Paticca Samuppada Sermon 3
The Law of Dependent Arising

(Pahan Kanuwa Sermon – No. 185)

'*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa*'

'Homage be! To the Fortunate One – the Worthy, Fully Enlightened!'

Ekamūlaṁ dvirāvaṭṭaṁ

timalaṁ pañcapattharaṁ

samuddaṁ dvādasāvaṭṭaṁ

pātālaṁ atarī isī

– *Ekamūla Sutta, Devatā Saṁyutta*, *Samyutta Nikaya*.

With but one root and turning twice

With triple stain and arenas five

The ocean with its eddies twelve

The quaking abyss – the sage has crossed

Dear Listeners,

In order to understand properly the Law of Dependent Arising, one has to have a deep insight into the inter-dependence between consciousness and name-and-form. In the last two sermons we compared this inter-dependence to a whirlpool. The deepest point in a whirlpool is the abyss. The riddle verse we have taken up today as the topic of our sermon, has a reference to an abyss. Let us examine whether there is any connection between the Law of Dependent Arising and this abyss.

This is a riddle verse that is found in the *Devatā Saṁyutta* of the *Saṁyutta Nikāya*. It seems that a certain deity has put together and presented seven factors in the Dhamma metaphorically as a sustained simile in this verse. First of all, let us try to get the literal (apparent) meaning of the verse. '*Ekamūlaṁ dvirāvaṭṭaṁ*' Having one root and with two turnings round. '*Timalaṁ pañca pattharam*' With three stains and five expanses. '*Samuddaṁ dvādasāvaṭṭaṁ*'– the ocean with twelve whirlpools. '*Pātālaṁ atarī isī*' – 'The abyss the sage has crossed.'

Only this difficult riddle verse is found there in that context without any clue to its meaning. The commentary gives some meanings at random. Though it appears as a difficult verse, the similes alluded to in it are to be found elsewhere in the discourses. To begin with the abyss itself, there is a discourse by the same name in the *Vedanā Saṁyutta* of the *Saḷāyatana Vagga* in the *Saṁyutta Nikāya*. There the Buddha says:

'Monks, this is a synonym for painful bodily feelings, namely, the abyss.'

('*Sārīrikānaṁ kho etaṁ bhikkhave dukkhānaṁ vedanānaṁ adhivacanaṁ yadidaṁ pātāloti*')

So you all now know what the abyss is. Then as for the ocean, that too, we can understand by an open hint in the *Samudda Sutta* in the same section of the *Saṁyutta Nikāya*.

'Cakkhu bhikkhave purisassa samuddo. Tassa rūpamayo vego, Yo taṁ rūpamayaṁ vegaṁ sahati, ayaṁ vuccati bhikkhave atari cakkhusamuddaṁ saūmiṁ sāvaṭṭaṁ sagāham sarakkhasaṁ tiṇṇo pāragato thale ṭiṭṭhati brāhmaṇo.'

'The eye, O monks, is the ocean for a man. It has the force of waves of forms. Whoever endures that force of forms, he, O monks, is called one who has crossed the eye-ocean with its waves, whirlpools, seizures, and demons – the Brahmin who has crossed over and stands on dry ground on the further shore.'

Now what does this mean? The eye is called an ocean for a man. In that ocean, there are the waves of forms. Whoever is able to withstand the force of those form waves, is called the Brahmin who has crossed over this eye ocean with its waves, whirlpools, seizures and demons and stands on the dry ground having gone beyond. The reference here is to the Arahant.

The discourse goes on to give the same description in regard to the other sense spheres – namely, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind, calling each of them an ocean for a man to cross over. The objects of the six senses are called waves. This is an instructive discourse for those meditators whose meditation topic is the six sense spheres. In the eye ocean there is the force of form waves. If one gets swept away by them and gets drawn into the whirlpool, one is seized by the form demons. So also in the case of the ocean of the ear. Here the idea of waves is quite apt. One is carried away by sound-waves, gets drawn into the whirlpool and is seized by the sound-demons. It is the same with the other senses inclusive of the mind. In the case of the mind, it is the thought-waves. That is a concept relevant to insight meditation. The force of thought-waves develops into breakers which sweep us aloft and drag us into the whirlpool to be seized by the demon. This is by the way, but the important point is the explanation of the sustained simile of the ocean.

Then what about the eddies? We need not go in search of other discourses, since it is already implicit here. The word '*sāvaṭṭa*' (with eddies) qualifying the ocean can be taken as an allusion to the concept of the twelve eddies. Since the discourse speaks of six oceans, how are we to count twelve eddies in the six oceans? Worldlings regard each of the six senses as well as their respective objects as 'self'. That is why, for instance, there is the admonition to regard them as 'not-self' (*anattā*), in developing *anattasaññā* (perception of not-self) as a meditation subject. (e.g., *cakkhuṁ anattā, rūpaṁ anattā* – eye is not self, form is not self.) For instance, in the case of the eye, waves keep circling round the eye as well as its object, before one gets drawn into the whirlpool. So much for the twelve eddies. What, then, are the five oceans (*pañcapattharaṁ*)? In the *Māradhītu Sutta* of the *Sagāthaka Vagga* of the *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, we read:

'*pañcoghatiṇṇo atarīdha chaṭṭhaṁ*'

'Having crossed the five floods, he has here itself crossed the sixth as well.'

