṃ tathā etaṃ, yathā etaṃ tathā idaṃ*,²⁷ "just as this, so is that; just as that, so is this".

Our minds are obsessed by the perception of diversity, *nānattasaññā*. According to colour and form, we distinguish objects in the outside world and give them names. It is a burden or a strain to the mind. The reflection by way of elements as given in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* could even be appreciated as a step towards the perception of unity, *ekattasaññā*, from this grosser perception of diversity. It tends to relaxation and unification of the mind.

So the purpose of this reflection by way of the elements, peculiar to the discourses, is to look upon the elements as void, in accordance with the Buddha's advice, *dhātuyo suññato passa*, "look upon the elements as void".²⁸

However, for some reason or other, perhaps due to the influence of some Indian schools of philosophy with a slant towards materialism, some Buddhist sects indulged in academic subtleties which seem to obsess the mind with the four elements with concepts about them, instead of the simpler reflection on elements characteristic of the *suttas*. Originally the purpose was to erase the four elements from the mind.

The original purpose was to make the four elements, the amorphous primaries which masquerade as form in the minds of beings for incalculable aeons, to fade away from the mind. But what happened later was to revel in atomistic analyses, which more or less followed the way of thinking peculiar to materialism. It ended up in hair-splitting analyses even literally, painting for instance the earth element all the more vividly in the mind. We have to assess this academic trend against the original purpose, unbiased by the traditional predilection for it. It is no exaggeration to say that all this tended to obscure the path to *Nibbāna* in the course of time.

The Buddha's 'research' was something entirely different. His 'research' into the four elements took a completely different course. In the *Nidānasamyutta* of the *Samyutta Nikāya* the Buddha proclaims the results of his research into the four elements.

Paṭhavīdhātuyāhaṃ, bhikkhave, assādapariyesanaṃ acarim̐. Yo paṭhavīdhatuyā assādo tad ajjhagamaṃ, yavatā paṭhavīdhātuyā assādo paññāya me so sudiṭṭho.

Paṭhavīdhātuyāhaṃ, bhikkhave, ādīnavapariyesanaṃ acarim̐. Yo paṭhavīdhatuyā ādīnavo tad ajjhagamaṃ, yavatā paṭhavīdhātuyā ādīnavo paññāya me so sudiṭṭho.

*Paṭhavīdhātuyāhaṃ, bhikkhave, nissaraṇapariyesanaṃ acarim̐. Yaṃ paṭhavīdhatuyā nissaraṇaṃ tad ajjhagamaṃ, yavatā paṭhavīdhātuyā nissaraṇaṃ paññāya me taṃ sudiṭṭhaṃ.*²⁹

"Monks, I went in search of the gratification in the earth element. Whatever gratification there is in the earth element, that have I found out; whatever is the range of the gratification of the earth element, that have I well discerned with wisdom.

Monks, I went in search of the danger in the earth element. Whatever danger there is in the earth element, that have I found out; whatever is the range of the danger of the earth element, that have I well discerned with wisdom.

Monks, I went in search of the stepping out from the earth element. Whatever stepping out there is from the earth element, that have I found out; whatever is the range of the stepping out from the earth element, that have I well discerned with wisdom."

Now this is the Buddha's research into the earth element. The discourse goes on to state the same fact with regard to the other three elements.

The term *assāda*, mentioned in this *Sutta*, is defined as the bodily pleasure and mental happiness, *sukhaṃ somanassaṃ*, arising due to the earth element. The danger in the earth element is its impermanent, suffering and changing nature, *aniccā dukkhā vipariṇāmadhammā*. The stepping out from it is the disciplining and abandonment of desire for it, *chandarāgavinayo chandarāgappahānaṃ*.

It is on the strength of this research that the Buddha even enjoined the reflection on the four requisites. The *Ariyavaṃsasutta* makes this sufficiently clear. In connection with the modes of reflection on the use of the four requisites, a thematic phrase occurs which is highly significant in this concern.

*Laddhā ca piṇḍapātaṃ agathito amucchito anajjhāpanno ādīnavadassāvī nissaraṇapañño paribhuñjati.*³⁰ "On getting alms food he partakes of it without greed, uninfatuated, unenslaved, being aware of the danger in it, with the wisdom in stepping out."

The terms *agathito amucchito anajjhāpanno*, "without greed, uninfatuated, unenslaved", are suggestive of the gratification which one has to withstand. The term *ādīnavadassāvī*, "being aware of the danger", is suggestive of overeating and other possible risks in taking food. The meaning of the expression *nissaraṇapañño*, "with the wisdom in stepping out", in the highest sense is taking food with the deeper idea of abandoning food in accordance with the cryptic dictum *āhāraṃ nissāya āhāraṃ pajahati*, "gives up food depending on food".³¹

It should be clear from the foregoing what the original idea behind the contemplation on the elements was and what happened later. The later trends seem to have ignored the fact that perception is a mirage. Research into these four elements is a matter for the physicist, though it is like chasing a mirage with thoughts and concepts. What is needed is the liberation of the mind from the perception of form that is ingrained in the minds of beings due to the four elements in this long *saṃsāra*.

All the meditation techniques the Buddha has taught are directed towards the fading away of this perception of form. Because of these four primaries we have a perception of form, which enables us to take signs. All the four are actually impermanent, but the perceptual data we have gathered dependent on them are indelibly imprinted on our minds. Signs taken up in the far distant past in one's *samsāra* can come up again and again as attachments and aversions to perpetuate one's *samsāric* existence. The thoughts and prolific concepts arise out of this perception of form.

In other words, we distinguish between one thing and another according to colour and shape. By evaluating them through attachments and aversions, we allow them to get deeply rooted in our mind. These are the latencies to perception, which in the *Madhupiṇḍikasutta* find mention in the expression *saññā nānuseñti*, "perceptions do not lie latent".³²

Whereas the *arahant* does away with these latencies, the non-*arahant* entertains them to some extent or other. These latencies account for the prolific concepts with which beings heap up *samsāric* suffering. In order to loosen the hold of these signs on our minds, the perilous aspect of the four elements has to be emphasized. That is why the Buddha in a number of discourses described to the monks the impermanence of the four elements. It was not his intention to encourage any atomistic analysis. He preached about the impermanence of the four elements to expose the hollowness and vanity of this drama of existence – to erase the perception of form, productive of this drama, from the minds of beings.

Now *sankhāra* is a term we often come across in the *Dhamma*. We happened to suggest a possible nuance of the term, when we brought up similes relating to the cinema and the theatre. *Sankhāra* is a term capable of comprehending the entire range of preparations that go to make up a theatrical performance.

Now the Buddha has related the story of this great earth in some discourses. But it is not an account of a scientific experiment, as our modern day scientists would offer. The Buddha describes how this great earth came up and how it gets destroyed in order to drive home into our minds the impermanence of the very stage on which we enact our

saṃsāric drama, thereby inculcating an attitude of disenchantment and dispassion, *nibbidā* and *virāga*.

These *saṅkhāras*, pertaining to our drama of existence on this gigantic stage, the earth, get deeply imprinted in our minds. They sink deep as latencies to perception, productive of existence. It is to eradicate them that the Buddha has placed before us the story of this great earth in some discourses. By far the best illustration comes in the *Aggaññasutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*.

According to it, at the beginning of this aeon the earth was immersed in a darkness and covered with water. The inhabitants were those who had come down from the *Ābhassara Brahma* World. They were sex-less, mind-made, feeding on joy, self-luminous and capable of moving through the air, *manomayā, pūtibhakkhā sayampabhā antalikkhacarā*.³³

After billions and billions of years, a savoury earth spread itself over the waters, like the tissue that forms over hot milk as it cools. It was very sweet and tempting. Some being of a greedy nature, exclaiming: ‘Ah! What can this be?’, tasted this savoury earth with his finger. Craving arose in him as a result of it. Others who saw him doing it did the same.

Then they all began digging into the savoury earth with their hands and eating it, with the result that their subtle bodies became gross, hard and solid. Craving also increased, and their minds became rougher and coarser. The environment changed in unison, becoming grosser and grosser. So we have here the perilous aspect. As the perils became manifest, the watery earth grew in solidity and the simple life grew in complexity.

Billions and billions of years passed until the earth assumed its present shape and appearance with all its gigantic mountains, rocks and buildings. But then, in the *Sattasuriyasutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha describes what happens to this great earth at the end of the aeon.

As the holocaust draws near, a second orb of the sun appears, and then a third, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth and a seventh. The great earth in its entirety, together with its mountains and rocks, goes ablaze, becoming just one huge flame of fire, consuming all before it without leaving any ash or soot, like in a spot where oil or ghee had burnt. So here we have no room for any atomism. In conclusion the Buddha brings out the true aim and purpose of this discourse.

*Evaṃ aniccā, bhikkhave, saṅkhārā, evaṃ addhuvā, bhikkhave, saṅkhārā, evaṃ anassāsikā, bhikkhave, saṅkhārā. Yāvañcidaṃ, bhikkhave, alaṃ eva sabbasaṅkhāresu nibbindituṃ alaṃ virajjituṃ alaṃ vimuccituṃ.*³⁴

"So impermanent, monks, are preparations, so unstable, monks, are preparations, so unsatisfying, monks, are preparations. So much so, monks, this is enough to get disenchanted with preparations, this is enough to get dispassionate with them, this is enough to get released from them".

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- ¹ M I 436, *MahāMālunkyasutta*.
² A I 87, *Āsāduppajahavagga*.
³ D II 31, *Mahāpadānasutta*, see sermon 3.
⁴ Sn 270, *Sūcilomasutta*.
⁵ Sn 273, *Sūcilomasutta*.
⁶ Spk I 304.
⁷ See sermon 27.
⁸ SN I 70, *Purisasutta*.
⁹ See sermon 3.
¹⁰ D II 32, *Mahāpadānasutta*.
¹¹ E.g. M I 263, *MahāTaṇhāsaiṅkhayasutta*.
¹² D II 107, *MahāParinibbānasutta*, see also A IV 312 and Ud 64.
¹³ Sv II 557 and Mp IV 154.
¹⁴ Nett 61.
¹⁵ Sn 843, *Māgandiyasutta*.
¹⁶ Sn 954, *Attadaṇḍasutta*.
¹⁷ Sn 919, *Tuvaṭṭakasutta*.
¹⁸ See sermon 5 on Sn 787, *Duṭṭhaṭṭhakasutta*.
¹⁹ See sermon 2.
²⁰ Dhṃ 385, *Brāhmaṇavagga*; see sermons 5, 18 and 19.
²¹ Ud 75, *DutiyaLakuṇṭakabhaddiyasutta*.
²² D II 119, *MahāParinibbānasutta*.
²³ See sermon 14.
²⁴ M I 185, *MahāHatthipadopamasutta*.
²⁵ See sermon 2.
²⁶ M I 57, *Satipaṭṭhānasutta*.
²⁷ Sn 203, *Vijayasutta*.
²⁸ Dhṃ-a III 117.
²⁹ S II 171, *Acarīṃsutta*.
³⁰ A II 27, *Ariyavaṃsasutta*.
³¹ A II 145, *Bhikkhunīsutta*.
³² M I 108, *Madhupiṇḍikasutta*.
³³ D III 84, *Aggaññasutta*.
³⁴ AN IV 103, *Sattasuriyasutta*.

