Paticca Samuppada Sermon 11
The Law of Dependent Arising

(Pahan Kanuwa Sermon – No. 193)

'*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa*'

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

Ye ca rūpūpagā sattā

ye ca arūpaṭṭhāyino

nirodhaṁ appajānantā

āgantāro punabbhavaṁ

Ye ca rūpe pariññāya

arūpesu asaṇṭhitā

nirodhe ye vimuccanti

te janā maccuhāyino

Kāyena amataṁ dhātuṁ

phusayitvā nirūpadhiṁ

upadhipaṭinissaggaṁ

sacchikatvā anāsavo

deseti sammāsambuddho

asokaṁ virajaṁ padaṁ

– Itivuttaka Tika Nipāta

Those beings that go to realms of form

And those that are settled in formless realms

Not understanding the fact of cessation

Come back again and again to existence

Those who having comprehended realms of forms

Do not get settled in formless realms

Are released in the experience of cessation

It is they that are the dispellers of death

Having touched with the body the deathless element

Which is free from all assets

And realized relinquishment of assets

Being influx-free the perfectly enlightened one

Proclaims the sorrowless taintless state

Dear Listeners,

The Four Noble Truths, which the Fully Enlightened Buddha proclaimed to the world on an Esala Full Moon Poya day, is a wonderful teaching the world has never heard before.

Suffering, its arising, the cessation and the Path to it – all these Four Noble Truths are based on the norm of Dependent Arising. Therefore, on this Esala Poya Day we have chosen as the topic of our eleventh sermon, in this series of sermons on Dependent Arising, the Noble Truth of Cessation. We have taken up three verses which declare that this truth of cessation is something that the world has never heard. Among the Threes of the *Itivuttaka* these three verses are introduced with this statement:

'*Vuttaṁ hetaṁ bhagavatā vuttaṁ arahatāti me sutaṁ.*'

– 'I have heard that this was said by the Fortunate One, the Worthy!' What was said is mentioned in brief as follows:

'*Rūpehi bhikkhave arūpā santatarā*

arūpehi nirodho santataroti'

"Monks, more peaceful than Realms of Form are the Formless.

More peaceful than the Formless Realms is Cessation."

Then comes the brief introductory note:

"This fact the Fortunate One uttered. Therein it is said thus:" and then those three verses are given. Let us try to get at the meaning of these verses.

'*Ye ca rūpūpagā sattā*' – Whatever beings there are that go to Realms of Form. '*Ye ca arūpaṭṭhāyino*' – and whatever beings that are in Formless Realms. '*nirodhaṁ appajānantā*' – Not understanding cessation. '*āgantāro punabbhavaṁ*' – come back again and again to existence.

'Ye ca rūpe pariññāya' – But those who having comprehended the nature of forms. '*arūpesu asaṇṭhitā*' – do not get settled in Formless Realms. '*nirodhe ye vimuccanti*' – and are released in the cessation. '*te janā maccuhāyino*' – They are the dispellers of death.

'*Kāyena amataṁ dhātuṁ – phusayitvā nirūpadhiṁ*' – Having touched with the body the Deathless Element that is assetless, '*upadhipaṭinissaggaṁ – sacchikatvā anāsavo*' – And being influx free, realized the relinquishment of assets, '*deseti sammāsambuddho – asokaṁ virajaṁ padaṁ*' – The Fully Enlightened One preaches the sorrowless taintless state.

Poṭṭhapāda Sutta of the *Dīgha Nikāya* is a highly significant discourse which clearly portrays the ideas expressed in those three verses. The introductory episode is as follows:

When the Buddha was dwelling at Jetavana monastery in Sāvatthi, the wandering ascetic Poṭṭhapāda was staying at *Mallikārāma* built by Queen Mallikā for ascetics of other sects, together with hundreds of wandering ascetics. One day the Buddha set out in the forenoon on his alms round and it occurred to him:

"It is too early for me to go for alms in the city of Sāvatthi. What if I were to meet the wandering ascetic Poṭṭhapāda in *Mallikārāma*."

Then the Buddha turned in the direction of *Mallikārāma* and as he was approaching, Poṭṭhapāda saw him from afar and silenced his crowd saying that the Buddha liked silence.

When the Buddha came there, Poṭṭhapāda welcomed him with the compliment:

"Venerable Sir, it is a long time since you have done us the favor of paying a visit" and offered him a high seat. Seated on it the Buddha asked him what sort of a talk they were engaged in when he came in as an interruption. Poṭṭhapāda simply replied:

"Venerable Sir, let that talk be. That is not the type of talk which is not rare for your reverence to hear." and raised a topic which he considered more important.

"In days past, Venerable Sir, among recluses and Brahmins of various sects assembled in the hall for discussing moot-points, a talk arose concerning the cessation of higher levels of perception (*abhisaññānirodha*). The topic of discussion was:

'How does the cessation of higher levels of perception come about?' When that topic came up, some put forward the view:

"Without a cause or condition a man's perception arises and ceases. At the time it arises, one is percipient. When it ceases, one is not percipient."

This is how some explained the cessation of higher levels of perception. Then another said:

"No, no. That is not the way it happens. Perception is a man's self. It comes and goes. When it comes, one is percipient. When it goes one is non-percipient." Then a third interposed:

"No no. That is not the way it happens. There are recluses and Brahmins of great psychic power and influence. They insert perception into a man and withdraw it. When it is inserted, he is percipient, when it is withdrawn he is non-percipient."

Then a fourth objected:

"No no. That is not the way it happens. There are deities of great psychic power and influence. They insert perception into a man and withdraw it. When it is inserted he is percipient, when it is withdrawn he is non-percipient."

Having given a report of that discussion Poṭṭhapāda said:

"And then Venerable Sir, I remembered the Fortunate One with the thought:

'If only the Fortunate One, the Well-gone One were here who is proficient in those issues! The Fortunate One is knowledgeable in the cessation of higher levels of perception'."