This is a reference to the Arahant. The five floods are the five arenas or expanses of sense-pleasures. Sense pleasures spread over the arenas of the five senses (*pañcapattharaṁ*) and in so spreading incur three stains (*timalaṁ*), a reference to which can be traced to the *Dutiyasamudda Sutta* in the *Saḷāyatana Saṁyutta*.

'*yassa rāgo ca doso ca avijjā ca virājitā*

so imaṁ samuddaṁ sagāhaṁ sarakkhasaṁ

saūmibhayaṁ duttaraṁ accatari.'

'He in whom lust, hate and ignorance have been made to fade away, has crossed this ocean, so hard to cross – the ocean with its seizures, demons, and the danger of waves. This, again, is a reference to the Arahant.'

Just see how all these fall into place. So you may take lust, hate, and ignorance as the three stains.

Then there is the term '*dvirāvaṭṭaṁ*', 'double-turning' or 'turning between two things'. These too we can understand through *Salla Sutta* in the *Vedanā Saṁyutta*. In that Sutta, there is this statement about the 'untaught worldling' (*assutavā puthujjano*).

'So dukkhāya vedanāya phuṭṭho samāno kāmasukhaṁ abhinandati. Taṁ kissa hetu ? na bhikkhave assutavā puthujjano pajanāti dukkhāya vedanāya nissaraṇaṁ aññatra kāmasukhā.'

'He, on being touched by painful feeling, delights in sensual pleasures. Why so? Monks, the untaught worldling does not know a stepping out from painful feeling except sensual pleasures.'

Because he doesn't see an exit from painful feeling other than a recourse to sensual pleasures, the ordinary worldling keeps on turning back and forth between pain and pleasure. That is why we call it a see-sawing between these two extremes due to ignorance about the neither painful nor pleasant (neutral) feeling at the middle. That is to say, for him, ignorance underlies the neither painful nor pleasant feeling, while the latencies to lust and hate underlie pleasant feeling and painful feeling, respectively.

Therefore, these three 'stains' keep on growing in him. So much for the 'turning twice' in the riddle verse.

Last of all we come to 'the one root' (*ekamūlaṁ*). Now, what is this 'one root'? That too, we can understand in the light of the *Phassamūlaka Sutta* ('Rooted in contact') in the *Vedanā Saṁyutta*. There we find the following declaration by the Buddha:

'Monks, there are these three feelings that are born of contact, rooted in contact, caused by contact and arisen from contact. What three? Pleasant feeling, painful feeling, neither painful nor pleasant feeling.'

The clue we need is already there in the title of the Sutta (*phassamūlaka*). All feelings have contact as their only root (*ekamūlaṁ*).

Although we have offered the above explanation, the standard commentary of the text which nearly everyone relies on gives a different interpretation to this riddle verse. We shall cite it too for the sake of those of you who prefer to follow it. We explained from 'the abyss' upwards whereas the commentator explains from 'the root' downwards. Now this is how the commentator explains the term '*ekamūlaṁ*'. The root causes for the Saṁsāric existence of beings are ignorance and craving. However, for some reason or other, the commentator opts for craving as the root in this context. So remember, according to the commentary, the 'one root' is craving. Then '*dvirāvaṭṭaṁ*' or 'turning between two things' is explained as the alternation between the eternalist view and the annihilationist view, for the world is said to be turning round between these two extremes. The five arenas are the five-fold sense pleasures as we also have explained. The three stains are said to be lust (*rāga*), hate (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) whereas in our explanation ignorance (*avijjā*) figures as the third stain. The ocean (*samudda*) is taken to be craving. The twelve eddies are explained as the twelve internal and external sense spheres, which tallies with our interpretation. But then the abyss is said to be craving itself.

So it seems according to the commentary, three out of the seven similes of the riddle verse are to be interpreted as references to craving. You should consider whether the commentarial interpretation is plausible. According to it, the root is craving, the ocean is craving, and the abyss is also craving. Here is a riddle verse with a sustained simile. But the commentary seems to have gone off at a tangent, missing its true significance.

The most important term that emerged from our discussion is '*phassamūlaka*'– 'rooted in contact'. It is suggestive of the immense significance of contact. Out of the discourses dealing with the question of contact, the one that brings us the deepest analysis is the *Mahā Nidāna Sutta* of the *Digha Nikāya*. So let me now sidetrack to that discourse.

This *Mahā Nidāna Sutta* is of fundamental significance like the *Satipaṭṭhana Sutta* and, even like it, was preached at the township of *Kammāssadamma* in the *Kuru* country. By way of introduction it is said that once when the Buddha was staying at *Kammāssadamma* in the *Kuru* country, Venerable Ānanda approached him and said:

"It is wonderful, Venerable Sir, it is marvellous, Venerable Sir, how deep the Law of Dependent Arising is and how profound it appears! All the same, Venerable Sir, it appears to me as clear and clear."