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

*Etaṃ santaṃ, etaṃ paṇītaṃ, yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho sab-
būpadhipaṭinissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ.*¹

"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 assembly of the venerable meditative monks. This is the twenty-ninth sermon in the series of sermons on *Nibbāna*.

We made an attempt, in our last sermon, to highlight the impermanence of the stage trappings which from the beginning of an aeon to its end this great earth stage presents for the drama of existence of *samsāric* beings, enacted on it. Putting side by side in vivid contrast to each other, the description of the beginning of the aeon, as given in the *Aggaññasutta*, and the description of the destruction of the aeon, in the *Sattasuriyasutta*, we tried to arouse a powerful perception of impermanence, leading to disenchantment, which is the key to *Nibbāna*.

A resonant echo of these discourses of the Buddha, suggestive of the impermanence of this drama of existence and the earth stage on which it is enacted, comes to us through the *MahāHatthipadopamasutta*, preached by the venerable Sāriputta.

*Tassā hi nāma āvuso bāhirāya paṭhavīdhātuyā tāva mahallikāya
aniccatā paññāyissati, khayadhammatā paññāyissati, vayadhammatā
paññāyissati, vipariṇāmadhammatā paññāyissati, kiṃ pan' imassa mat-
taṭṭhakassa kāyassa taṇhupādiṇṇassa ahan'ti vā maman'ti vā asmī'ti vā,
atha khvāssa no t' ev' ettha hoti.*²

"Even of this external earth element, Friends, great as it is, an impermanence will become manifest, a liability to destruction will become manifest, a liability to waste away will become manifest, a liability to undergo change will become manifest, what to say of this ephemeral body clung to by craving as 'I' or 'mine' or 'am'? On the other hand there is no justification for such a clinging."

This pithy paragraph of the discourse is eloquent proof of the fact that it is possible to dispel the latencies to conceit leading to 'I'-ing and 'mine'-ning by penetrating into the impermanence of this puny internal earth element through the broader perspective of the impermanence of the vast external earth element.

*Animittaṅca bhāvehi, mānānusayamujjaha,*³ "Develop the signless, too, and give up the latency to conceit!", was the advice the Buddha gave to venerable Rāhula in the *Rāhulasutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*. It is clear from this advice that, when signs fade away through the perception of impermanence, latencies to conceit also lose their hold on the mind.

Instead of pervertingly exploiting the canonical discourses describing the impermanence of the external world with wrong reflection in order to indulge in worldly speculation, we should arouse radical reflection and project them into our own internal world in order to understand the vanity of this drama of life.

Where are the actors and actresses who played their part in the early acts of our drama of life? Where are those stage decorations and trappings? Though they are no more, so long as latencies to perception, amassed through them, persist in us, there is nothing to prevent us from indulging in thoughts and proliferations. When we reflect on the impermanence of the entire world, we get dispassionate about the heap of preparations in our drama of life, reckoned in terms of objects, events and persons.

When dispassion sets in, signs fade away, like in a blurred water-colour painting. For a meditator, developing the perception of impermanence, the world might appear like an indistinct water-painting, with blotches of colour.

When the figures in the painting cannot be distinguished according to colour and shape, there is less room for the perception of diversity, *nānattasaññā*. Thereby latencies to conceit, which give rise to divisions and conflicts are also attenuated. That is why the Buddha always reminds us of the perception of impermanence as an important subject of meditation. He has recommended in particular the signless concentration, for instance in the *Khandhasamyutta* of the *Samyutta Nikāya*.

*Tayome, bhikkhave, akusalavitakkā: kāmavitakko, byāpādavitakko, vihiṃsāvitakko. Ime ca, bhikkhave, tayo akusalavitakkā kva aparisesā nirujjhanti? Catūsu vā satipaṭṭhānesu supatiṭṭhita-cittassa animittaṃ vā samādhiṃ bhāvayato. Yāvañcidaṃ, bhikkhave, alam eva animitto samādhi bhāvetuṃ. Animitto, bhikkhave, samādhi bhāvito bahulīkato mahapphalo hoti mahānisaṃso.*⁴

"Monks, there are these three kinds of unskilful thoughts: sensual thoughts, thoughts of ill-will, thoughts of harming. And where, monks, do these three unskilful thoughts cease without remainder? For one who dwells with the mind well attended by the four foundations of mindfulness, or for one who develops the signless concentration. So much so that this is reason enough for one to develop the signless concentration. Monks, when the signless concentration is developed and cultivated it is of great fruit, of great benefit."

From this quotation it becomes clear, that there are two methods of making the three kinds of unskilful thoughts cease without residue. The first method is to have a mind well attended by the four foundations of mindfulness. The second method is the development of the signless concentration. The particle *vā*, "or", shows that it is an alternative. It seems, therefore, that by developing the signless concentration these thoughts and concepts do not get an opportunity, due to the very fact that signs fade away.

It is because of our *samsāric* habit of taking in signs that thoughts and proliferations arise in us. But even in our endeavour to liberate our minds from thoughts and proliferations, we cannot help resorting to a particular mode of taking in signs. One cannot do without them altogether.

We have often mentioned the reason why the Buddha proclaimed a middle path. It is in the nature of some things that, though they have to be given up, they cannot be fully dispensed with. So the middle path has also to be a gradual path, *anupubbapaṭipadā*.⁵ The middle path itself becomes a gradual path, because there has to be a graded system in the course of practice to be followed.

If we are to present the fundamental idea behind these two terms, the 'middle path' and the 'gradual path', we may say that the course of practice leading to *Nibbāna* is in principle both **pragmatic** and **relative**.

It is pragmatic in the sense that it has a practical value, as it is directed towards some goal. It is relative to the extent that the stages that go to make up the path have no absolute value in themselves. Each stage has only a relative value, being of significance in relation to the next stage. Every stage in the graded path is dependent and relative.

On an earlier occasion, we happened to mention the simile of the relay of chariots in the *Rathavinītasutta*.⁶ Like stage coaches, the chariots run relative to each other. It is an illustration of the principle of relativity.

So even in the attempt to liberate the mind from its hold on signs, we cannot help making use of a particular set of signs. In that attempt, we have to be guided by the first principles of relativity and pragmatism.

In order to explain these first principles, we made use of a certain simile in one of our earlier sermons. The simile is: sharpening a razor.⁷ To refresh our memory, the main purpose of bringing up this simile was to show the difference between meditative reflection, *sammasana*, and dogmatic adherence, *parāmasana*. Whereas *parāmasana* means tenacious grasping, *sammasana* is a particular way of holding lightly for some subtle purpose. We took up the razor simile to illustrate the distinction between these two.

If one grabs the razor roughly and moves it up and down the whetstone, it would get blunt. But if one catches hold of the razor in a relaxed nonchalant way, and mindfully sweeps the whetstone back and forth, it would get sharpened.

This way of reflection on preparations, or *sāṅkhārās*, reminds us of the two terms *vipassanā*, insight, and *anupassanā*, contemplation, which again are relevant to the theme of pragmatism and relativity.

As an illustration, let us take the case of a carpenter, planing a piece of wood. In the process of planing, from time to time he might hold up the piece of wood to his left eye, and with his right eye closed might give it a critical glance. There is something sinister about this way of looking. It is as if an expert is directing a fault-finding critical glance on the work of an inexperienced. But here it is the carpenter himself looking at his own artefact. Why does he do so? He is himself playing the role of a critic, in order to find out his shortcomings as a carpenter. If he complacently looks at it with excessive self-confidence, he can never rectify his errors and improve himself.

In the two terms *vipassanā* and *anupassanā* we have a special way of seeing that is penetrative as well as contemplative. It is, in short, an **objective approach to understand the subjective in one's experience, with a view to attaining perfection.**

In the *Theragāthā* we find Venerable MahāMoggallāna Thera stating the purpose of this special way of seeing in the following verse.

*Sukhumaṃ paṭivijjhanti
vālaggam usunā yathā
ye pañcakkhandhe passanti
parato no ca attato.*⁸

"They penetrate into that which is subtle,
Like a horse's hair with an arrow,
Who look upon the aggregates five,
As something alien, not their own."

Sakulā Therī in the *Therīgāthā* voices something similar in the following verse.

*Saṅkhāre parato disvā
hetujāte palokine
pahāsiṃ āsave sabbe
sītibhūta 'mhi nibbutā.*⁹

"By seeing as alien all preparations,
As causally arisen and fragile,
I have given up all influxes,
Become cool and extinguished."

In the discourses, personality view or *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* is described in such terms as *rūpaṃ attato samanupassati*, "he looks upon form as self", and *vedanaṃ attato samanupassati*, "he looks upon feeling as self".¹⁰ That is the way with the worlding, untaught in the *Dhamma*. But the noble disciple, who has heard the *Dhamma*, particularly the one who meditates, makes use of this looking upon as alien, *parato*. That is how his way of seeing becomes an in-sight, *vipassanā*, a contemplation, *anupassanā*.

The term *anupassanā* as a particular mode of seeing in accordance occurs in the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta* in a way that has puzzled many a scholar. Phrases like *kāye kāyānupassī viharati* and *vedanāsu vedanānupassī viharati* seem to defy translation.¹¹ "In the body he dwells seeing in accordance with the body". What is this "seeing in accordance"? That is what the carpenter is doing. This meditative carpenter, too, has to direct a critical glance at the preparations in order to find out their shortcomings. He has to look upon them as alien, *parato*. That is the significance of the expression *kāye kāyānupassī*.

If he starts off with the prejudice 'this is my body, what is wrong with this?', there is little chance that he will see its shortcomings, its impermanent, suffering, not-self characteristics.

If he is to see them, he has to adjust his point of view. He has to look upon the body as alien, *parato*. From this alien point of view, the meditative carpenter not only discovers the shortcomings in his artefact, but also adopts a technique of planing to smoothen out the rough edges.

What are these rough edges? The protuberances of craving, conceits and views. Though this is a pure heap of preparations, *suddhasaṅkhārapuñjo*,¹² as Venerable Vajirā calls it, there are three protuberances, three rough edges to be planed down in the form of craving, conceit and views. To smoothen them out, the meditative carpenter resorts to a kind of planing. Let us now listen to the sound of his planing.

Na etaṃ mama, na eso 'ham asmi, na me so attā.

Na etaṃ mama, na eso 'ham asmi, na me so attā.

Na etaṃ mama, na eso 'ham asmi, na me so attā.

"Not: 'this is mine', not: 'this am I', not: 'this is my self'."

"Not: 'this is mine', not: 'this am I', not: 'this is my self'."

"Not: 'this is mine', not: 'this am I', not: 'this is my self'."