And then Poṭṭhapāda formally invited the Buddha to explain it with the words:

"Venerable Sir, how does cessation of higher levels of perception come about?"

Before presenting the Buddha's answer to this question, let me mention something that enhances the relevance of the Buddha's sermon. It was a time when yogins of India in their spiritual quest found themselves in a dilemma. They had reached the highest level in the development of perception. There were some who had attained the *jhānic* level of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*). You may have heard of the two teachers our *Bodhisatta* prince *Siddhattha* approached after his renunciation namely *Ālāra Kālāma* and *Uddaka Rāmaputta*. Out of them, *Ālāra Kālāma* had attained the Formless Realm of Nothingness. (*Ākiñcaññāyatana*) and *Uddaka Rāmaputta* had attained the Realm of Neither-perception-nor-non-perception

(*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*). But our *Bodhisatta* aroused both those *jhānic* levels as soon as the two teachers uttered a few words about them and even as they were offering equal status as teachers he left them with the thought:

"This is not the way to *Nibbāna*."

From this we can infer that those yogins were in a problematic situation. The dilemma they were in is briefly mentioned in the *Pañcattaya Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* as follows:

"*Saññā rogo saññā gaṇḍo saññā sallaṁ, asaññā sammoho. Etaṁ santaṁ etaṁ paṇītaṁ yadidaṁ nevasaññānāsaññaṁ.*"

"Perception is a disease, perception is a boil, perception is a dart, and absence of perception is delusion. This is peaceful, this is excellent, that is to say neither-perception-nor-non-perception."

They understood the limitations of perception – that it is a disease, a boil, a dart. But on the other hand, to give up perception according to them – is tantamount to delusion. So for the nonce, they found a solution in the intermediate position – neither-perception-nor-non-perception. In an earlier sermon we compared it to a see-sawing. In short those yogins were seesawing between perception and non-perception. It was in such a context that the Buddha was confronted with this problem. Let us see how he tackles it.

First of all, the Buddha tells Poṭṭhapāda*:*

"If any recluses and Brahmins had said that perception arises in a man without any cause or condition, they have blundered at the very outset.

Then the Buddha declares the conclusion that accords with the Dhamma.

"*Sahetuhi Poṭṭhapāda sappaccayā purisassa saññā uppajjantipi nirujjhantipi.*"

"For*,* Poṭṭhapāda*,* it is due to causes and conditions that a man's perceptions arise and cease."

Now comes a highly significant statement which embodies a first principle. You all had better bear it in mind. It comes up again and again like a refrain in a song throughout the Buddha's disquisition that follows. This is it:

"*Sikkhā ekā saññā uppajjanti,*

sikkhā ekā saññā nirujjhanti"

"Through training some perceptions arise,

through training some perceptions cease."

Having presented that first principle, the Buddha himself offers to substantiate it with the explicatory question:

"*Kā ca sikkha?*"

"What is that training?"

Since the long account that follows is very often met with in the discourses, we shall only give the gist of it.

A *Tathāgata*, Fully Enlightened, arises in the world and preaches the Dhamma which is excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle, excellent in the end, having realized through higher knowledge the nature of the world as it is, in the world with its gods, Maras, Brahmas, recluses and Brahmins.

A householder or a householder's son listens to that Dhamma, arouses faith in it and goes forth in the dispensation.

Having gone forth, he becomes endowed with virtue, sense-restraint, mindfulness and full awareness and contentment. With that he goes into solitude and cleanses his mind of the five hindrances – avarice, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, worry and remorse and doubt. Even from there one can see how the Law of Dependent Arising works in the mode of approach to the First *Jhāna*. That monk, as he reflects on the fact that the hindrances are abandoned within him, rapture arises. He subdues it and experiences joy. Due to his joyous mind, the body becomes tranquil. With the tranquil body, he experiences happiness and in that happiness his mind gets concentrated. About that monk, the Buddha says this much. Secluded from sense pleasures and unskilful mental states, he attains to and abides in the First *Jhāna* which is accompanied by thought applied and sustained with joy and bliss born of seclusion. In him, the former perception of sensuality ceases and the subtle but actual perception of joy and bliss born of seclusion is there at that time. And then the Buddha citing this as an illustration of the above first principle, makes the following declaration:

> "*Evampi sikkhā ekā saññā uppajjanti,*
>
> *sikkhā ekā saññā nirujjhanti*"
>
> "Thus it is that through training some perceptions arise
>
> and through training some perceptions cease."

Then the approach to the Second *Jhāna,* briefly stated, is as follows:

When that monk attains to the First *Jhāna* again and again, he realizes that some *Jhāna* factors are gross. First of all thoughts, initial and sustained, are found to be gross and he calms them down and attains to the Second *Jhāna,* which is accompanied by joy and bliss born of concentration. About that monk the Buddha says that in him the former

subtle perception of joy and bliss born of seclusion ceases. Instead of it the subtle perception of joy and bliss born of concentration arises. Then again the Buddha comes out with the refrain-like corroborative formula:

"*Evampi sikkhā ekā saññā uppajjanti, sikkhā ekā saññā nirujjhanti*"

"Thus it is that through training some perceptions arise and through training some perceptions cease."

And then the Third *Jhāna* is attained by getting rid of joy which is felt to be gross and by arousing a bliss of equanimity. About him it is said that the former subtle perception of joy born of concentration ceases and in its place a subtle perception of bliss born of equanimity arises of which he is now conscious. Then that monk abandons both bliss and pain and having already done away with happiness and unhappiness arouses the Fourth *Jhāna* which is free from both pain and bliss and has pure mindfulness of equanimity. In him, it is said that the former subtle perception of bliss of equanimity has ceased and the subtle perception of the absence of pain and bliss has arisen.

Again the same refrain-like formula comes up.