The Buddha's response was this:

"Do not say so, Ānanda, do not say so. This Law of Dependent Arising is deep and it appears profound. It is through not understanding and not penetrating this Dhamma that this progeny has become a tangled skein, matted like a bird's nest, interwoven like *muñja* and babbaja grass, unable to pass beyond states of woe, bad bournes, downfall and the round of birth and death."

From there onwards, the Buddha, like a teacher explaining a deep point to a pupil, clarifies some deep aspects of the Law of Dependent Arising to Venerable Ānanda who is the Treasurer of the Dhamma in this dispensation. As a matter of fact, *Mahā Nidāna Sutt*a is considered by many as an extraordinary and profound discourse. Anyway let us try to understand it without undue fears.

To put it in brief, this discourse has something special to say about contact, which is the point we are concerned with. We have already mentioned that 'name' in name-and-form comprises feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention and that 'form' in name-and-form amounts to the perception of form derived from the four great primaries– earth, water, fire and air. In this discourse, the Buddha explains to Venerable Ānanda, step by step, the mutual relationship between name-and-form on the one hand as well as the mutual relationship between name-and-form and consciousness on the other. The discourse proceeds in the form of a catechism. But for facility of understanding, I shall try to present it in a simplified way.

To begin with, let me draw your attention to the special significance of the discourse. As we have mentioned earlier, the traditional way of analysis of the Law of Dependent Arising which many follow at present, is to start from '*avijjā*' or ignorance. However in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta,* we discussed the other day, the first two links '*avijjā*' and '*saṅkhārā*' are not mentioned. In this discourse too, those two links do not find mention.

Instead, what is highlighted here as the basic and most important, is this inter-relation between name-and-form and consciousness. Generally, in reciting the formula of Dependent Arising we are used to the following order:

'Dependent on ignorance, preparations, dependent on preparations, consciousness, dependent on consciousness, Name-and-form, dependent on name-and-form, six sense spheres, dependent on six sense spheres, contact, and so on.'

That is to say, between name-and-form and contact we expect to get six sense spheres. But apparently this discourse makes no mention of six sense spheres. Instead, it has a reference to eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact and mind-contact. Therefore, one cannot say that the six sense spheres are fully omitted from this discourse. Contact is explained with special reference to the six senses, which makes good the apparent omission. The most important feature of this discourse is the exposition of the inter-relation between '*nāma*' (name) and '*rūpa*' (form). The other day we explained that '*nāma*' refers to what pertains to the question of recognizing something. There are two aspects in contact or '*samphassa*', namely, the impact and the recognition of the impact. In this concern, the Buddha explains an extremely subtle point to Venerable Ānanda catechetically.

I shall try to give the gist of that detailed explanation whereby the Buddha convinces Venerable Ānanda step by step of the rationale of his explanation. The conclusive statement amounts to this:

"If all those modes, characteristics, signs and exponents by which the name group (*nāmakāya*) is designated were absent, there would not be manifest any verbal impression (*adivacana samphassa*) in the form-group (*rūpakāya*). You had better bear in mind that there are two significant terms which keep recurring in this discourse, namely, '*adivacana samphassa*' and '*paṭigha samphassa*'. It is these two terms that have puzzled many scholars. In connection with the concept of contact, we find the Buddha mentioning these two unusual terms in this discourse. Out of those two, '*adivacana samphassa*' can be easily explained, since we have associated the term '*nāma*' with 'naming'. '*Adivacana*' is a word connected with the linguistic medium. '*Adhivacana, nirutti, paññatti*' (synonym terminology, designation) are part and parcel of the linguistic medium. They are helpful in explaining something. So with this concept of contact, there is an aspect of recognition. That is what '*adhivacana samphassa*' (verbal-impression) means. Then there is also the 'impact aspect' to denote which the term '*paṭigha samphassa*' (resistance-impression) is used. It is to show how these two have a mutually reciprocal relationship that the Buddha first of all declares – as we have stated above – that if all those modes etc. by which the name-group is designated were absent, there would not be manifest any verbal impression in the form group. That is to say, no

verbal impression about the form-group is possible, if not for the name-group. Then the Buddha goes on to give the converse. If all those modes, characteristics, signs and exponents by which the form-group is designated were absent, there would not be manifest any resistance impression (*paṭigha samphassa*) in the name-group.

Those of you who listened attentively might understand this. If I may give a simile, contact is like the Siamese twins born to the parents 'Name' and 'Form'. This is because for the full understanding of contact both the verbal impression offered by the name group and the resistance impression offered by the form-group are essential. That is as far as the animate world is concerned and not with regard to the inanimate world. In the animate world, an impact is understood with the help of the constituents of 'name'– feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention. What is called 'form' is the four great primaries which provide the scaffolding for the nomenclature– namely, earth, water, fire and air. A resistance too has to come in. On an earlier occasion, we gave as a simile the case of a blind man going and striking against a block of ice. He would come back with a perception of earth. Supposing when he goes there for the second time, the block of ice is melting. He would come back with a perception of water. Next time he goes there, it is boiling. He would return with a perception of fire. If he goes again when it is evaporating, he might come back with a perception of air. The worldling gets acquainted with the four elements like that blind man and proceeds to name them according to his impressions. Whatever it is, a resistance has to come in.