It is this sharp "not", *na*, that cuts away the protruding defilements. So it seems that these phrases are not mentioned in the discourses for the purpose of grasping them as some sort of dogmatic formula. They have a pragmatic and relative value for the meditator in his planing to do away with those rough edges.

In this context, we may allude to the term *ussada*, which is particularly relevant to the theme. This term comes up in some discourses, but its meaning is not quite clear. It seems to imply something that comes up as a

protuberance or a swelling, something that surfaces and shows up. Cravings, conceits and views are such swellings or protuberances which show up from this heap of preparations. These swellings have to be planed down.

A verse in the *Tuvaṭṭakasutta* of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* in the *Sutta Nipāta* is suggestive of these nuances of the term *ussada*. It is a verse that can be used even for reflecting on the peace of *Nibbāna*, *upasamānussati*.

*Majjhe yathā samuddassa
ūmi na jāyatī, ṭhito hoti
evaṃ ṭhito aneja'ssa
ussadaṃ bhikkhu na kareyya kuhiñci.*¹³

"As in mid-ocean no waves arise,
And it is all steady and motionless,
So unmoved and steady let the monk be,
Let him not form any swelling anywhere."

This verse, by contrast, insinuates that the worldling's mind is much nearer the seashore, where ripples turn into waves and furious breakers. In mid-ocean there is not that fury, there are no waves or ripples. It is all calm and peaceful there.

So the meditative carpenter has to plane down the rugged surfaces with insightful contemplation, until those cravings, conceits and views that show up are smoothed out and only a pure heap of preparations, *suddhasaṅkhārapuñjo*, remains.

How the principle of relativity is applicable to this meditative planing down, in accordance with the concept of a gradual path of practice, *anupubbapaṭipadā*, is beautifully illustrated by the *Sakkapañhasutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*. This planing down the rough surface of thoughts and proliferations has to be done gradually and systematically. Even a carpenter, while planing a piece of wood, has to adjust his instrument from time to time in the course of planing. He might even pick up another plane when the surface gets smoother. The planing down of thoughts and proliferations, as a fading away of signs, is a gradual process.

The *Sakkapañhasutta* provides us with a good illustration of it in the form of a dialogue between Sakka, the king of gods, and the Buddha. The dialogue was so pithy and deep, that at the end of it Sakka attained the

fruit of stream-winning. The first question that is relevant to our discussion, is worded as follows.

*Chando pana, mārisa, kiṃnidāno kiṃsamudayo kiṃjātiko kiṃpabhavo; kismīm sati chando hoti, kismiṃ asati chando na hoti?*¹⁴

"What, dear sir, is the cause of desire, what is its arising, what is it born of, what is its origin? When what is there, does desire come to be; when what is not there, does desire not come to be?"

The Buddha's answer was:

Chando kho, devānaminda, vitakkanidāno vitakkasamudayo vitakka-jātiko vitakkapabhavo; vitakke sati chando hoti, vitakke asati chando na hoti.

"Desire, O King of Gods, has thinking as its cause, it arises with thinking, it has thinking as its origin. When thinking is there, desire comes to be; when thinking is not there, desire does not come to be!"

In the same way, Sakka asks: "what is the cause, the arising and the origin of thinking?", and the Buddha replies: "reckonings born of prolific perception (*papañcasaññāsāṅkhā*), O King of Gods, is the cause, the arising and the origin of thinking."

So then it seems that reckonings born of prolific perception, *papañcasaññāsāṅkhā*, is the cause of thinking. We happened to discuss this particular term at length in our analysis of the *Madhupiṇḍikasutta*.¹⁵ The term *papañca* actually stands for a proliferation of thoughts, of cravings, conceits and views. Now *sāṅkhā* has the sense of "reckoning" or "designation". The Buddha's reply therefore implies that thinking arises based on those designations.

The next question of Sakka is:

Kathaṃ paṭipanno pana, mārisa, bhikkhu papañcasaññāsāṅkhānirodhasārūppagāminīpaṭipadaṃ paṭipanno hotīti? "How has a monk to set out, dear sir, so as to become one who is treading the path of practice conducive to the cessation of reckonings born of prolific perception?"

The Buddha's answer to this question is directly relevant to our understanding of the gradual path, *anupubbapaṭipadā*.

Somanassam p'ahaṃ, devānaminda, duvidhena vadāmi, sevitabbam pi asevitabbam pi. Domanassam p'ahaṃ, devānaminda, duvidhena vadāmi, sevitabbam pi asevitabbam pi. Upekham p'ahaṃ, devānaminda, duvidhena vadāmi, sevitabbam pi asevitabbam pi.

"Even happiness, O King of Gods, I speak of as being of two kinds: one to be pursued, the other not to be pursued. Even unhappiness, O King of Gods, I speak of as being of two kinds: one to be pursued, the other not to be pursued. Even equanimity, O King of Gods, I speak of as being of two kinds: one to be pursued, the other not to be pursued."

Then the Buddha goes on to explain it further as follows:

Tattha yaṃ jaññā somanassaṃ: imaṃ kho me somanassaṃ sevato akusalā dhammā abhivaḍḍhanti, kusalā dhammā parihāyantīti, evarūpaṃ somanassaṃ na sevitaḅbaṃ. Tattha yaṃ jaññā somanassaṃ: imaṃ kho me somanassaṃ sevato akusalā dhammā parihāyanti, kusalā dhammā abhivaḍḍhanṭīti, evarūpaṃ somanassaṃ sevitaḅbaṃ. Tattha yañ ce savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ, yañ ce avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ, ye avitakke avicāre se pañītare.

"Out of them, whatever happiness about which one knows: 'while pursuing this happiness unskilful thoughts grow and skilful thoughts decline', that kind of happiness should not be pursued. Out of them, whatever happiness about which one knows: 'while pursuing this happiness unskilful thoughts decline and skilful thoughts grow', that kind of happiness should be pursued. And there, too, of that happiness which is accompanied by thinking and pondering, and of that which is not accompanied by thinking and pondering, whatever is not accompanied by thinking and pondering is the more excellent."

From this we can infer the fact that the happiness unaccompanied by thinking and pondering is nearer to *Nibbāna*. This is the criterion we can glean from this discussion.

In the same way, the Buddha goes on to analyze unhappiness as being twofold. Out of them, that which is productive of unskilful thoughts should be avoided, and that which is productive of skilful thoughts should be pursued. But therein, too, that which is unaccompanied by thinking and pondering is declared as more excellent than that which is accompanied by thinking and pondering. That is the path to *Nibbāna*.

So also is the case with regard to the analysis of equanimity. Therein, that equanimity productive of skilful thoughts has to be pursued, subject to the proviso that equanimity unaccompanied by thinking and pondering is more excellent than that which is so accompanied.

In summing up, the Buddha concludes the explanation with the sentence:

Evaṃ paṭipanno kho, devanam inda, bhikkhu papañcasaññāsāṅkhānirodhasārūppagāminipaṭipadaṃ paṭipanno hoti. "It is a monk who has thus set out, O King of Gods, who is treading the path of practice conducive to the cessation of reckonings born of prolific perceptions."

So then, this discourse is one that is highly significant from a pragmatic point of view.

Sometimes a little problem might crop up here. In our discussion of the *Madhupiṇḍikasutta* in an earlier sermon, we came across the following statement:

*Yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti, yaṃ papañceti tatonidānaṃ purisaṃ papañcasaññāsāṅkhā samudācaranti,*¹⁶ "what one reasons about, one proliferates; what one proliferates, owing to that reckonings born of prolific perception beset him" etc.

Apparently there is a contradiction between this statement in the *Madhupiṇḍikasutta* and the above quoted reply by the Buddha in the *Sakkapañhasutta*, where thinking is said to be the cause of desire, and reckonings born of prolific perception are said to be the cause of thinking. But actually there is no contradiction, since the raw material for thinking is the set of reckonings or worldly concepts born of prolific perception. Proliferation only aggravates the situation by further ramification of concepts, which overwhelm and obsess the person concerned.

In other words, there is a peculiar circularity involved in the process. Even for thinking concepts evolved by prolific perception are utilized. In the course of thinking proliferation takes over, with the result that those concepts throw up a flush that tends to overwhelm and obsess the one who initiated the whole process. As in the case of a fermenting agent, used in the preparation of liquor, there is a circularity in this proliferation, which makes the confusion in *samsāra* worst confounded.

Now in order to break this cycle, a systematic and gradual approach is needed. That is what the *Sakkapañhasutta* lays down. Here is a task that cannot be done slipshod. It is one that calls for mindfulness and circumspection.

The Buddha has described in minor detail the modus operandi from the rugged outset proceeding by gradual stages towards subtler and subtler objectives. It is a forked path, where one has to proceed always keeping to the right, choosing the skilful in preference to the unskilful, and intuitive in preference to the ratiocinative. So here we have a wonderfully graded path that combines relativity with pragmatism.

If our discussion of the terms *vitakka*, *papañca* and *papañcasaññā-saṅkhā* has already revealed their incompatibility with insight, there cannot be any confusion on coming across canonical references to the *arahattaphalasangāmi* as *avitakkasamādhī*, "thoughtless concentration". This term has puzzled many a scholar.

We find, for instance, in the *Subhūti*sutta of the *Jaccandhavagga* of the *Udāna* a reference to *avitakkasamādhī*. There it is said that the Venerable Subhūti, an *arahant*, was sitting cross-legged in front of the Buddha with his body erect, having attained to *avitakkasamādhī*, and that the Buddha uttered the following paean of joy on seeing him so seated:

*Yassa vitakkā vidhūpitā
ajjhataṃ suvikappitā asesā,
taṃ saṅgam aticca arūpasaññī
catuyogātigato na jātim eti.*¹⁷

This is a verse with a very deep meaning, but before getting down to its meaning as such, we cannot help making some observations about the commentarial explanation of the term *avitakkasamādhī*, "thoughtless concentration".

According to the commentary, *avitakkasamādhī* stands for all levels of concentration, both fine-material, *rūpāvacara* and immaterial, *arūpāvacara*, from the second *jhāna* upwards. This is an interpretation purely from the *samatha* or tranquillity standpoint. The commentary goes on to say that in the present context it means *arahattaphalasangāmi*, based on the fourth *jhāna*, *idha pana catutthajhānapādako arahattaphalasangāmi avitakkasamādhī'ti adhippeto.*¹⁸

But we have to point out that in the light of the foregoing observations on *vitakka* and *papañca*, *avitakkasamādhī* is not a term that is relevant merely to the *samatha* aspect of Buddhist meditation. It is not simply a term that connotes all *jhānas* devoid of thought, *vitakka*. It is a term directly relevant to insight, *vipassanā*.

The purpose of *samatha* is to temporarily suppress thought, *vik-khambhanappahāna*, abandonment by suppression. It is the task of insight to dig into the roots of thinking and clear up the mess, making them ineffective. In other words, it is of relevance to abandonment by eradication, *samucchedappahāna*. It is in that sense that *avitakkasamādhī* stands for *arahattaphalasamādhī*.