"Thus it is that through training some perceptions arise and through training some perceptions cease."

Then the way of going beyond Spheres of Form is given. That monk by transcending perceptions of form, putting an end to perceptions of resistance and not attending to perceptions of multiplicity takes up the sign – 'space is infinite' and attains to the Sphere of Infinity of Space. In him, the perception of Form that he earlier had, ceases and the subtle perception of Infinity of Space arises. He becomes one with a subtle perception of bliss in the Sphere of Infinity of Space. Thus through training some perceptions arise and through training some perceptions cease.

Transcending the Sphere of Infinity of Space, that monk makes that consciousness which was directed to space itself the object and develops the Sphere of Infinity of Consciousness. And in him the former subtle perception of the Infinity of Space ceases and the subtle perception of the Infinity of Consciousness arises. He becomes one with the subtle perception of bliss in the Sphere of Infinity of Consciousness. Thus some perceptions arise through training and some perceptions cease through training.

Then he transcends the Sphere of Infinity of Consciousness and developing as the meditation object, the idea 'There is nothing', attains to and abides in the Sphere of Nothingness. And in him the former subtle perception of Infinity of Consciousness ceases and the subtle perception of the Infinity of Nothingness arises. Thus through training some perceptions arise and through training some perceptions cease.

Now comes a turning point at this stage. The Sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception is too subtle to be made the base for developing insight. The Sphere of

Nothingness is regarded as the central spot from which one turns either towards the Sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception or towards the attainment of Cessation of Perceptions and Feelings. But as mentioned above, until the advent of the Buddha, ascetics of other sects were not aware of this latter possibility. Instead they were see-sawing between perception and non-perception. The Buddha now goes on to describe how a monk in this dispensation makes the breakthrough.

"Poṭṭhapāda, when a monk in this dispensation is aware of his perception, he passes from one level of perception to another and gradually touches the peak of perception called '*saññagga*' – which is a term for the Sphere of Nothingness. As he stands there at the peak of perception it occurs to him:

"To go on intending is bad for me. It is better for me not to intend. ('*cetayamānassa me pāpiyo acetayamānassa me seyyo*'). And he weighs pros and cons thus:

"If I were to go on intending and engage in specially preparing ('*āhañceva kho pana ceteyyaṁ abhisaṁkhareyyaṁ*') these perceptions would cease and other grosser perceptions would arise. Then he makes a decision which it is not possible for one in an ordinary level of perception to make. It is worded as follows:

> "*yannūnāhaṁ na ceva ceteyyaṁ nābhisaṁkhareyyaṁ*"
>
> "What if I were not to intend and specially prepare"

And in accordance with that decision he neither intends nor prepares specially ('*so na ceva ceteti na abhisaṁkharoti*').

Now the Buddha explains what happens to the monk who carries out that crucial decision.

"As he does not intend and prepare specially, those perceptions cease and other grosser perceptions do not arise. He touches cessation ('*So nirodhaṁ phusati*'). Finally the Buddha sums up the whole account with this sentence:

> "*Evaṁ kho Poṭṭhapāda,*
>
> *anupubbābhisaññānirodhasampajāna-samāpatti hoti.*"

"It is in this way, Poṭṭhapāda that the attainment with full awareness to the gradual cessation of higher levels of perception comes about"

The long compound which marks the grand finale of this extraordinary discussion might need analysis. '*Anupubba*' means gradual or by stages. '*Abhisaññā*' we have already explained as higher levels of perception and *ābhisaññānirodha* is cessation of those higher levels of perception. '*Nirodha-sampajānasamāpatti*' means the attainment to the cessation with full awareness. By the way, the term '*anupubba*' merits a little

comment, as it is a very important term in this dispensation. You may have come across the phrase:

'*anupubbasikkhā anupubbakiriyā anupubbapatipadā*.' In this dispensation there is a gradual training, a gradual course of action and a gradual treading of the path. The term '*anupubba*' (gradual) reminds one of the Law of Dependent Arising. Just think of a flight of steps. Like that by gradual stages, proceeding by stage to stage in the higher levels of perception, a monk in this dispensation gradually arrives at the cessation of perceptions and feelings.

Now that you are familiar with the constituents of 'name' in name-and-form ('*nāmarūpa*') that is to say feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention, you may note that the problem of yogins till then was how to get rid of feelings and perceptions. They were unable to give up perceptions for fear of falling into delusion. What is the reason? They were clinging to preparations. (*saṅkhārā*). In the context of name-and-form preparations appear as intention (*cetanā*). So this is the crucial point. That monk when he took the extraordinary decision:

"Let me not have intentions or preparations" was ready to give up even intention. Form is already gone and out of the constituents of name, feelings, perceptions and intentions are made to cease by that decision.

So what is there to 'contact'? Cessation itself.

This is enough for you to understand the difference between the philosophy of those pre Buddhistic yogins and the philosophy behind the Law of Dependent Arising with its Middle Path approach. At the end of this wonderful disquisition the Buddha asks Poṭṭhapāda*:*

"What do you think, Poṭṭhapāda? Have you ever heard of an attainment with full awareness to the gradual cessation of higher levels of perception like this?"

"No, indeed Venerable Sir."

After that Poṭṭhapāda raises a number of questions. Let us take them up one by one.

The first question is:

"Venerable Sir, does the Fortunate One make known one peak of perception (*saññagga)* or does he make known several peaks of perception?"

To this question the Buddha gives a very strange answer:

"Poṭṭhapāda*,* I make known one peak of perception as well as several peaks of perception."

Then Poṭṭhapāda asks:

"How is it, Venerable Sir, that the Fortunate One makes known one peak of perception as well as several peaks of perception?"