So then, from the characteristics proper to the name-group, the form-group gets recognition, and from the characteristics proper to the form-group, the name-group encounters resistance. But the Buddha goes on to add something more to complete the picture.

"If, Ānanda, all those modes, characteristics, signs and exponents by which there is a designation of both name group and form group were absent, would there be manifest either any verbal-impression or any resistance-impression?"

"There would not, Venerable Sir." replies Venerable Ānanda.

Lastly he asks the question which decides the issue:

"And if, Ānanda, all those modes, characteristics, signs and exponents by which there comes to be a designation of Name-and-form were absent, would there be manifest any contact?"

"There would not, Venerable Sir."

These, then, are the four conclusions. Firstly, it is said that if there were no characteristics proper to the name-group, there would not be a verbal impression on the form-group. Secondly, if there were not the characteristics proper to the form-group, there would not be any resistance impression on the name-group. Thirdly, it is said that

if the characteristics by which both name-group and form-group are designated were absent, there would be neither a verbal impression nor a resistance impression. Fourthly comes the culminating conclusion:

If there were no name-and-form there would be no contact.

Then the Buddha goes on to point out another important fact, namely, the mutual relationship between consciousness and name-and-form. This is the deepest point. Here too the Buddha questions Venerable Ānanda, convincing him step by step of the point at issue. He puts the questions in such a way that Venerable Ānanda has to reply in the negative. Now this is how the Buddha points out that the presence of consciousness is a necessary condition for name-and-form.

"If, Ānanda, consciousness were not to descend into the mother's womb, would name-and-form be left remaining?"

"No, indeed, Venerable Sir." replies Venerable Ānanda.

Now let us digress a little. Some of those western psychologists speak only about consciousness. They never speak of name-and-form. Everybody is talking about the moment of death these days. There is so much pep talk about NDE and ADE. But what the Buddha tells us is that before the dying moment, name-and-form is already sketched out in a mother's womb. If consciousness does not go there and join it, name-and-form would not grow. In other words, without the support of consciousness, name-and-form would not remain in the mother's womb. The next question the Buddha puts to Venerable Ānanda is that, having descended into the mother's womb, if consciousness slips out for some reason or other, would Name-and-form grow up and get born into 'this state of existence' (*itthatta*)? The reply, as usual, is in the negative. The object of the last thought is '*nāma-rūpa*' which is indicative of the next birth. It makes an imprint in the mother's womb, like a light shade of the mind but until consciousness goes and joins with it, there is no animation. Even if consciousness unites with it and animates it, if it slips out during the period of pregnancy, an apparent miscarriage will result. Instead of a child, a lifeless ball of flesh will come out, because consciousness has slipped out due to some karmic reason. Consequently, no being will be born out of that '*nāma-rūpa*' into 'this state of existence' or '*itthatta*'.

When Venerable Ānanda understood this point, the Buddha proceeds to put another question to him.

"If, Ānanda, the consciousness of a boy or a girl were to get cut off at the young age itself, would name-and-form come to growth and maturity?"

"No, indeed, Venerable Sir."

Another important fact comes to light by this question. What is generally known as "*nāma-rūpa*" in the world is that which is activated by consciousness–which latter is

taken for granted as it is invisible. But if consciousness slips out after the birth of a child, it is no longer reckoned as *nāma-rūpa*. It is only a dead body.

Having convinced Venerable Ānanda of these three corroborative facts, the Buddha finally draws the conclusion in a very emphatic tone:

"*Tasmātihānanda, esova hetu, etaṁ nidānaṁ, esa samudayo, esa paccayo, viññāṇassa yadidaṁ nāmarūpaṁ*"

"Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the cause, this is the origin, this is the condition for name-and-form, namely, consciousness."

Thereby the Buddha convinces Venerable Ānanda of the fact that there can be no name-and-form in the absence of consciousness.

Then he shows that the converse is also true just by one sentence:

"*Viññaṇaṁ va hi Ānanda, nāmarūpe patiṭṭhaṁ nālabhissatha api nu kho āyatiṁ jātijarāmaṇa dukkhasamudaya sambhavo paññāyethāti*"

"And if, Ānanda, consciousness were not to get a footing on name-and-form, would there be manifest an arising of birth,

decay, death and suffering in the future?"

"No, indeed, Venerable Sir."

"Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the cause, this is the origin, this is the condition for consciousness – namely, name-and-form."

This amounts to saying that if consciousness does not get a footing in name-and-form, there is no state of existence. There is no question of birth again. What the Arahants have done is to bring consciousness to such a state where it gets no footing on name-and-form. In other words, it is the state of unestablished consciousness (*appatiṭṭhita viññaṇa*).

Having thus clarified the inter-relation between consciousness and name-and-form, the Buddha now makes a very strange declaration of extraordinary depth summing up this mutual relationship in the context of Saṁsāric existence.