But now in order to clarify this point further, let us get down to the meaning of this difficult verse. It might be easier for comprehension if we explain the four lines one by one. The first line is *yassa vitakkā vidhūpitā*. There the commentary interprets *vitakkā* as all wrong thoughts, such as those of sensuality. The word *vidhūpitā* gets the following comment: *ariyamaggañāṇena santāpitā susamucchinṇā*, "burnt up by the knowledge of the noble path and fully eradicated".

However, we happened to mention in an earlier sermon that the word *vidhūpita* has an extremely deep meaning. Particularly in a context where the two words *sandhūpeti* and *vidhūpeti* were found together, we pointed out that the *dhūpa* element in both words is suggestive of a peculiar ritual connected with incense.¹⁹ Fragrant incense powder is used for the propitiation of gods, while caustic types are used for exorcising evil spirits. So *vidhūpita* could mean "smoking out" or "expelling" of thoughts in this context.

Now as regards the second line, *ajjhattaṃ suvikappitā asesā*, the commentary takes *suvikappitā* as an equivalent of *susamucchinṇā*, "fully eradicated". But it is more likely that the word *vikappita* basically signifies some form of "building up", since it is derived from the root *kḷp*, "to make, build, construct, fit out", from which Sanskrit words like *vikalpa*, *saṃkalpa*, *ākalpa* and *kalpanā* are derived. *Ajjhattaṃ suvikappitā* taken together would therefore mean "well constructed within". The second line could now be paraphrased as *yassa ajjhattaṃ suvikappitā vitakkā asesā vidhūpitā*, "in whom thoughts, well constructed within, have been smoked out without residue".

Let us now try to unravel the meaning of the last two lines, *taṃ saṅgam aticca arūpasaññī, catuyogātigato na jātim eti*. The commentary explains the word *saṅgam* as implying attachment to defilements such as lust, but the attachment meant in this context is attachment to thoughts, *vitakka*. *Taṃ saṅgam aticca* means having gone beyond the attachment to thoughts.

Then comes a term which is even more abstruse: *arūpasaññī*. The commentary adopts a queer mode of exegesis here. It says: *ruppanasañkhātassa ca vikārassa tattha abhāvato nibbikārahetubhāvato vā 'arūpan' ti laddhanāmaṃ nibbānaṃ ārammaṇaṃ katvā*. *Nibbāna* is called *arūpa* because it is devoid of change that is reckoned as an affliction, *ruppana*, and *arūpasaññī* therefore means 'one who is percipient of *Nibbāna* as the goal of the path'.

It is noteworthy that the compound term *arūpasaññī* could be analyzed in two ways. One can split it up as *arūpa + saññī*, or as *a + rūpasaññī*, a signifying negation equivalent to *na*. In the first case, it gives the meaning "percipient of the immaterial" realm. In the second case, the meaning is "devoid of perception of form". There is a subtle difference between these two possible senses. The commentarial interpretation prefers the first sense, trying to establish the term *arūpa* as an epithet for *Nibbāna* rather arbitrarily. It is the second possible interpretation that fits the context. *Arūpasaññī* means devoid of *rūpasaññā*, *a + rūpasaññī*.

In one of our earlier sermons, we had occasion to mention that the perception of form is a basic reason for thought activity, as it enables one to pick up signs. By way of illustration, we alluded to the following verse in the *Jaṭāsutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*:

*Yattha nāmañca rūpañca,
asesaṃ uparujjhati,
paṭighaṃ rūpasaññā ca,
ettha sā chijjate jaṭā.*²⁰

"Where name and form
As well as resistance and perception of form
Are completely cut off,
It is there that the tangle gets snapped."

So it is that same *rūpasaññā* that finds mention here too in this problematic verse. *Arahattaphalasamādhī* is not an approach towards *arūpasaññā*, but a release from *rūpasaññā* in toto. As we have already pointed out on an earlier occasion, *arūpa* still has the seed of *rūpa* in it. *Arūpa* is only a shadow of *rūpa* and presupposes it.

Therefore, the reference in this verse is not to *arūpa*. *Arūpasaññī* has a deeper meaning than that. It implies release from the perception of form, *rūpasaññā*, which sustains the illusion of permanence and encourages the grasping of signs. Perception of form and the idea of resistance, *paṭigha*, that goes with it, is at the root of this *samsāric* problem. Now *arūpasaññī* implies the absence of that *rūpasaññā* in the *arahattaphalasamādhī*.

The third line, *taṃ saṅgam aticca arūpasaññī*, could therefore be rendered as "having gone beyond attachment (to thoughts) and being free from the perception of form".

Now we are left with the last line of the verse: *catuyogātigato na jātim eti*. *Catuyogā* means the four yokes, namely those of sensuality, existence, views and ignorance, *kāma*, *bhava*, *diṭṭhi*, *avijjā*. *Catuyogātigato na jātim eti* conveys the idea that the Venerable *Arahant* Subhūti, who has gone beyond the four yokes, comes not back to birth. So this particular verse reveals to us a deeper dimension of the term *avitakkasamādhī*.

Coming back to the question of smoking out or exorcising thoughts, it seems thoughts, or *vitakkā*, are comparable to the army of Māra. In this concern, the important issue of thoughts, so relevant to the life of a meditator, finds an interesting answer. The army of Māra is, in the last analysis, our thoughts themselves. Generally we take references to an army of Māra in its gross sense. But in some *Suttas*, like the *Padhānasutta* in the *Sutta Nipāta*, the army of Māra is defined in terms of thoughts. For instance, one reads in the *Padhānasutta*:

*Kāmā te paṭhamā senā,
dutiya aratī vuccatī,
tatiyā khuppiāsā te,
catutthī taṅhā pavuccatī.*²¹

"Sense desires are your first battalion,
And boredom is reckoned the second,
Hunger and thirst comes as the third,
And craving is called the fourth."

The word *kāmā* in this context does not refer to pleasurable objects as such, though that is what is usually meant by it. Rather, it refers to thoughts about pleasurable objects. In fact, *kāmā* in its real sense does imply thoughts about pleasurable objects, as clearly stated in the following verse of the *Samyutta Nikāya*.

*Na te kāmā yāni citrāni loke,
saṅkapparāgo purisassa kāmo,
tiṭṭhanti citrāni tatheva loke,
athettha dhīrā vinayanti chandaṃ.*²²

"They are not the pleasures, those charming things in the world,
Lustful thought is the pleasure for a man,
They go on as before, those charming things in the world,
But it is the desire for them, that the wise discipline."

As we already mentioned in our discussion of the *Sakkapañhasutta*, desire is the cause of thinking. There, the relation between desire and thought is recognized. It is the desire for pleasure that those who are prudently wise discipline and dispel. All this goes to prove that the word *kāmā* primarily refers, not to the objects of sense desire, but to thoughts about them. So, in the last analysis, we are confronted with the question of thought.

For instance, hunger and thirst, *khuppiṭṭāsā*, are cited as another battalion of Māra. Here, too, it is not hunger and thirst in themselves that represent the army of Māra. It is thoughts about them, such as *kiṃ su asissāmi, kuvaṃ vā asissaṃ*, "what shall I eat, where shall I eat". For we read in the *Sāriputtasutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*:

*Kiṃ su asissāmi, kuvaṃ vā asissaṃ
dukkhaṃ vata settha, kvajja sessaṃ
ete vitakke paridevaneyye,
vinayetha sekho aniketasārī.*²³

"What shall I eat, where shall I eat?
Badly have I slept, where shall I sleep?
Such miserable thoughts let the trainee discipline,
As he wanders forth without an abode."

Against this background of the paramount importance attached to thoughts, we can reassess the significance of the following verse in the *Bodhivagga* of the *Udāna*, we had already quoted in a previous sermon.

*Yadā have pātubhavanti dhammā,
Ātāpino jhāyato brāhmaṇassa,
Vidhūpayaṃ tiṭṭhati Mārasenaṃ,
Suriyo 'va obhāsayaṃ antalikkhaṃ.*²⁴

"When phenomena manifest themselves,
To the resolutely meditating Brahmin,
He stands fumigating the hordes of *Māra*,
Even as the sun irradiating the firmament."

After his enlightenment the Buddha spent the first week seated under the Bodhi-tree and during the last watch of the night of the seventh day reflected on the law of dependent arising both in the direct and reverse order. This joyous utterance has an allusion to it. It is when the insight into conditioned phenomena dawns on the contemplating *arahant* that he smokes out the hordes of *Māra*, like the sun illuminating the sky.

In the light of this simile, we can now understand how the hordes of *Māra* are dispelled. It is the reflection on the law of dependent arising in direct and reverse order that dispels the denizens of darkness of ignorance, namely thoughts.

The principle underlying the law of dependent arising is summed up in the following abstract formula, which we had discussed at length:

*Imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti,
imassuppādā idaṃ uppajjati,
imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti,
imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati.*

"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."

When this principle is applied in a thorough-going way to conditioned phenomena, they tend to fade away. That is how thoughts are dispelled. In the twelve-linked formula each pair, for example *avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā*, is based on this dynamic principle represented by the term *paccaya*. A penetrative reflection into arising and ceasing in a flash deprives thoughts of their evocative power and renders them nugatory. This is the smoking out of the army of *Māra*, the thoughts.

Now to hark back to the *avitakkasamādhi*, we come across an allusion to it in the *Sāriputtatheragāthā*.

*Avitakkaṃ samāpanno
sammāsambuddhasāvako
ariyena tuṅhībhāvena
upeto hoti tāvade.*²⁵

"The Fully Awakened One's disciple,
On attaining to thoughtless musing,
Is at once endowed with a silence
That is of the ennobling type."

This *avitakkasamādhi*, then, is none other than the *arahattaphala-samādhi*, which is known as *ariyo tuṅhībhāvo*, "noble silence". This is not to be confused with the second *jhāna*, in which thinking and pondering have been calmed down by *samatha*, tranquillity meditation. Noble silence in the highest sense is *arahattaphalasamādhi*, because in it the question of thoughts is fully resolved. That, indeed, is the *avitakkasamādhi*. We get another allusion to this thoughtless concentration in *Vimalātherīgāthā*.

*Nisinnā rukkhamūlamhi
avitakkassa lābhini.*²⁶

"Seated am I, at the root of a tree,
A winner to the thoughtless state."

We come across a long verse in the *Dhītarosutta* of the *Mārasaṃyutta* in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, where again there is a reference to this thoughtless concentration. To quote the relevant section:

*Passaddhakāyo suvimuttacitto
asaṅkhārāno satimā anoko
aññāya dhammaṃ avitakkajhāyī.*²⁷

"In body relaxed, in mind well freed,
Concocting not, mindful, abode-less,
Well knowing the Norm, he muses thoughtless."

All this points to the fact that the *arahattaphalasangāmi* is called *avittakkasāngāmi* in a very special sense. It is relevant to insight meditation and not to mere tranquillity meditation. The problem of thoughts could be fully resolved only when the reckonings born of prolific perception are abandoned.