"In whatever way one touches cessation, in that way I point out a peak of perception. Thus it is Poṭṭhapāda that I point out one peak of perception as well as several peaks of perception. As far as we understand this is how it should be understood. There is in the Dhamma a conclusive statement as follows:

'*yāvatā saññāsamāpatti tāvatā aññāpaṭivedho.*'

'As far as is the range of attainments of perception, so far is there a penetration into full understanding.'

It means there are as many possibilities of penetration into arahanthood as there are attainments of perception. That is to say, the possibilities of reaching cessation through insight and realizing *Nibbāna*. Not only through attainment of cessation by gradual stages but through any one of the *jhānic* attainments (except the eighth) one can reach the peak of perceptions by ending intentions (*cetanā*) and special preparations (*abhisaṅkhārā*) mentioned above. That is how the Buddha's answer should be interpreted.

Then Poṭṭhapāda asks a second question:

"Venerable Sir, does perception arise first and later knowledge or knowledge arises first and later perception? Or else do perception and knowledge arise simultaneously?"

To this question the Buddha gives a straightforward answer:

"It is perception, Poṭṭhapāda that arises first. Knowledge arises later. Through the arising of perception is the arising of knowledge. And he understands. It is through this specific condition that knowledge has arisen in me."

Here too, the commentator is in doubt and quotes several interpretations given by various teachers.

According to our understanding, this is how the above subtle statement has to be explained.

Now what was the problem in regard to perception that the yogins were grappling with? For them perception was some sort of a 'bug-bear'– a mystery. They either took it as self or as some mysterious thing which someone else infused into them from outside. It was the Buddha who blasted the myth. Let us examine the implications of a certain term recurring in this discourse. That pregnant term is '*sakasaññī*' – 'with one's own perception' or 'percipient of oneself' It occurs in the decisive phrase:

"*Yato kho Poṭṭhapāda bhikkhu idha <u>sakasaññī</u> hoti.....*" – When Poṭṭhapāda a monk in this dispensation is percipient of oneself....

There is in this sutta the mention of the term '*sampajañña*' – full awareness; So from the very beginning a monk is accompanied by '*sati-sampajañña*' – mindfulness and full awareness. Then there is no place for mystic concepts, for mystery mongering with a 'self' or 'soul'; instead from moment to moment he is proceeding in accordance with the Law of Dependent Arising. There is nothing to grasp. It is like climbing a flight of steps. All along it is the story of perception and knowledge of perception. For instance if you read this discourse you will come across the two highly significant phrases:

i. '*vivekaja pītisukha sukhumasacca<u>saññā</u> hoti*' 'There is subtle and factual perception of joy and bliss born of seclusion.'

ii. '*vivekaja pītisukha sukhumasacca<u>saññī</u> hoti*'

'…. He is percipient of the subtle and factual joy and bliss born of seclusion.'

So the two terms '*saññā*' *and* '*saññī*' used by the Buddha side by side are highly significant. <u>Perception</u> arises and one is <u>aware</u> of that perception. It is that <u>awareness</u> of perception ('*saññī*') that has to be understood as knowledge ('*ñāna*') in this context. It is not the case that perception has arisen and the monk is unaware of it. Because he has full awareness ('*sampajañña*') he gets to know it. That is the knowledge. But the commentator goes on dabbling with conflicting views of teachers. The issue is clear enough.

Well, the Buddha has answered that question too. But Poṭṭhapāda has yet another question – a serious one at that. He asks:

"Venerable Sir, is perception a man's self or is perception one thing and self something else?"

Now this is a tricky question the type clever lawyers go on asking. Poṭṭhapāda here brings in a self as from nowhere.

Why? Because he still has '*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*' or 'Personality View'. He was probably disappointed that the Buddha's disquisition made no mention of a self. That is why he dragged in the question. Such questions put one in a dilemma. If you give a categorical answer, you get into difficulties. Take for instance a case like this in the law courts. A driver who has never taken intoxicants appears before the judge, but a lawyer wants to get him to admit that he has taken drinks. If the lawyer asks him sternly "Say 'Yes' or 'No'. Are you still drinking or have you stopped it?" – the man would be in a fix. Whether he answers 'yes' or 'no' he would get caught in the lawyer's trap. Poṭṭhapāda's question is also of the same type. But the Buddha didn't get caught. Instead he counter questioned Poṭṭhapāda*:*

"What do you mean by 'self', Poṭṭhapāda?"

The Buddha asked Poṭṭhapāda for a definition of the word 'self' because he himself has no conception of a self or soul. In discourses like *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, he called the concept of a 'self' an entirely foolish idea. ('*kevala paripūro bāladhammo*') which the world is clinging on to.

The commentator reprimands Poṭṭhapāda for dragging in a self with a pungent simile. He says as if a pig, after it has been bathed clean and anointed with perfumes goes back and plunges into a pit of excreta, Poṭṭhapāda, in spite of the fact that he has been bathed and anointed with perfumes in the form of a subtle sermon emphasizing the three characteristics, went back and plunged into the same cesspit of self view. But the Buddha as if to retrieve him counter-questioned him. Poṭṭhapāda, what do you mean by 'self'?

Some questions admit of a categorical answer but some do not. Sometimes you have to get the question clarified by the questioner himself. Such questions are called '*paṭipucchāvyākaranīya pañha*' – questions that have to be answered after counter-questioning. This is such a question. Now Poṭṭhapāda gives a definition of the word '*attā*'.

'Venerable Sir, I have the concept of a self that is gross and has form made up of the four great primaries and consuming food taken in mouthfuls. In short it means this body as it is. Now the Buddha says:

'Poṭṭhapāda, if that is the self you are speaking of, then perception is one thing and self something else. Then he gives the reason.

"The perception I am speaking of is of this nature. Some perceptions arise and some other perceptions cease. (*aññā va saññā uppajjanti aññā va saññā nirujjhanti*). There is something deep in this statement. It means 'perceptions arise as one thing and cease as another because they are subject to otherwiseness every moment. Take for instance the case of one attaining the First *Jhāna*. The perception that was there at the moment of attaining is not the same by the time it is transcended for it undergoes change by the training (*sikkhā*). That is to say, one level of perceptions arises, another level of perceptions ceases. There is no place for a self or soul in that explanation. When that definition is invalidated Poṭṭhapāda comes out with another definition.