"*Ettāvatā kho Ānanda jāyetha vā jīyetha vā mīyetha vā cavetha vā uppajjetha vā, ettāvatā adhivacanapatho ettāvatā niruttipatho ettāvatā paññattipatho ettāvatā paññāvacaraṁ ettāvatā vaṭṭaṁ vaṭṭati itthattaṁ paññāpanāya yadidaṁ nāmarūpaṁ saha viññāṇena*"

"In so far only, Ānanda, can one be born or grow old or die or pass away or reappear, in so far only is there any pathway for a verbal expression, in so far only is there any pathway for terminology, in so far only is there any pathway for designation, in so far

only is there any sphere of wisdom, in so far only is there a whirling round for a state of 'thisness', that is to say, as far as name-and-form together with consciousness."

The full significance of the whirling round for a designation of this existence (*ettāvātā vaṭṭaṁ vaṭṭati itthataṁ paññāpaṇāya*) emerges from this declaration. This is the standard quotation asserting the validity of our simile of the vortex between consciousness and name-and-form (*nāmarūpaṁ saha viññāṇena*). It is because of this whirling round, this vortex, that even a designation is possible. The entire problem of existence is traceable to this vortex and its solution through wisdom is also within this and not outside it. Even the price of an article is dependent on the whirling round of supply and demand. Likewise, it is between these two that is name-and-form and consciousness – that all concepts of a being in existence are at all possible.

Perhaps our explanation of '*phassa*' or contact might not be clear enough for many of you. As usual, let me digress into the world of similes for further clarification. When we speak of contact in the sentient or animate world, the idea of two things automatically comes in because consciousness discriminates between two things. But what about the insentient or inanimate world? If we throw heavily one big stone on another, even if the other gets cracked, it will not complain. There is no 'clash'. But supposing you accidentally collide with another while walking on the pavement in a rush hour, there could easily be a clash – verbally or even physically. There we see clearly a case of verbal impression (*adhivacanasamphassa*) and resistance impression (*paṭighasamphassa*), unlike in the earlier instance of inanimate objects. There was no 'clash', no offence or defence between the two stones.

Let us take up another simile. That is one which carpenters will understand easily. Suppose a carpenter is going to join two planks of wood to fix up a door. He might ask his apprentice to see whether the two planks properly touch each other. Strictly speaking, lifeless planks cannot 'touch'. But the concept of touch is attributed to it in mechanical parlance in various branches of technology. Mechanics even infuse life into the tools and machines they work with. I am told that there is 'someone' inside the computer too. Our delusion of self makes us attribute life into the inanimate objects also. The age of animism and anthropomorphism is not yet over. There was no clash when the two stones collided. But there was a clash when two pedestrians collided. This is enough for one to understand the two aspects of '*phassa*'– '*adhivacanasamphassa*' (verbal impression) and '*paṭighasamphassa*' (resistance impression). The recognition aspect is not there in the case of inanimate objects. But our primitive animistic instinct prompts us to attribute 'contact' and 'touch' to lifeless objects around us and arbitrarily infuse life into them.

The question of contact (*phassa*) brings us to an extraordinary feature of the Buddha's teaching which marks it off from all other religious teachings in the world. No other religious teacher could go beyond contact. In the *Brahmajāla Sutta,* the Buddha

dismisses all the 62 views with a brief but meaningful phrase '*tadapi phassa paccayā*'– 'that too is dependent on contact.' The implication is that the Buddha went beyond contact. How did he accomplish this? By his understanding of the Law of Dependent Arising. This itself reveals the special significance of the Law of Dependent Arising. But there are many who call in question our interpretation of *Paṭicca Samuppāda* by quoting a discourse which has an allusion to the descent into the womb.

The discourse they adduce in support of the commentarial three-life interpretation is the *Titthāyatana Sutta* of the *Anguttara Nikāya*. The special significance of that discourse is that it relates the Law of Dependent Arising to the Four Noble Truths.

"*Channaṁ bhikkhave dhātūnaṁ upādāya gabbhassa avakkanti hoti. Okkantiyā sati nāmarūpaṁ nāmarūpa paccayā saḷāyatanaṁ. Saḷātanapaccayā phasso. Phassaphaccayā vedanā. Vediyamanassa kho panāhaṁ bhikkhave idaṁ dukkhanti paññapemi. Ayaṁ dukkhasamudayoti paññapemi. Ayaṁ dukkhanirodhoti paññapemi. Ayaṁ dukkhanirodhagāmini paṭipadāti paññapemi*"

"Depending on the six elements, monks, there is a descent into the womb. When there is a descent, there is Name-and-form. Dependent on name-and-form, the six sense spheres, dependent on the six sense spheres, contact, dependent on contact, feeling. To one who feels, monks, I make it known thus:

'This is suffering. This is the arising of suffering. This is the cessation of suffering. This is the path leading to the cessation of suffering.'"

Now what are the six elements? Earth, water, fire, air, space and consciousness. Those of you who have read the *Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta,* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* would remember how the Buddha begins his sermon to Pukkusāti.

"*Chadhāturo ayaṁ bhikkhu puriso*"

"Monk, this man is made up of six elements."

That means, man is a bundle of six elements, not four. The Sutta in question also begins with the words "*channaṁ bhikkhave dhātūnaṁ upādāya*"

"monks, depending on the six elements?"