In the *Cūlavagga* of the *Udāna* we get a reference to this aspect of the *arahattaphalasangāmi*.

*Tena kho pana samayena bhagavā attano papañcasaññāsāṅkhāpāhānaṃ paccavekkhamāno nisinno hoti.*²⁸ "At that time the Fortunate One was seated reflecting on his abandonment of reckonings born of prolific perceptions".

At the time the mind is free from worldly concepts born of prolific perception, inwardly all thoughts are rendered powerless. Thoughts do not come up and there is no grasping of signs. It is to highlight this fact that the terms *avittakkajhāna* and *avittakasāngāmi* are used.

By way of further proof, we may cite the following two verses in the *Samyojanasutta* of the *Sagāthakavagga* in the *Samyutta Nikāya*. A deity poses the question:

*Kiṃsu saṃyojano loko,
kiṃsu tassa vicāraṇaṃ,
kissassa vipphānena
nibbānaṃ iti vuccati?*²⁹

"What is the fetter of the world,
What is its trailing along?
By giving up what, do they say,
Nibbāna is attained?"

And the Buddha gives the answer:

*Nandī saṃyojano loko,
vittakassa vicāraṇaṃ,
taṇhāya vipphānena
nibbānaṃ iti vuccati.*

"To delight enfeathered is the world,
Thought is its trailing along.
It is that craving, by giving up which,
They say, *Nibbāna* is attained."

Here, again, we have an indication of the relevance of thoughts to the question of insight. The *Sundarikabhāradvājasutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta* has the following allusion to the qualities of an *arahant*:

*Bhavāsavā yassa vacī kharā ca
vidhūpitā atthagatā na santi.*³⁰

"In whom the influxes of existence,
And the sediments of speech as well,
Are smoked out, gone down, and exist no more."

The commentary takes the word *vacī kharā* to mean "harsh speech".³¹ There is some imbalance between the two terms *bhavāsavā* and *vacī kharā*, if the commentarial interpretation is granted. Harsh speech could ill afford to get coupled with influxes of existence to be cited as fundamental defilements extinct in an *arahant*. It seems *vacī kharā* has a deeper significance than that. It probably means the sediments or dregs (Sanskrit *kṣāra*) of speech, namely the worldly concepts and designations which, as *papañcasaññāsankhā*, reckonings born of prolific perception, form the basis of all thoughts.

In the *arahant*, therefore, influxes of existence as well as sediments of speech, are smoked out, gone down and made extinct. This, then, seems to be the most plausible interpretation of the two lines in question, *bhavāsavā yassa vacī kharā ca, vidhūpitā atthagatā na santi*.

So we have garnered sufficient canonical evidence to conclude that the terms *vitakka* and *papañca* are particularly relevant to the life of a meditator. Also, the fact that the *arahattaphalasamādhi* has been called *avitakkasamādhi*, shows that the conquest of thoughts is not of a temporary type, as in the case of tranquillity meditation. On the other hand, it is a transcendence of a more radical type, through an insight into the relative validity of worldly concepts, their falsifying nature and the perception of permanence underlying them.

Avitakkasamādhi is a term used to denote that state of complete emancipation of the mind by making all signs fade away, so that the whole world appears like a blotched water-colour painting, thus freeing the mind from the perception of diversity, without even resorting to a perception of unity.

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- ¹ M I 436, *MahāMālunkyasutta*.
² M I 185, *MahāHatthipadopamasutta*.
³ Sn 342, *Rāhulasutta*; cf. also S I 188, *Ānandasutta*; Th 1226, *Vaṅgīsatheragāthā*; Thī 20, *Abhirūpanandātherīgāthā*.
⁴ S III 93, *Piṇḍolysutta*.
⁵ E.g. M III 1, *Gaṇakamoggallānasutta*.
⁶ M I 149, *Rathavinītasutta*.
⁷ See sermon 5.
⁸ Th 1160, *MahāMoggallānatheragāthā*.
⁹ Thī 101, *Sakulātherīgāthā*.
¹⁰ E.g. M I 300, *CūlaVedallasutta*.
¹¹ M I 56, *Satipaṭṭhānasutta*.
¹² S I 135, *Vajirāsutta*.
¹³ Sn 920, *Tuvaṭṭakasutta*.
¹⁴ DN II 277, *Sakkapañhasutta*.
¹⁵ MN I 109, *Madhupiṇḍikasutta*; see sermon 11 and 12.
¹⁶ MN I 112, *Madhupiṇḍikasutta*; see sermon 11.
¹⁷ Ud 71, *Subhūtisutta*.
¹⁸ Ud-a 348.
¹⁹ S III 89, *Khajjanīyasutta*, see sermon 23
²⁰ S I 13, *Jaṭāsutta*; see sermon 11.
²¹ Sn 436, *Padhānasutta*.
²² S I 22, *Nasantisutta*.
²³ Sn 970, *Sāriputtasutta*.
²⁴ Ud 3, *Bodhivagga*; see sermon 23.
²⁵ Th 999, *Sāriputtatheragāthā*.
²⁶ Thī 75, *Vimalātherīgāthā*.
²⁷ S I 126, *Dhītarosutta*.
²⁸ Ud 77, *Papañcakhayasutta*.
²⁹ S I 39, *Samyojanasutta*.
³⁰ Sn 472, *Sundarikabhāradvājasutta*.
³¹ Pj II 409.

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

*Etaṃ santaṃ, etaṃ paṇītaṃ, yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho sab-
būpadhipaṭinissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ.*¹

"This is peaceful, this is excellent, namely the stilling of all prepara-
tions, the relinquishment of all assets, the destruction of craving, de-
tachment, cessation, extinction."

With the permission of the assembly of the venerable meditative
monks. This is the thirtieth sermon in the series of sermons on *Nibbāna*.

In our previous sermon we discussed the way of liberating the mind
from the grip of thoughts, which are comparable to the army of Māra by
means of the gradual and systematic mode of practice based on the twin
principles of pragmatism and relativity. We also made an attempt to
understand why the *arahattaphalasamādhī* of the *arahant*, who arrives at
the non-prolific state by gradually attenuating cravings, conceits and
views, comes to be called *avitakkasamādhī*, "thoughtless concentration".

This *avitakkasamādhī* is the 'noble silence' in its highest sense. It is
not the temporary subsidence of thinking and pondering as in tranquillity
meditation. It goes deeper in that it routs the hosts of Māra at their very
citadel, as it were, by penetrative wisdom.

The other day, with special reference to the *Sakkapañhasutta* in the
Dīgha Nikāya, we outlined in brief a path of practice gradually tending
towards the cessation of reckonings born of prolific perception. That
discourse expounds a happiness, an unhappiness and an equanimity to be
pursued, and a happiness, an unhappiness and an equanimity not to be
pursued.

We get a clear enunciation of these two kinds of happiness, unhappi-
ness and equanimity in the *Salāyatanavibhaṅgasutta* of the *Majjhima
Nikāya*. In that discourse, the Buddha gives an exposition of thirty-six
pathways of thought of beings under the heading *chattiṃsa sattapadā*,
literally "thirty-six steps of beings".²

They are listed as follows:

- 1) *Cha gehasitāni somanassāni*, "six kinds of happiness based on the household life".
- 2) *Cha nekkhammasitāni somanassāni*, "six kinds of happiness based on renunciation".
- 3) *Cha gehasitāni domanassāni*, "six kinds of unhappiness based on the household life".
- 4) *Cha nekkhammasitāni domanassāni*, "six kinds of unhappiness based on renunciation".
- 5) *Cha gehasitā upekkhā*, "six kinds of equanimity based on the household life".
- 6) *Cha nekkhammasitā upekkhā*, "six kinds of equanimity based on renunciation".

The 'six' in each case refers to the six objects of sense, namely form, sound, smell, taste, tangible and idea, *rūpa, sadda, gandha, rasa, phoṭṭhabba, dhamma*. Now in order to acquaint ourselves with the six kinds of happiness based on the household life, let us try to understand the definition of the first kind, that is to say 'form', as the object of the eye.

Cakkhuvīññeyyānaṃ rūpānaṃ iṭṭhānaṃ kantānaṃ manāpānaṃ manoramānaṃ lokāmisapaṭisaṃyuttānaṃ paṭilābhaṃ vā paṭilabhato samanupassato pubbe vā paṭiladdhapubbaṃ atītaṃ niruddhaṃ vipariṇataṃ samanussarato uppajjati somanassaṃ, yaṃ evarūpaṃ somanassaṃ, idaṃ vuccati gehasitaṃ somanassaṃ.

"When one regards as an acquisition an acquisition of forms, cognizable by the eye, that are desirable, charming, agreeable, delightful, connected with worldly gains, or when one recalls what was formerly acquired that has passed, ceased and changed, happiness arises. Such happiness as this is called happiness based on the household life."

The happiness based on renunciation is defined as follows:

Rūpānaṃ tveva aniccataṃ viditvā vipariṇānavirāgaṇirodhaṃ: 'Pubbe c'eva rūpā etarahi ca sabbe te rūpā aniccā dukkhā vipariṇāmadhammā 'ti, evaṃ etaṃ yathābhūtaṃ samappaññāya passato uppajjati somanassaṃ, yaṃ evarūpaṃ somanassaṃ, idaṃ vuccati nekkhammasitaṃ somanassaṃ.

"When by knowing the impermanence, change, fading away and cessation of forms one sees as it actually is with right wisdom that forms both formerly and now are all impermanent, suffering and subject to change, happiness arises. Such happiness as this is called happiness based on renunciation."

Then the unhappiness based on the household life is explained in the following words:

Cakkhuvīññeyyānaṃ rūpānaṃ iṭṭhānaṃ kantānaṃ manāpānaṃ manoramānaṃ lokāmisapaṭisaṃyuttānaṃ appaṭilābhaṃ vā appaṭilabhato samanupassato pubbe vā appaṭiladdhapubbaṃ atūtaṃ niruddhaṃ vipariṇataṃ samanussarato uppajjati domanassaṃ, yaṃ evarūpaṃ domanassaṃ, idaṃ vuccati gehasitaṃ domanassaṃ.

"When one regards as a non-acquisition the non-acquisition of forms cognizable by the eye that are desirable, charming, agreeable, delightful, connected with worldly gains, or when one recalls what was formerly not acquired that has passed, ceased and changed, unhappiness arises. Such unhappiness as this is called unhappiness based on the household life."

The description of unhappiness based on renunciation has a special significance to insight meditation. It runs:

Rūpānaṃ tveva aniccatāṃ viditvā vipariṇānavirāganirodhaṃ: 'Pubbe c'eva rūpā etarahi ca sabbe te rūpā aniccā dukkhā vipariṇāmadhammā 'ti, evaṃ etaṃ yathābhūtaṃ samappaññāya disvā anuttaresu vimokhesu pihaṃ upaṭṭhāpeti: 'kadā 'ssu nāma' ahaṃ tad āyatanaṃ upasampajja viharissāmi yad ariyā etarahi āyatanaṃ upasampajja viharanti'ti, iti anuttaresu vimokhesu pihaṃ upaṭṭhāpayato uppajjati pihapaccayā domanassaṃ, yaṃ evarūpaṃ domanassaṃ, idaṃ vuccati nekkhammasitaṃ domanassaṃ.