"Venerable Sir, I mean a self that is mental replete with all limbs major and minor with senses intact. That in effect is their concept of *Jhānas* with Form (*rūpajjhāna)*. Then the Buddha says:

"Poṭṭhapāda, even if your self is of that description, perception is one thing and self is something else. When that attempt also fails, Poṭṭhapāda puts forward yet another definition of self:

"Venerable Sir, I mean a self that is formless and consisting of perception."

But the Buddha dismissed that too, saying:

“Even if your self is formless and consisting of perception, still the position is that perception is one thing and self another.”

Finally Poṭṭhapāda in his exasperation asks:

“Is it possible Venerable Sir, for me to know whether perception is a man’s self or else perception is one thing and self another?”

Poṭṭhapāda, however, is disappointed when the Buddha replies:

“It is difficult for you to know whether perception is a man’s self or else perception is one thing and self another, since you are of a different view with different convictions, with different predilections, practicing elsewhere under other teachers.”

When even that attempt failed Poṭṭhapāda as a last resort asks:

“If that is so Venerable Sir, may I know whether the

world is eternal – this alone is true all else is false?”

Those of you who have read our books must have come across the ten questions known as Unexplained Points with which the Buddha was confronted by many but which the Buddha laid aside as unexplained (*avyākata*). In our earlier sermons we have explained why the Buddha laid them aside. Now Poṭṭhapāda comes out with that questionnaire. Briefly stated, they are as follows:

First, a dilemma. Is the world eternal? Is the world not eternal? Next comes another dilemma. Is the world finite? Is the world infinite? Then another set of two questions which again poses a dilemma:

‘Life-principle (‘*jīvaṁ*’ – a term suggestive of Soul or self) is the same as body. Life principle is one thing and body another.’ Then comes a tetralemma a four-cornered question:

‘Does the *Tathāgata* exist after death? Does the *Tathāgata* not exist after death? Does he both exist and not exist after death? Does he neither exist nor not exist after death?’ The tetralemma seeks to ‘corner’ the answerer into granting one or the other of possible alternatives. But the Buddha could not be cornered by dilemmas and tetralemmas. He rejected the questionnaire in toto every time he was confronted with it and refused to give a categorical answer. He simply laid them aside (‘*avyākata ṭhapita*’) because they were ill-founded. In this instance too, his response to every one of those ten questions was:

“It has not been explained by me Poṭṭhapāda.”

Then Poṭṭhapāda asks:

“Venerable Sir, if that is so, is there anything you have explained categorically?”

And the Buddha says that he has categorically explained the four propositions.

“This is suffering. This is the arising of suffering. This is the cessation of suffering. This is the way of practice leading to the cessation of suffering – that is to say, the Four Noble Truths.”

Poṭṭhapāda, however, seemed satisfied with that explanation and with the assent:

“That is so, Fortunate One. That is so, Well-gone One” (‘*Evametaṁ Bhagavā, evametaṁ Sugatha*’) relieved the Buddha from the barrage of questions and the Buddha left on his alms-round. As soon as he left, the crowd of wandering ascetics got around Poṭṭhapāda and chastised him with verbal pricks, saying:

“This Poṭṭhapāda approves of everything Recluse Gotama says. He doesn’t seem to have answered any one of the ten questions categorically.”

Poṭṭhapāda rejoined saying:

“I also don’t see any of those questions answered categorically. But Recluse Gotama lays down a true and factual path of practice, a statute of Dhamma, a norm of Dhamma. When Recluse Gothama is laying down a true and factual path of practice, a statute of Dhamma, a norm of Dhamma, how can I, as an intelligent man, not approve of the well-spoken words of Recluse Gotama as well-spoken.

That phase of the discussion ends there. The sequence of events from there onwards is recorded in the discourse as follows.

After two or three days, Citta Hatthisāriputta (Son of an elephant trainer) and the wandering ascetic Poṭṭhapāda came to see the Buddha.

The first thing Poṭṭhapāda came out with was a report of what happened after the Buddha had left the other day.

“Venerable Sir, soon after the Fortunate One departed that day, they got around and gave me a shower of verbal pricks.”

When he had reported all what had transpired, the Buddha said:

“Poṭṭhapāda, all those wandering ascetics are blind. They lack vision. Only you are the one with vision. There are, Poṭṭhapāda, Dhammas that I have preached and laid down non-categorically and there are also Dhammas I have preached and laid down categorically. The former refers to the ten Indeterminates and the latter refers to the Four Noble Truths. Then the Buddha goes on to relate some of his own experiences with recluses and Brahmins in regard to the question of views of a self.

There are some recluses and Brahmins who declare and entertain such a view as this:

'*Ekantasukhī attā hoti arogo parammaraṇā*' – After death, self is of unmixed bliss and healthy' I approach them and ask:

"Is it true you declare and hold on to such a view as this?"

They say,

"Yes".

Then I ask them:

"Do you dwell knowing and seeing a world of unmixed bliss?"

They reply "N?"

I ask them:

"Have you for one night or for one day, for half a night or half a day experienced an all-blissful self?"

They say "No".

I ask them,

"Do you have that knowledge to declare,

"This is the path, this is the practice for seeing with one's own eyes an all-blissful world?"

They say "No".

I ask them:

" Have you heard the voice of deities reborn in an all-blissful world who go on saying:

"Friends, be well-established on the path, be uprightly established on the path for seeing with your own eyes a world all-blissful for we on our part, friends, with such a practice are reborn in an all blissful world?" They say,

"No".