That is to say, if there is a grasping of the six elements before the death of a person, '*gabbhassa avakkanti hoti*' there is a descent into a womb. Since the presence of consciousness is already implied, here we have the same story of interdependence between name and form. This passage is misinterpreted by many scholars and preachers as canonical evidence in support of the commentarial three-life interpretation of *Paṭiccasamuppāda*. All what the Sutta passage in question asserts is that if one grasps the six elements, that is to say, as long as these elements are not made to fade away as stated in the *Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta*, there is a descent into the

womb. '*Okkantiyā sati nāmarūpaṁ*'. When there is a descent of consciousness into the womb, one can speak of name-and-form. Dependent on name-and-form, there is the six sense spheres. Dependent on six sense spheres, contact; and dependent on contact, feeling. Feeling is taken as the turning point to the Four Noble Truths '*Vediyamānassa bhikkhave idaṁ dukkhanti paññapemi*'. It is to one who feels that I make known 'this is suffering' etc. The formula branches off towards the Four Noble Truths, leading to the cessation of suffering. In this way, the law of Dependent Arising is conjoined to the Four Noble Truths.

All this shows the immense importance of the Law of Dependent Arising. There are many instances where the fundamental significance of the Law of Dependent Arising is highlighted. Once Venerable Sariputta brings up a quotation from the Buddha himself to emphasize the importance of the Law of Dependent Arising:

"*Vuttaṁ kho panetaṁ bhagavatā yo paṭiccasamuppādaṁ passati so dhammaṁ passati; yo dhammaṁ passati so paṭiccasamuppādaṁ passati*"

"This has been said by the Fortunate one:

'He who sees the Law of Dependent Arising sees the Dhamma. He who sees the Dhamma sees the Law of Dependent Arising.?"

If this is so I wonder how many are there who actually know the Dhamma. It seems according to the words of the Buddha that no one can claim to know the Dhamma unless he has understood the Law of Dependent Arising.

In the same connection, there is a very powerful peroration by the Buddha asserting in no uncertain terms the cardinal significance of the Law of Depdendent Arising. Even the tone of that declaration is so impressive that I shall try to quote it in full.

'*Katamo ca bhikkhave, paṭiccasamuppādo? Jātipaccayā bhikkhave jarāmaraṇaṁ. uppādā vā tathāgatānaṁ anuppādā vā tathāgatānaṁ ṭhitā va sā dhātu dhammaṭṭhitatā dhammaniyāmatā idappaccayatā. Taṁ tathāgato abhisambujjhati abhisameti abhisambujjhitva abhisametvā ācikkhati deseti paññapeti paṭṭhapeti vivarati vibhajati uttānīkaroti passathāti cāha*'

"What, monks, is Dependent Arising? Conditioned by birth, monks, is decay and death. Whether there is an arising of Tathāgatas or no arising of Tathāgatas, that element does persist, that stability of the Dhamma, that norm of the Dhamma, the specific conditionality. That, the Tathāgata awakens to, and intuits into. Having awakened to it and intuited into it, he explains it, preaches it, proclaims it, reveals it, analyzes it, elucidates it, and says 'Behold'."

This declaration shows the greatness of the Buddha as a peerless teacher in that he explained, analyzed and elucidated such a deep Dhamma in a way that we can

understand and see for ourselves in our experience. The specific conditionality between any two links of the formula is called *Paṭicca Samuppāda* as evidenced from the following quotation:

"*avijjā paccayā bhikkhave saṁkhārā, yā tatra tathatā avitathatā anaññathatā idappaccayatā ayaṁ vuccati bhikkhave paṭiccasamuppādo*." "Conditioned by ignorance, O, monks, are preparations. That suchness therein, that invariability, that not-otherwiseness, that specific conditionality–this, O, monks, is called Dependent Arising."

All these declarations make it clear that this specific conditionality is an invariable law true for all times whether the Tathāgatas arise or not. This is a lion's roar proclaiming the greatness of this eternal law.

Having come across such a Dhamma, we should not shrink from it, saying that it is too deep for us to understand. Without understanding it, one cannot be a Stream-winner. That is why even the poor leper Suppabuddha, when he became a Stream-winner, is said to have got the insight into the Law of Dependent Arising. Nowadays a meditator has to get a certificate from the meditation centre as proof of his attainment. All that was not necessary in the past. The sum total of the insight of a stream-winner is expressed in the following words:

'*Yaṁ kiñci samudayadhammaṁ sabbaṁ taṁ nirodhadhammaṁ*'

'Whatever is of a nature to arise, all that is of a nature to cease.'

As we explained the other day, the underlying principle of the Law obtains between any two links. One must understand the difference between the Law and its illustrations. There is a lot of confusion in this regard. The Buddha would cite just two links as in this instance–'*avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā*'(conditioned by ignorance are preparations) –and emphasize the invariability of this Law, or else he would say '*jātipaccayā jarāmaraṇaṁ*'(conditioned by birth is decay and death) and assert the eternal validity of the Law implied by it. What is required is the seeing of this Law in one's experience and not the recitation of the formula. To break up the formula into three parts as applicable to three lives is to make the confusion all the more confounded–and this despite the fact that Dhamma is declared to be 'visible here and now' (*sandiṭṭhiko*) and 'timeless' (*akāliko*). It is with reference to this life itself that the Buddha presented the solution to this problem of suffering. There is no need to refer ignorance to a past life. Many scholars are puzzled by the nonmention of ignorance in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* and the *Mahā Nidāna Sutta*. Apparently, both *avijjā* and *saṁkhārā* are missing in these two discourses. But all the same, they are implicit there in the discussion of Paṭiccasamuppāda. The non-understanding of the inter-relation between consciousness and name-and-form itself is '*avijjā*'. The going round, the whirling round resulting from that ignorance is sankhārā. So then one cannot say that those two links