"When by knowing the impermanence, change, fading away and cessation of forms one sees as it actually is with right wisdom that forms both formerly and now are all impermanent, suffering and subject to change, one arouses a longing for the supreme deliverances thus: 'When shall I enter upon and abide in that sphere that the Noble Ones now enter upon and abide in?' In one who arouses such a longing for the supreme deliverances unhappiness arises conditioned by that longing. Such unhappiness as this is called unhappiness based on renunciation."

The description of unhappiness based on renunciation brings up some important terms worth discussing. *Anuttāresu vimokhesu* is a reference to the three supreme deliverances known as *animitta*, the "signless", *appaṇihita*, the "undirected", and *suññata*, the "void".

The reference to an *āyatana*, "sphere", in this passage is particularly noteworthy. The sphere that the Noble Ones enter on and abide in is none other than the sphere alluded to in the famous *Sutta* on *Nibbāna* in the *Udāna*, beginning with *atthi, bhikkhave, tad āyatanaṃ, yattha n' eva paṭhavī na āpo* etc., "Monks, there is that sphere in which there is neither earth nor water" etc.³ We have pointed out that it is a reference to the cessation of the six sense-spheres as a realization.⁴ So the sphere that the Noble Ones enter on and abide in is the very cessation of the six sense-spheres.

In the same *sutta* passage in the *Udāna*, we came across the three terms *appatitthaṃ, appavattaṃ* and *anārammaṇaṃ*, the "unestablished", the "non continuing" and the "objectless", which we identified as allusions to the three deliverances.

The word *pihā* (Sanskrit *spṛhā*, "longing", "desire"), occurring in this context, shows that there need not be any hesitation in using words implying desire in connection with *Nibbāna*. It is true that such a desire or longing for *Nibbāna* makes one unhappy. But that unhappiness is preferable to the unhappiness based on the household life. That is why it is upgraded here as unhappiness based on renunciation.

So far we have quoted instances of the six kinds of happiness based on the household life, *cha gehasitāni somanassāni*; the six kinds of happiness based on renunciation, *cha nekkhammasitāni somanassāni*; the six kinds of unhappiness based on the household life, *cha gehasitāni domanassāni*; and the six kinds of unhappiness based on renunciation, *cha nekkhammasitāni domanassāni*. The 'six' in each case refers to the objects of the six senses. Now let us take up a paradigm to understand the six kinds of equanimity based on the household life, *cha gehasitā upekkhā*.

Cakkhunā rūpaṃ disvā uppajjati upekkhā bālassa mūlhassa puthujjanassa anodhijinassa avipākajinassa anādīnavadassāvino assutavato puthujjanassa, yā evarūpā upekkhā rūpaṃ sā nātivattati, tasmā sā upekkhā 'gehasitā' ti vuccati.

"On seeing a form with the eye, equanimity arises in a foolish infatuated worldling, in an untaught worldling who has not conquered his limitations, who has not conquered the results [of *kamma*], and who is not aware of danger, such equanimity as this does not transcend form, that is why it is called equanimity based on the household life."

The equanimity of a worldling, untaught in the *Dhamma*, who has not conquered limitations and defilements, and who has not conquered the results of *kamma*, is incapable of transcending form. His equanimity is accompanied by ignorance.

Then comes the description of equanimity based on renunciation, *nekkhammasitā upekkhā*.

Rūpānaṃ tveva aniccataṃ viditvā vipariṇānavirāganīrodhaṃ: 'Pubbe c'eva rūpā etarahi ca sabbe te rūpā aniccā dukkhā vipariṇāmadhammā 'ti, evaṃ etaṃ yathābhūtaṃ samappaññāya passato uppajjati upekkhā, yā evarūpā upekkhā rūpaṃ sā ativattati, tasmā sā 'upekkhā nekkhammasitā 'ti vuccati.

"When by knowing the impermanence, change, fading away and cessation of forms one sees as it actually is with right wisdom that forms both formerly and now are all impermanent, suffering and subject to change, equanimity arises. Such equanimity as this transcends form, that is why it is called 'equanimity based on renunciation'."

The same kind of reflection on impermanence upon occasion gives rise to happiness, unhappiness and equanimity, according to the attitude taken up. Unlike the equanimity born of ignorance, this equanimity, born of right wisdom, transcends form. That is why it is called equanimity based on renunciation.

The Buddha speaks about all the thirty-six objects of sense, out of which we brought up, as a paradigm, the illustration given about the visual object, form. These thirty-six are called the thirty-six pathways of beings, *chattīṃsa sattapadā*, in the sense that they depict the thought patterns of beings. In this discourse, the Buddha proclaims the basic maxim he employs in gradually channelling the thought processes of beings towards *Nibbāna* along these thirty-six pathways. The maxim is summed up in the following words: *tatra idaṃ nissāya idam pajahatha*, "therein, depending on this, abandon this".

This maxim has some affinity to the *paṭicca samuppāda* formula "this being, this arises". In fact, this is a practical application of the same formula. In the context of the path of practice, the dependence on one thing is for the purpose of abandoning another. There is an attitude of detachment in this course of practice. Based on this maxim, the Buddha outlines the way in which he guides one towards *Nibbāna* in four stages. The first stage in that gradual path towards *Nibbāna* is described as follows:

Tatra, bhikkhave, yāni cha nekkhammasitāni somanassāni tāni nissāya tāni āgama, yāni cha gehasitāni somanassāni tāni pajahatha tāni samatikkamatha, evaṃ etesaṃ pahānaṃ hoti, evaṃ etesaṃ samatikkamo hoti.

"Therein, monks, by depending on and relying on the six kinds of happiness based on renunciation, abandon and transcend the six kinds of happiness based on the household life, that is how they are abandoned, that is how they are transcended."

In the same way, by depending on the six kinds of unhappiness based on renunciation, the six kinds of unhappiness based on the household life are abandoned. Also, by depending on the six kinds of equanimity based on renunciation, the six kinds of equanimity based on the household life are abandoned.

So at the end of the first stage, what are we left with? All what is based on the household life is left behind, and only the six kinds of happiness based on renunciation, the six kinds of unhappiness based on renunciation and the six kinds of equanimity based on renunciation remain. That is the position at the end of the first stage.

Then, in the second stage, a subtler and more refined level of experience is aimed at. Out of the three types of mental states based on renunciation, firstly, the six kinds of unhappiness based on renunciation are abandoned by the six kinds of happiness based on renunciation. Then the six kinds of happiness based on renunciation are abandoned by the six kinds of equanimity based on renunciation.

To the extent that all the above three mental states are based on renunciation, they are of a piece with each other. Also, it is the same mode of insightful reflection that gives rise to them. However, as attitudes, happiness is subtler and more excellent than unhappiness, and equanimity

is subtler and more excellent than happiness, since it is nearer to wisdom. So in the second stage we see a gradual procedure arriving at a subtler and more excellent state even in the case of those three mental states based on renunciation. By the end of the second stage, only equanimity based on renunciation remains.

Now comes the third stage. Here the Buddha points out that in the case of equanimity there can be two varieties. *Atthi, bhikkhave, upekkhā nānattā nānattasitā, atthi, bhikkhave, upekkhā ekattā ekattasitā.* "There is, monks, an equanimity that is diversified, based on diversity, and there is an equanimity that is unified, based on unity".

What is that equanimity that is diversified? It is defined as the equanimity regarding the objects of the five external senses, that is to say, equanimity regarding forms, sounds, smells, flavours and tangibles. Equanimity that is unified is defined with reference to the immaterial realms, namely the sphere of infinity of space, the sphere of infinity of consciousness, the sphere of nothingness and the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

Now in the case of these two types of equanimity, the Buddha points out a way of abandoning the equanimity based on diversity with the help of the equanimity based on unity. As equanimity both types are commendable, but that which is diversified and based on diversity is grosser. Equanimity that is unified and based on unity is subtler and more excellent. So the equanimity based on diversity is abandoned and transcended by the equanimity that is unified, based on unity. This is the end of the third stage.

In the fourth stage, we are left with only that equanimity that is based on unity. It is experienced in the higher rungs of meditation. But here, too, the Buddha advocates a prudent course of action. In fact, it is here that the deepest practical hint is given.

Atammayataṃ, bhikkhave, nissāya atammayataṃ āgamma, yāyam upekkhā ekattā ekattasitā, taṃ pajahatha taṃ samatikkamatha, evam etissā pahānaṃ hoti, evam etissā samatikkamo hoti.

"Monks, by depending and relying on non-identification abandon and transcend equanimity that is unified, based on unity; that is how it is abandoned, that is how it is transcended."

Atammayatā is a term we have already discussed at length in our earlier sermons.⁵ Its importance has not been sufficiently recognized in our tradition. As we pointed out, the word *tammayo*, literally "of thatness", could be explained with reference to such usages as *suvaṇṇamaya* and *ra-jatamaya*, "golden" and "silver". How does this "of thatness" come by?

If, for instance, one who has attained the infinity of space as a meditative experience identifies himself with it, with the conceit *eso 'ham asmi*, "this am I", there is that *tammayatā* coming in. It is a subtle grasping, or in other words a me-thinking, *maññanā* – imagining oneself to be one with that experience. So the Buddha's advice is to abandon and transcend even that equanimity based on unity by resorting to the maxim of *atammayatā*, non-identification.

The subtle conceit 'am', *asmi*, is that trace of grasping with which one tries to sit pretty on that which is impermanent and changing. It is the most fundamental assertion of existence.

In the *Sappurisasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* we get a good illustration of the application of this principle of detachment, made known by the Buddha. *Sappuriso ca kho, bhikkhave, iti paṭisañcikkhati: nevasaññānāsaññāyatana-samāpattiyā pi kho atammayatā vuttā Bhagavatā, yena yena hi maññanti tato taṃ hoti aññathā 'ti. So atam-mayataṃ yeva antaraṃ karitvā tāya nevasaññānāsaññāyatana-samāpattiyā n' eva attān' ukkaṃseti na paraṃ vambheti. Ayam pi, bhikkhave, sappurisa-dhammo.*⁶

"But a good man, monks, considers thus: 'Non-identification even with the attainment of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception has been declared by the Fortunate One [in such terms as]: 'In whatever way they imagine, thereby it turns otherwise'.' So he takes into account that very non-identification and neither exalts himself nor disparages others because of his attainment of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. This, too, monks, is the nature of a good man."

In the *Sappurisa-sutta*, the Buddha expounds the characteristics of a 'good man'. In this context, the term *sappurisa*, "good man", is used exclusively to represent a noble disciple, *ariyasāvaka*. A noble disciple does not look upon his *jhānic* attainments in the same way as an ordinary meditator attaining *jhānas*. His point of view is different.