Then he asks Poṭṭhapāda*:*

"What do you think Poṭṭhapāda when that is the position, does not the assertion of those recluses and Brahmins turn out to be baseless?"

A peculiar word '*appāṭihīraka*' is used in that context, which we have rendered by baseless:

It means an assertion that lacks proof or evidence to substantiate it. The Buddha himself gives two similes to illustrate the connotations of the word.

The first simile is about a beauty queen "Suppose a man goes about saying:

"I like and love the beauty queen of this province."

Others ask him:

"Good man, do you know of what clan she is?"

He says,

"No".

"Do you know her name?"

He says,

"No".

"Do you know whether she is tall or short or black or grey or brown?"

He says "No".

"Do you know in what village or town she is?"

He says:

"No".

And then others ask him; "So you like and love a beauty queen whom you do not know or see?"

After giving this simile the Buddha asks:

"What do you think Poṭṭhapāda? In that case does not that man's talk turn out to be baseless (*appāṭihīraka*)? Poṭṭhapāda says:

"Indeed that is so Venerable Sir."

Comparing it to the undemonstrable assertion of those recluses and Brahmins, the Buddha gives another simile to convince Poṭṭhapāda of the absurdity of it.

"Supposing a man is building a staircase at the four cross-roads for climbing into a mansion. People ask him:

"Good man, that mansion for which you are building this staircase do you know in which direction it is – whether in the East or West or North or South? Whether it is tall or short or medium-sized? He says "No".

Then they tell him:

“Well then, good man, you are building a staircase for a mansion you do not know or see.”

He says,

“Yes”.

Giving this simile the Buddha asks Poṭṭhapāda again:

“What do you think Poṭṭhapāda? In that case, doesn’t that man’s talk turn out to be baseless? “Indeed that is so, Venerable Sir” replies Poṭṭhapāda.

Having thus invalidated the soul theories of those recluses and Brahmins the Buddha now explains the concept of *Jhānas* in this dispensation with the help of a peculiar term ‘*attapaṭilābhā*’ (acquisition of self). Instead of the term ‘*attā*’ the Buddha brings in the concept of ‘*attapaṭilābhā*’. He says:

“*Tayo kho’me* Poṭṭhapāda *attapaṭilābhā oḷāriko attapaṭilābho manomayo attapaṭilābho arupo attapaṭilābho.*”

Poṭṭhapāda*,* there are these three acquisitions of self, (namely), the acquisition of a gross self, acquisition of a mental self, acquisition of a Formless self. They are defined with the same words as in the earlier discussion on self but they are not presented as states of a self but as acquisitions (*paṭilābhā*). The gross acquisition of self is qualified with the words ‘*cātummahābhūtiko*’ (made up of four great primaries) and ‘*kabaliṅkārāhārabhakkho*’ (consuming food taken in mouthfuls). The mind-made (*manomaya*) acquisition of self is described with the words ‘*sabbaṅgapaccaṅgī ahīnindriyo*’ (replete with all limbs major and minor, with senses intact). The Formless (*arūpa*) acquisition of self is described with the term ‘*saññāmayo*’ (consisting of perception).

So these are the three acquisitions (*paṭilābhā*). Let us try to get at the nuances of this term ‘*paṭilābhā*’ (lit. ‘profit’). For acquiring something you have to follow some course of action. In this context, what is the course of action? The ‘training’ (*sikkhā*). It is to indicate that these states are the outcome of some training that the Buddha introduced this term on this occasion.

Where Poṭṭhapāda and other ascetics used the term ‘*attā*’ (self) to explain these *Jhānic* states, the Buddha used the term *attapaṭilābhā*’ because they are to be attained through some training. Now here is a revolutionary change in outlook. These three acquisitions of self (*attapaṭilābhā*) are given the same standard definitions. The first one is ‘*oḷāriko rūpī cātummahābhūtiko kabaliṅkārāhārabhakkho*’ (gross, has form, is made up of the four great primaries, consuming food taken in mouthfuls). The second, is ‘*manomayo sabbaṅgapaccaṅgī ahīnindriyo* (mental, replete with all limbs major and

minor, with senses intact). The third is '*arupī saññāmayo*' (formless and consisting of perceptions).

But the Buddha didn't stop with redefinition. He declares now:

"Poṭṭhapāda*,* for the abandoning of the acquisition of the gross self, I preach the Dhamma by practicing according to which your defiling mental states would be abandoned, purifying mental states would be developed and you would by yourself realize with your higher knowledge the perfection and fulfillment of wisdom here and now and abide in it."

You may now recall what I have told about '*saññāgga*' – the peak of perception. Even from the First *Jhāna* or from Formless (*arupa) Jhānas* one can attain *Nibbāna* provided one develops insight based on them. Then the Buddha tells Poṭṭhapāda that he preaches the Dhamma for the abandonment of all three types of acquisitions of self (that is gross, mind made and formless) or *attapaṭilābhā*. Thereby one attains to the perfection of wisdom here and now.

After the Buddha had answered Poṭṭhapāda's questions to his satisfaction, Citta Hatthisāriputta comes out with his questions. In fact his questions go deeper into the subject of '*attapaṭilābhā*' introduced by the Buddha. He asks:

"Venerable Sir, at the time there is the gross acquisition of self, is the mental acquisition of self and formless acquisition of self, false (*moghā* – lit. empty) at that time? Is the gross acquisition of self alone real for him at that time?

Venerable Sir, at the time the mental acquisition of self is there, is the gross acquisition of self and the formless acquisition of self, false at the time? Is only the mental acquisition of self, real for him at that time?

Venerable Sir, at the time, the formless acquisition of self is there, is the gross acquisition of self and the mental acquisition of self, false at that time? Is only the formless acquisition of self, real for him at that time?"