are overlooked. The *Mahā Nidāna* or the great cause in the *Mahā Nidāna Sutta* refers to the inter-relation between consciousness and name-and-form. There is so much talk these days about the consciousness of a person at death. But very few talk about name-and-form. The Buddha has clearly explained the inter-dependence of these two in his sermons on Dependent Arising. It is a case of a vortex or a whirlpool.

Then what about the freedom from this state of affairs? In the verse which forms the topic of this sermon, it is said that the sage has crossed the abyss –'*pātālaṁ atarī isī*'. What is the significance of this statement? We have explained that the abyss refers to the painful bodily feelings. Bodily pain is the deepest inescapable aspect of suffering. But the arahants have come out even from that abyss. On an earlier occasion, we described how Venerable Dabba Mallaputta, an arahant, set fire to his own body at the moment of *parinibbāna*. It is not a case of rash self-immolation. That was after he attained to *Arahattaphala Samāpatti*. The extraordinary feature of that concentration is that while in it one is free from all feelings. It is a well-known fact that *nibbāna* is called *avedayita sukha* (unfelt bliss). Once when the Venerable Sāriputta declared "Friends, this *nibbāna* is bliss! Friends, this *nibbāna* is bliss?"

Venerable Udāyi asked him:

"What bliss is there, friend, where there is no feeling?"

His reply was "This itself, friend, is the bliss therein–the fact that there is no feeling!" This is because all three grades of feeling– pleasant, painful and neither painful nor pleasant– are reckoned as suffering in the last analysis.

Crossing the abyss or to get over painful bodily feelings is to attain to that concentration peculiar to arahants. While in that state, the mind is said to be '*animitta*' (signless), *appaṇihita* (undirected) and '*suññā*' (void). Alternatively, it is called *appatiṭṭhita viññāṇa* (unestablished consciousness). Earlier, we spoke of consciousness getting established in a mother's womb. It is then that the concept of a "person" is valid. But the highest aim of this dispensation is to reach that state where consciousness does not get established. That is freedom. That is the emancipation of the mind.

This emancipation of the mind is presented in various ways in various discourses. Now that we have mentioned about the six elements, let us briefly examine how the *Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta* approaches the problem of emancipation. Here we are given a method of making the elements fade away (*virājeti*) from the mind–a sort of erasing from the mind. How can one erase them? These elements are there because of measuring. In our writings about meditation on elements, we have pointed out with special reference to Venerable Sāriputta's sermons, that earth, water, fire and air are drawn on our minds due to experiences obtained through name-and-form. It is a case of measuring. To do away with this measuring, Venerable Sāriputta recommends an elemental meditation. Head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth etc., represent the internal earth-element. It is the

same with the external earth-element in point of solidity. Compared with the larger earth element outside, the internal earth-element is puny and insignificant. By constant reflection on those lines, the mind is made to get disenchanted with the earth-element, thereby making it fade away from the mind. It is a mind liberated from the four elements that does not take birth in a mother's womb. On the other hand, so long as the grasp on the six elements is there, there is a descent into the womb as mentioned above. Having grasped the six elements or depending on the six elements, there is a descent into the womb. Only so long as there is a grasp on these elements, can one speak of a birth in a mother's womb. Along with birth goes the whirling between the two.

That is why we spoke of a vortex on an earlier occasion. A vortex can be recognized only so long as there is a whirling round. If one stretches one's arm towards the open sea saying 'there, there', others cannot guess 'where' he means unless there is a vortex. Where there is a vortex, one can point out a spot in the sea. Similarly, every being is a Saṁsāric vortex. In the previous sermon, we explained how a vortex is formed and how it ceases. Let us try to understand this formation of a vortex from another point of view. As you know, there is a word in common usage in referring to the body, namely, '*upādinna*'. This is a term variously interpreted by scholars. '*upādinna*' means 'what is grasped'. It actually refers to that which is grasped at the dying moment–the 'grasped par excellence', so to speak. That is what we try to protect at all costs. Isn't it the tiny speck of 'mud' (*kalala*) in the mother's womb– that foetus which we grasp as the first thing in this life? We grasp it with such tenacity that it is called '*gabbha*' or '*garbha*' (Sanskrit). Its growth inside the womb is not simply due to the mother's care and caution. It is largely due to the tenacious 'grab' of the child. All this is because of the whirling round between consciousness and name-and-form. What we call 'beings' are so many whirlpools in the ocean of *samsāra*. This organic body as 'the grasped par excellence' (*upādinna*) represents that which has been grasped as internal from the four elements outside. All our efforts are directed towards the protection of this organic combination of elements. The disturbance of the humours is also symptomatic of our struggle to preserve this organic combination intact. That clash on the pavement gives a hint to the danger of possessing this conscious body. Birth, decay, disease, death and all the abysmal pains arise out of this Saṁsāric vortex. That is why the Buddha told Venerable Ānanda:

'It is through not understanding and not penetrating this Dhamma that this progeny has become a tangled skein matted like a bird's nest, interwoven like *muñja* and *babbaja* grass, unable to pass beyond states of woe, bad bournes, downfall and the round of birth and death.'