This discourse explains his view point. A good man reflects wisely according to the advice given by the Buddha to the effect that even to the higher *jhānic* attainment of neither-perception-nor-non-perception the principle of non-identification must be applied, recalling the maxim made known by the Buddha: *Yena yena hi maññanti tato taṃ hoti aññatha*, "in whatever way they imagine, thereby it turns otherwise".

This is a maxim we had discussed earlier too.⁷ *Maññanā* is egoistic imagining. When one thinks in egoistic terms about something, by that very me-thinking it turns otherwise. Due to egoistic imagining, it becomes a thing, and once it becomes a thing, it is bound to change and become another.

The good man calls to mind that maxim, that norm, and refrains from exalting himself and disparaging others on account of his attainment. He does not identify himself with it. From this it becomes clear that *atammayatā* or **non-identification is the path to Nibbāna**.

So the Buddha gradually channelizes the pathways of thoughts of beings from the grosser to subtler levels and finally tops up by directing them to *Nibbāna* through non-identification, *atammayatā*. Non-identification is the watchword for clinging-free *parinibbāna*.

The dictum *tatra idam nissāya idam pajahatha*, "therein, depending on this, abandon this", which the Buddha expounds in the *Salāyatanavibhaṅgasutta*, portrays a duality between attention, *manasikāra*, and inattention, *amanasikāra*. That is to say, the basic principle in this dictum is the method of encouraging inattention to grosser things by recommending a way of attending to subtler things. So it seems both attention and inattention are given an importance in this procedure. In order to eliminate one thing by inattention, attention to some other thing is recommended. For the purpose of inattention to something gross, attention to something subtle is taken up. But that is not the end of it. Even that is expelled with the help of something subtler. Here we have a wonderful technique, based on the twin principles of pragmatism and relativity.

These two terms comprehend the entire gamut of the path of practice in Buddhism. 'Pragmatic' means 'for some practical purpose', 'relative' means 'in relation to something else', that is, as a means to an end, and not absolutely as an end in itself. So in this system of practice everything has a pragmatic and a relative value.

The question of attention and inattention has also to be understood in that background. A clear illustration of the method of elimination of grosser mental states with the help of subtler mental states by attention and inattention comes in the *Vitakkasaṅṭhānasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*. There the Buddha explains this method making use of a simile of a carpenter.

*Seyyathā pi, bhikkhave, dakkho palagaṇḍo vā palagaṇḍantevāsī vā sukhumāya āṇiyā oḷārikaṃ āṇiṃ abhinīhaneyya abhinīhareyya abhinivajjeyya, evam eva kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno yaṃ nimittam āgamma yaṃ nimittam manasikaroto uppajjanti pāpakā akusalā vitakkā chandūpasamhitā pi dosūpasamhitā pi mohūpasamhitā pi, tena, bhikkhave, bhikkhunā tamhā nimittā aññaṃ nimittam manasikātabbaṃ kusalūpasamhitam.*⁸

"Just as, monks, a skilled carpenter or his apprentice might knock out, draw out and remove a coarse peg by means of a fine one, even so, monks, when a monk [finds that], due to some sign, by attending to some sign, there arise in him evil unskilful thoughts connected with desire, with hate and with delusion, that monk, monks, should attend to some other sign in its stead, one that has to do with the skilful."

Now let us try to understand the point of this simile. When, for instance, a carpenter, in fitting out a door, finds that he is driving a blunt nail, he extracts it with the help of a sharper one. He takes up the sharper nail just for the purpose of extracting the blunt nail. So also one resorts to a skilful thought to expel the unskilful thought as a means to an end. This kind of pragmatic and relative approach avoids tenacious grasping and dogmatic involvement.

The spirit of the law of dependent arising runs through the entire course of Buddhist practice, culminating in *atammayatā*, non-identification.

The two terms *kusala* and *akusala* also deserve our special attention in this context. The basic meaning of *kusala* is "skilful", and *akusala* means "unskilful". Here, again, we have something relative. 'Skilful' presupposes 'unskilful' and gets a value in relation to the latter. It has no absolute value. We make use of the skilful in order to push away the unskilful. That done, there is no further involvement with it, as one's last

resort is *atammayatā*, non-identification. That is why there is no problem of a clogging coming in.

Our discussion of the *Salāyatanavibhaṅgasutta* brings to light another unique feature of this *Dhamma*. In other religious systems the question of reality is resolved by having recourse to unity. Oneness is supposed to be the ultimate goal.

In our analysis of the *saṃsāric* problem, we often referred to a duality or a dichotomy. Everywhere we were confronted with a duality. But to grasp the two as one, in some form of oneness, is not the way out. Instead we have here, as the final solution, *atammayatā* or non-identification, a clinging-free approach in the last analysis.

It is in the nature of *saṃsāric* existence that beings find themselves bound and fettered. These fetters are called *saṃyojanāni*. A binding or a fetter implies 'two', as when two bulls are tied together.⁹ The term *upādāna* is also used quite often. It implies a holding on to something. There, too, the notion of a duality comes in — one who holds and the thing held. It is not at all easy to transcend this duality, characteristic of *saṃsāric* existence. This is the crux of the whole problem. Unity or oneness is not the solution, it has to be solved with extreme judiciousness.

In the very first discourse of the *Samyutta Nikāya* we get a solution to the problem, briefly stated. The discourse is called *Oghatarānasutta*, "Crossing the Flood", and it was given pride of place probably because of its importance.

A deity comes and asks the Buddha: *Kathaṃ nu tvaṃ mārisa ogham atari?* "How did you, Sir, cross the flood?"¹⁰

And the Buddha answers: *Appatiṭṭhaṃ khvāham, āvuso, anāyūhaṃ ogham atariṃ.* "Without tarrying, friend, and without hurrying, did I cross the flood."

But the deity, finding the answer too enigmatic, asks: *Yathā kathaṃ pana tvaṃ mārisa appatiṭṭham anāyūham ogham atari?* "But how [exactly is it], sir, that you crossed the flood without tarrying and without hurrying?"

Then the Buddha makes an explanatory statement:

Yadā svāham, āvuso, santiṭṭhāmi tadāssu saṃsīdāmi, yadā svāham āvuso āyūhāmi tadāssu nibbuyhāmi. Evam khvāham, āvuso, appatiṭṭhaṃ anāyūhaṃ ogham atariṃ.

"When I, friend, tarried, I found myself sinking; when I, friend, hurried, I got swept away. And so, friend, without tarrying and without hurrying did I cross the flood."

Then the deity, being pleased, uttered the following verse in approbation:

*Cīrassaṃ vata passāmi,
brāhmaṇaṃ parinibbutaṃ,
appatiṭṭhaṃ anāyūhaṃ,
tiṇṇaṃ loke visattikaṃ.*

O, what length of time since I beheld,
A saint with all his passions quelled,
Who neither tarrying nor yet hurrying,
Has crossed the world's viscosity — 'craving'."

This discourse on crossing the flood reveals some salient features of the middle path. If a person caught up in a water current tries to stay still, he will sink. If he simply struggles to escape, he will get swept away. So like a good swimmer, he has to avoid both extremes, and, by means of a mindful and systematic gradual effort, work out his freedom. In other words, he has to strive — not struggle.

So we can understand why the Buddha in his very first sermon, *Dhammacakkapavattanasutta*, "Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma", proclaimed as the middle path the noble eightfold path, avoiding both extremes of attachment to sensuality, *kāma-sukhallikānuyoga*, and self-mortification, *attakilamathānuyoga*.¹¹ Here, too, the implication is that the entire round of existence is a water current to be crossed over by means of a systematic and gradual effort.

In some of our earlier sermons, while analyzing the law of dependent arising, we made use of the simile of the vortex for easy comprehension.¹² Now if we are to take it up again, we may say that it is in the nature of beings in *samsāra* to get drifted by the current of preparations, *saṅkhārā*, owing to ignorance, *avijjā*, and go on revolving between consciousness, *viññāṇa*, and name-and-form, *nāma-rūpa*.

This ignorance in the form of the four pervert perceptions — namely the perception of permanence in the impermanent, the perception of pleasure in the painful, the perception of beauty in the repulsive, and the perception of self in the not-self — gives rise to the run-away current of water which

keeps running round and round between consciousness and name-and-form. This is the *saṃsāric* vortex, *saṃsāravaṭṭa*.

Now, for instance, if we throw even a small leaf to a spot where there is a vortex, it also keeps revolving. Similarly, all over this *saṃsāric* existence duality holds sway. Therefore, freedom from it can be won only by a subtle form of striving. That is why the Buddha used the two terms *appatitṭhaṃ* and *anāyūhaṃ*. Avoiding the two extremes of stagnation and struggling, one has to cross the flood going the middle way.

When the Buddha proclaimed that freedom can be won only by the middle way, avoiding both extremes, the extremist philosophers of his day criticized and disparaged him, saying: ‘Then you are preaching a doctrine of bewilderment’.

We find such an instance of accusation in the *Māgandiyasutta* of the *Aṭṭhaka Vagga* of the *Sutta Nipāta*. The Brāhmin Māgandīya poses the following question to the Buddha:

*‘Ajjhattasanti’ ti yam etam atthaṃ,
kathan nu dhīrehi paveditaṃ taṃ.*

"That which they call ‘inward peace’,

In what terms have the wise proclaimed that [peace]?"¹³

The Buddha’s answer took the following form:

*Na diṭṭhiyā na sutiyā na ñāṇena,
sīlabatenāpi visuddhim āhu,
adiṭṭhiyā assutiyā aññāṇā
asīlatā abbatā no pi tena,
ete ca nissajja anuggahāya
santo anissāya bhavaṃ na jappe.*

"Not by views, nor by learning, nor by knowledge,

Nor yet by virtue and holy vows, they say, can purity come,

Neither can it come by without views, learning and knowledge,

Without virtue and holy vows,

Letting go of them all and grasping not one,

That peaceful one, leaning on none,

Would hanker no more for existence."

At this reply the Brāhmin Māgandiya was puzzled and accuses the Buddha of prevarication.

*No ce kira diṭṭhiyā na sutiyā na ñāṇena,
sīlabbatenāpi visuddhim āha,
adiṭṭhiyā assutiyā aññāṇā
asīlatā abbatā no pi tena,
maññe-m-ahaṃ momuham eva dhammaṃ,
diṭṭhiyā eke paccenti suddhiṃ.*

"If not by views, nor by learning, nor by knowledge,
Nor yet by virtue and holy vows can purity be won,
If it comes not without views, learning and knowledge,
Without virtue and holy vows — well then
Bewilderment itself, I think, is this Dhamma,
For there are some who claim purity by views."

Now these two verses call for some comments. Firstly there is a minor problem about variant readings. In both these verses, we followed the reading *visuddhi*, whereas some editions accept the reading *na suddhim āha*, where the negative seems superfluous. *Visuddhi* seems more meaningful here.