The Buddha's answer brings out quite a deep aspect of the whole problem of self. He says:

"*Citta*, at the time the gross acquisition of self is there, it is not reckoned ('*saṅkhaṁ gacchati*' – lit. go into reckoning) as mental acquisition of self. It is not reckoned as formless acquisition of self. At that time, it is reckoned only as the gross acquisition of self."

He applies the same criterion to the other two acquisitions of self. At the time the mental acquisition of self is there, it is not reckoned in terms of the other two. Similarly when the formless acquisition of self is there, it is not reckoned as any of the other two, but only as formless acquisition of self.

Here the Buddha is trying to draw the attention of Citta to the problem of confusing the three periods of time – quite a deep point at that. To drive home the point, the Buddha poses the following questions to Citta.

Now Citta, if people ask you "Were you in the past – not that you were not? Will you be in the future – not that you will not be? Are you now – not that you aren't? What will you say in reply?"

Citta says:

"Venerable Sir, if they question me like that, I would answer:

I was in the past – not that I wasn't. I will be in the future – not that I will not be. I am now, not that I am not."

Then the Buddha asks:

"If they ask you Citta, that acquisition of self you had in the past, is that acquisition of self alone real and the future acquisition of self, false and the present acquisition of self also false? Whatever acquisition of self you will have in the future, is that alone real and the other two false? Whatever acquisition of self you have now that alone is real and the other two false?"

Then Citta says:

"Venerable Sir, if they ask me that, I would reply:

Whatever acquisition of self I had in the past, <u>at that time</u> that acquisition of self alone was real and the other two false. Whatever acquisition of self I will have in the future <u>at that time</u> that acquisition of self alone will be real and the other two false. Whatever acquisition of self I have now, only that acquisition of self is real and the other two false <u>at that time</u>."

Then the Buddha completes the analogy saying:

"Even so Citta at whatever time the gross acquisition of self is there, <u>at that time</u>, it is not reckoned as mental acquisition of self nor as formless acquisition of self. At that time, it is reckoned only as gross acquisition of self. So also in the case of the other two.

The illusion in the world which was the reason for the self view, is the idea that the past and the future exist even as the present. In short, the confusion of the three periods of time. It is this myth that the Buddha is trying to explode. He does it with the following wonderful, homely simile which is sure to help you understand this deep point.

"Just Citta, as from the cow comes milk, from milk curd, from curd butter, from butter ghee, and from ghee cream of ghee, <u>at the time</u> it is milk, <u>it is not reckoned</u> as curd, nor as butter, nor as ghee, nor as cream of ghee. At that time, it is reckoned only as milk.

Similarly, when it is curd, it is reckoned as curd, not assuming that there is milk in it or that there is ghee which is yet to come is hidden in it."

I shall give you a little story, a sort of parable found in Western literature to help you understand this point. A miserly man had a goose that lays a golden egg everyday. He thought of getting today itself the eggs that she will be laying tomorrow and the days to follow. He split it open and was disappointed. It is a similar fallacy to think that future exists or that past exists. These are only worldly usages. Simply because milk can become ghee in the future it is wrong to think that already there is ghee in it.

After giving this simile as an illustration of what he had told about the three acquisitions of self (*attapaṭilābhā*) the Buddha sums up the discussion with the following memorable statement:

"*Itīmā kho Citta lokasamaññā lokaniruttiyo lokavohārā lokapaññattiyo, yāhi Tathāgato voharati aparāmasaṁ*."

"For these, Citta, are worldly appellations, worldly expressions, worldly usages, worldly designations which the *Tathāgata* makes use of without tenacious grasping."

It is due to tenacious grasping of these that all the confusion has arisen. We ourselves agree to give names to those various stages of milk preparations and then we go on wondering whether milk is found in curd or butter in curd. Indian philosophy with its involvement in soul theories was caught up in this confusion. In the *Taittiriya Upanishad* there is a theory of five selves encased in concentric shells. (*pañcakoṣa*) such as the '*annamaya*' and '*prāṇamaya*' (made-of-food, made-of-breath). This confusion about the three periods of time gave rise to dogmatic views of self.

The momentous declaration of the Buddha quoted above shows that he regarded all those concepts as mere worldly appellations, worldly expressions, worldly designations, which he used but did not grasp tenaciously. It is by that tenacious grasping that self-created problems of cause and effect arise. Whether the cause preceded the effect or whether the effect is already embedded in the cause. It is noteworthy that in a standard work on linguistics written by two modern scholars, the milk simile of the Buddha is quoted expressing their surprise that 2,500 years ago the Buddha has revealed a truth which is enough to awaken modern semantic philosophers today."

After this powerful declaration by the Buddha, Poṭṭhapāda confessed faith in him with great fervour.

"It is marvelous Venerable Sir, it is marvelous Venerable Sir, even as one were to set upright what had been overturned or reveal what had remained hidden, or tell the way to one who has lost his way or hold up an oil-torch in the darkness, so that those with eyes may see. So has the Fortunate One, in many ways declared the Dhamma. Venerable Sir,

here I go for refuge to the Fortunate One, to the Dhamma and the Order of monks. Let the Fortunate One accept me as a lay-follower who has gone to him for refuge from today as long as life endures. Then Citta Hatthisāriputta, with a similar confession of faith went to his refuge and even begged for the going forth and higher ordination. He did go forth and was given higher ordination. Not long after his higher ordination he went into solitude and with diligent and ardent endeavor attained arahanthood.

So that is how the discourse ends. But in the remaining few minutes let me clarify whatever knotty points there could be in our explanation.

Regarding the three significant terms we brought up, there is an important discourse which mentions them in the *Saṁyutta Nikāya* – namely *Niruttipatha Sutta*. There the Buddha pointedly deals with the confusion caused by mixing up the three periods of time. It begins with these words:

"Tayome bhikkhave niruttipathā adhivacanapathā paññattipathā." – "Monks, there are these three pathways of linguistic usage of synonyms and of designations."