This tangled problem the Buddha successfully solved by pointing out that there are two aspects of contact called *adhivacanasamphassa* and *paṭighasamphassa*. He also pointed out that in relation to contact there are two things:

name and form and that there is a mutual relationship between consciousness and name-and-form. Finally, he showed how consciousness is made non-manifestative. In our earlier sermons we pointed out that name-and-form is like a reflection on consciousness. It is like a blind man's impression of a block of ice he strikes against through feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention. Worldlings arouse greed, hate and delusion based on that impression, making the tangle all the more tangled. With this body born of one's past kamma, one breaks the five precepts, comes into conflict with the world just for the sake of protecting this body and goes on amassing defilements thereby precipitating a continuity of the vortex. But what did the arahants do? They aroused wisdom in regard to the interrelation between consciousness and name-and-form, since in the last analysis that is the proper sphere for wisdom as the term '*paññāvacaraṁ'* in that key passage implies. If one rightly understands that interrelation through the path of practice outlined by the Buddha and frees the mind from the four primaries earth, water, fire and air as well as from feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention, one attains to that state of emancipation of the mind known as *anidassana viññāṇa* (non-manifestative consciousness) or *appatiṭṭhita viññāṇa* (unestablished consciousness). This is the end of '*bhava*' or Saṁsāric existence which the Buddha has made known to the world.

So then '*bhava*' does not mean a place of existence as the world is prone to believe. It is an existence dependent on grasping (*upādāna*). There is another term used to indicate this kind of '*bhava*', namely, '*itthatta*'. This term too is a problem to many. '*Itthaṁ*' means 'in this way'. '*Itthatta*' is thisness or 'this state of existence'. '*Itthatta*' is in conflict with '*aññathābhāva'* (otherwiseness). 'Thisness' is all the time turning into 'otherwiseness'.

This is the tragedy of existence – '*itthabhāvaññathābhāva*' which the Buddha lays bare in the following verse in the *Dvayatānupassanā Sutta*.

Taṇhādutiyo puriso dīghamaddhāna saṁsaraṁ

itthabhāvaññathābhāvaṁ saṁsāraṁ nātivattati

'The man who has craving as his partner (lit, 'second') and keeps going round for a long time, does not transcend this *saṁsāra* which is an alternation between 'thisness' and 'otherwiseness'.'

The worldling allied to craving who keeps wandering in *Saṁsāra* for a long time cannot get beyond the duality of 'thisness' and 'otherwiseness'. The moment he grasps a state of existence as a 'thisness', it becomes subject to otherwiseness. This is what is called impermanence, the inexorable tragedy of the conceit of existence. Life is a vain struggle to withstand 'otherwiseness'. It is the vortex that sustains '*itthatta*' and the vortex is the outcome of ignorance and craving. From another point of view, it can be attributed to the four perversions (*vipallāsā*). Impermanence is the nature of the world. But there is a perception of permanence in the impermanent. Also, there is a perception of beauty in

the repulsive, a perception of pleasantness in the painful, and a perception of self in the notself. The vortex is kept up by these four perversions. Having followed the Noble Eight-fold Path and developed concentration and insight into the three characteristics– impermanence, suffering and not-self, one gets dejected with the five aggregates of grasping and attains emancipation. One can experience that non-manifestative (*anidassana*) state of consciousness. Thereby one would be fully convinced of the fact that '*bhava*' has ceased here and now. Because of that conviction, one is no longer 'qualified' to be born since name-and-form has slipped out. It is in view of this possibility of freedom from rebirth that the Buddha addressed the following question to Venerable Ānanda in the *Mahā Nidāna Sutta*.

'*Viññāṇaṁ va hi Ānanda nāmarūpe patiṭṭhaṁ nālabhissatha api nu kho āyatiṁ jātijarāmaraṇadukkhasamudaya sambhavo paññāyethā*.'

'*Nohetaṁ bhante*'

'If, Ānanda, consciousness were not to get a footing on name-and-form, would there be manifest an arising of birth, decay, death, and suffering in the future?'

'No, indeed, Venerable Sir.'

So then, you have listened to an analysis of a very important discourse today–the *Mahā Nidāna Sutta*. It is only by way of introduction that we brought up the *Ekamūla Sutta*. You should not regard all this as mere academic stuff meant for scholars. We invite you to make use of this knowledge of the Law of Dependent Arising in your practice with the aim of understanding the Four Noble Truths.

It seems today also as usual many of you have observed the higher precepts. Others too have listened to this sermon which is directed towards *Nibbāna* established on some precepts. May you all strive on diligently to attain the goal in this very life! Whatever beings there are from the lowest hell to the highest Brahma world, may they all rejoice in this sermon. May it conduce to the attainment of their aspirations! May they all realize the Deathless *Nibbāna*!