The commentarial explanation of these two verses seems to go off at a tangent.¹⁴ It says that the negatives in the first two lines of the Buddha's reply refer to wrong views, wrong learning, wrong knowledge, wrong virtue and wrong vows, and that the third and fourth lines refer to right view, right learning, right knowledge, right virtue and right vows. In other words, it is only a question of wrong view, *micchā diṭṭhi*, and right view, *sammā diṭṭhi*.

This interpretation misses the subtle point at issue in this dialogue. If it is as simple as that, there is no ground for Māgandiya's accusation. Other religious teachers, who disputed with each other, used to assert that purity is attained only by their views, learning, knowledge, virtue and vows.

Here then it is not a question of difference between *micchā diṭṭhi* and *sammā diṭṭhi*. Here is something more radical concerning *sammā diṭṭhi* itself. According to this enlightened approach, views etc. cannot totally be dispensed with, nor are they to be grasped. We come back now to the two key words 'pragmatic' and 'relative'. That is why the Buddha declared

that purity cannot be attained by views, learning, knowledge, virtue and vows, nor in the absence of these qualities.

This is an apparently contradictory statement which, however, puts in a nutshell the essence of the middle path. The inward peace, mentioned in the above context, is nothing other than the clinging-free perfect extinction, *anupādā parinibbāna*. That becomes clear by the last three lines of the Buddha's reply, *ete ca nissajja anuggahāya, santo anissāya bhavaṃ na jappe*.

"Letting go of them all and grasping not one,
That peaceful one, leaning on none,
Would hanker no more for existence."

We came across the word *anissita* in our discussions about *Nibbāna*, for instance in the cryptic formula *nissitassa calitaṃ, anissitassa calitaṃ n'atthi*, "to the one attached there is wavering, to the unattached one, there is no wavering".¹⁵ Being unattached, there is no hankering for existence. Where there is grasping, there is existence.

We may revert to our simile of sharpening a razor.¹⁶ The constituents of the path have to be taken up as one takes up a razor for sharpening, ready to let go. Once the purpose is served, they have to be given up. That is the dictum underlying this dialogue in the *Māgandīyasutta*.

Now we come to a discourse which clearly and unmistakably presents this extraordinary first principle. The discourse is the *Rathavinītasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*. Here it is not a case of arguing with a Brāhmin. The interlocutors in this discourse are two stalwarts of this dispensation, namely Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Puṇṇa Mantāniputta. Their long discussion on the path of practice, unfolding itself in dialogue form, was not meant for any clarification of doubts for themselves. It was probably inspired by a benevolent wish to help those 'Māgandīyas' in the world, who are ignorant of the pragmatic nature and relative value of the Buddha's middle path. For easy comprehension, we shall present this discourse in three parts.

First of all Venerable Sāriputta poses the following question to Venerable Puṇṇa Mantāniputta: *Kin nu kho, āvuso, sīlavisuddhatthaṃ Bhagavati brahmacariyaṃ vussatī'ti?* "What, friend, is it for the sake of purification of virtue that the holy life is lived under the Fortunate One?"¹⁷

And Venerable Puṇṇa Mantāniputta replies: "No friend."

"[Then] is it for the sake of purification of mind that the holy life is lived under the Fortunate One?" "No friend."

"[Then] is it for the sake of purification of view that the holy life is lived under the Fortunate One?" "No friend."

"[Then] is it for the sake of purification by overcoming doubt that the holy life is lived under the Fortunate One?" "No friend."

"[Then] is it for the sake of purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path that the holy life is lived under the Fortunate One?" "No friend."

"[Then] is it for the sake of purification by knowledge and vision of the way that the holy life is lived under the Fortunate One?" "No friend."

"[Then] is it for the sake of purification by knowledge and vision that the holy life is lived under the Fortunate One?" "No friend."

Then Venerable Sāriputta asks: "For the sake of what, [then] friend, is the holy life lived under the Fortunate One?" "Friend it is for the sake of perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging that the holy life is lived under the Fortunate One."

So the ensemble of part one of the dialogue is that the holy life is not lived under the Fortunate One for the sake of any of those purifications, but for something called *anupādā parinibbāna*, "perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging".

Now, in what we would call part two of the dialogue, Venerable Sāriputta highlights the contradictions in the answers given so far, somewhat like Māgandiya. Apparently there is some need for clarification. He asks: "But, friend, is purification of virtue perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging?" "No friend".

In this way he asks whether any of the other stages of purification, up to and including purification by knowledge and vision, is perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging. Venerable Puṇṇa answers in the negative. Then Venerable Sāriputta asks:

Kim pan' āvuso aññatra imehi dhammehi anupādā parinibbānaṃ? "But, friend, is perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging [to be attained] without these states?" "No friend". So, then, it looks as if the trend of contradictions has come to a head.

Now in part three of the dialogue we find Venerable Sāriputta rhetorically summing up the previous section of the dialogue: "When asked: 'But, friend, is purification of virtue perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging?', you replied: 'No friend'" (and so on), citing even the last negative response: "And when asked: 'But, friend, is perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging [to be attained] without these states?', you replied: 'No friend'"; and rounds up by asking with apparent exasperation: *yathākathaṃ pan' āvuso imassa bhāsitassa attho daṭṭhabbo?* "How, then, friend, can one understand the meaning of this statement?"

So rather dramatically the stage is now set for Venerable Puṇṇa Mantāniputta to come out with the deepest point in the discussion:

Sīlavissuddhiñce āvuso Bhagavā anupādā parinibbānaṃ paññāpessa, sa-upādānaṃ yeva samānaṃ anupādā parinibbānaṃ paññāpessa. "Friend, if the Fortunate One had designated purification of virtue as perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging, he would have designated what is still accompanied by clinging as perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging."

In the same strain, he goes on to apply this criterion to the other stages of purification and finally brings out the absurdity of the other extreme in the following words:

Aññatra ce, āvuso, imehi dhammehi anupādā parinibbānaṃ abhaviṣṣa, puthujjano parinibbāyeyya, puthujjano hi, āvuso, aññatra imehi dhammehi. "And if, friend, perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging were to be attained without these states, then even an ordinary worldling would have attained perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging, for an ordinary worldling, friend, is without these states."

Now we can see how subtle this question is. Simply because it was said that none of the above states is perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging, they cannot be dispensed with. We have already discussed the significance of the *Alagaddūpamasutta* in this concern. There we came across two similes, the simile of the raft and the simile of the water snake. To carry the raft on one's shoulder after crossing is one extreme.¹⁸ To take the water snake by its tail is the other extreme. The middle path lies between these two extremes. That is the implication of the above statement that if perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging is attained without these states, then even an ordinary worldling would have attained it, for he has none of them.

For further clarification of this point, Venerable Puṇṇa Mantāṇiputta comes out with the simile of the relay of chariots. King Pasendi of Kosala, while living in Sāvattthī, has some urgent business to settle at Sāketa. Between Sāvattthī and Sāketa seven relay chariots are kept ready for him. The king mounts the first relay chariot and by means of it arrives at the second relay chariot. Then he dismounts from the first relay chariot and mounts the second chariot. By means of the second chariot he arrives at the third chariot. In this way, finally he arrives at Sāketa by means of the seventh chariot. Then, when his friends and relatives in Sāketa ask him: ‘Sire, did you come from Sāvattthī to Sāketa by means of this chariot?’, he cannot reply in the affirmative. He has to relate the whole story of passing from chariot to chariot.

Having given this simile as an illustration, Venerable Puṇṇa Mantāṇiputta sums up the correct solution to the point at issue in the following memorable words:

Evameva kho, āvuso, sīlavisuddhi yāvadeva cittavisuddhatthā, cittavisuddhi yāvadeva diṭṭhivisuddhatthā, diṭṭhivisuddhi yāvadeva kaṅkhāvitaraṇavisuddhatthā, kaṅkhāvitaraṇavisuddhi yāvadeva maggāmaggañāṇadassanavisuddhatthā, maggāmaggañāṇadassanavisuddhi yāvadeva paṭipadañāṇadassanavisuddhatthā, paṭipadañāṇadassanavisuddhi yāvadeva ñāṇadassanavisuddhatthā, ñāṇadassanavisuddhi yāvadeva anupādā parinibbānatthā. Anupādā parinibbānatthaṃ kho, āvuso, Bhagavati brahmacariyaṃ vussati.

"Even so, friend, purification of virtue is purposeful as far as purification of the mind; purification of the mind is purposeful as far as purification of view; purification of view is purposeful as far as purification by overcoming doubt; purification by overcoming doubt is purposeful as far as purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path; purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path is purposeful as far as purification by knowledge and vision of the way; purification by knowledge and vision of the way is purposeful as far as purification by knowledge and vision; purification by knowledge and vision is purposeful as far as perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging. It is for perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging that the holy life is lived under the Fortunate One."

The key word in this grand finale of this dramatic exposition is *yāvad eva*. Simply rendered it means "just for", that is, the sufficing condition for something else. Properly understood, it is a watchword upholding the twin principles of pragmatism and relativity. In the light of the illustration by relay chariots, this watchword stands for that impersonal momentum or impetus required for any gradual course of purposive action, according to the law of dependent arising.

So we see how the Buddha discovered and laid bare the first principles of a universal law conducive to one's emancipation. Here is a series of states, in which one state is to be made use of for reaching another, and that for reaching yet another, but none of which is to be grasped per se. This is the distinction between what is called *upadhi*, or *saṃsāric* asset, and *nirupadhi*, or the asset-less *Nibbāna*.

In the case of those meritorious deeds, productive of *saṃsāric* assets, one goes on accumulating and amassing them. But, for the *nibbānic* state of *nirupadhi*, the asset-less, there is a different approach. One state leads up to another, and that to yet another, in accordance with the simile of the relay chariots, but none of them is to be grasped per se. One grasps neither purification of virtue, nor purification of the mind, nor purification of view, nay, not even purification by knowledge and vision. Leaving them all behind and reaching the subtlest of them all, there comes the final 'let go' to attain that perfect extinction without clinging, *anupādā parinibbāna*. This is the subtlest truth in this *Dhamma*.

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- ¹ M I 436, *MahāMālunkyasutta*.
² M III 217, *Saḷāyatanavibhaṅgasutta*.
³ Ud 80, *Paṭhamanibbānapaṭisaṃyuttasutta*.
⁴ See sermon 17.
⁵ See esp. sermons 14, 15, 24 and 25.
⁶ M III 44, *Sappurisasutta*.
⁷ See sermons 13, 14 and 15.
⁸ M I 119, *Vitakkasanthānasutta*.
⁹ S IV 282, *Samyojanasutta*.
¹⁰ S I 1, *Oghataraṇasutta*.
¹¹ S V 421, *Dhammacakkapavattanasutta*.
¹² See sermon 3 etc.
¹³ Sn 838, *Māgandiyasutta*.
¹⁴ Pj II 545.
¹⁵ M III 266, *Channovādasutta*; see sermon 4.
¹⁶ See sermon 5.
¹⁷ M I 147, *Rathavinītasutta*.
¹⁸ M I 134, *Alagaddūpamasutta*; see sermon 18.