The Buddha says that these three should not be mixed up and cites them separately. For instance, as regards the aggregate of form he says:

"Whatever form, monks that is past ceased, transformed 'it was' is the reckoning ('*saṅkhā*') appellation or designation. It is not reckoned as 'it is', or it will be. In the same way the reckoning used for any form that is future, the reckoning is 'it will be', and not 'it was' or 'it is'. Likewise the reckoning for any form that is present is 'it is' and not the other two. The Buddha says the same thing about each of the other four aggregates. He declares that whatever wise recluses and Brahmins there were, there will be and there are, have not, will not and do not mix up these three periods of time. Whatever is past is gone. It is a delusion to think that it exists. Whatever is future has not come yet. It may exist only when it comes.

It is in view of that tendency in mixing up, that the Buddha introduces the term '*attapaṭilābhā*' – 'acquisition of self'. A special phrase is used in that connection – '*tasmiṁ samaye*' (at that time). That is highly significant as a term for specification. For instance, when there is the formless acquisition of self the other two acquisitions of self, do not come in.

There too the Buddha warns against mixing up the three periods of time. It is by such a 'mixing up' that the Personality-view ('*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*' – lit. 'existing body view') has arisen. However language is not to be blamed for it. It is the fault of man's defilements. The 'father' and the 'mother' are to be blamed. Who is the father? Ignorance. Who is the mother? Craving. The hindrance of ignorance with its notion of the compact, covers up the perception of the heap in the world and presents it as a 'thing'. Craving with its glue pastes the heap together. Thereby the worldling is made to think that the body exists so

that it clings to '*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*' ignoring the extremely rapid process of change going on within the body. So also in the case of other things. It is here that the self-view lies hidden. The purpose of this *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta,* Therefore, is to expose this fallacy. It is a wonderful discourse. Poṭṭhapāda as well as Citta Hatthisāriputta*,* are asking the same question which we ourselves would have asked had we not known the Dhamma. It was the same problem that blocked the progress of the yogins. They reached some high level of spiritual development, but they mystified it. They never thought that it is brought about by causes and conditions as shown in this discourse. Instead they attributed it to some non-descript soul or self or else they thought that some agent is manipulating perception. Why were they unable to extricate themselves from perception? Because they had not recognized '*Saṅkhārā*' or preparations. The most distinctive feature of the Dhamma proclaimed by the Buddha is the recognition of the part played by *Saṅkhārā* – a term that is integral to the Law of Dependent Arising. Even in making that extraordinary decision, the monk was directing his attention to *saṅkhāras.*

"*yannūnāham na ceva ceteyyam nacābhi-sankhareyyam*" – "What if I were not to intend and specially prepare?"

He was keen on getting free from intentions and preparations. He has been clinging on to intentions and preparations all this time. A simile given in the *Visuddhimagga* comes in useful here. Suppose there is a broad stream of water and no bridge to crossover. One way to get across is to hang on to a creeper hanging down from a tree on this side and go on swinging until enough momentum is gathered just to be well above the other bank. As soon as you can see the other bank below you when you look down, you have to let-go of the hold on the creeper-daring the drop. Otherwise the creeper would swing you back. That is why the Buddha compared this Dhamma to the raft. This simile smacks of the same technique.

Meditation for serenity (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*) is only a creeper to hang on like that. After you have built up sufficient momentum by swinging holding on to it, you must letgo. But you are scared of the THUD. That is why until the Buddha showed the way to do it, yogins went on 'see-sawing' with the dilemma "to-be or not-to-be" in the ethereal plane of neither perception nor non-perception because of their soul-prejudice. They were scared of losing the 'I'. The Buddha showed them that there is no 'I' to suffer the 'thud' through this novel concept of '*sikkhā*' or training. To hark back to the wonderful refrain:

'*Sikkhā ekā saññā uppajjanti, sikkhā ekā saññā nirujjhanti*'

"Through training some perceptions arise, through

training some perceptions cease!"

It is the Law of Dependent Arising that blasts the view of self or soul. From beginning to end this discourse vibrates through and through with the Law of Dependent Arising. This is a marvelous discourse. So you had better bear in mind every one of the similes you have come across. Remember the breaking of '*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*' or personality view is not something that happens with an audible sound. By assiduously developing insight on the Five Aggregates of grasping somehow or other you realize the vanity of grasping and let-go. Actually it is not that you let-go with an effort. It is an effortless letting –go in spite of yourself – so to say. What you touch by that letting-go is 'contact with cessation' ('*nirodhaṁ phusati*'). One awakens from the Cessation of Perceptions and Feelings into *Nibbāna* – to Arahanthood. Why? Because on arising from the cessation of Perceptions and Feelings one is aware of the 'signless' ('*animitta*') 'unestablished' ('*appaṇihita*') and void ('*suññata*'). That is the awakening from the THUD on the other bank. If one has attained the Cessation of Perceptions and Feelings, one invariably awakens from it to *Nibbāna*. Why so? Because wisdom is the End. With it one wins to the conviction; 'Exhausted is birth, lived is the Holy Life, done is what had to be done!'("*khīṇā jāti, vusitam brahmacariyaṁ kataṁ karaṇīyaṁ*").

Well then, this is enough for you all. If life endures I might be able to expatiate in sermons to come. On this memorable *Esala Poya* day within this hour we have said something on the Law of Dependent Arising on which the Four Noble Truths are founded. If you can imbibe anything useful for the development of your serenity and insight meditations from this sermon, please do so and put forth your best efforts to win deliverance from this dreadful samsāric suffering and by going through the Fruits of the Paths to Stream-winning, Once-Returning and Non-returning realize the deathless *Nibbāna*!

Whatever beings there be, from the lowest hell to the highest Brahma world wishing to rejoice in this sermon, may they rejoice in our sermon! May the merits accrued thereby conduce to their realization of the highest aim – the Deathless *Nibbāna*!

