

The Nibbāna Sermons 23 to 33 by Bhikkhu K Ñāṇananda

An e-learning course hosted by the
Numata Center for Buddhist Studies
University of Hamburg
in collaboration with the
Barre Center for Buddhist Studies
Massachusetts

Sermon 30

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We get a clear enunciation of these two kinds of happiness, unhappiness and equanimity in the *Saḷāyatanavibhaṅgasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*. In that discourse, the Buddha gives an exposition of thirty-six pathways of thought of

beings under the heading *chattiṃsa sattapadā*, literally "thirty-six steps of beings". They are listed as follows:

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

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

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

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

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 1067):

"When one regards as a gain the gain of forms cognizable by the eye that are wished for, desired, agreeable, gratifying, and associated with worldliness—or when one recalls what was formerly obtained that has passed, ceased, and changed—joy arises. Such joy as this is called joy based on the household life."

MĀ 163:

"The eye comes to know forms that are conducive to joy and the mind reflects on them, desiring those forms, experiencing happiness conjoined with desire. Those [forms] which one has not got, one desires to get; those which one has already got are recollected and give rise to joy. Joy of this type is called joy based on attachment."

The happiness based on renunciation is defined as follows:

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

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

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 1068):

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

MĀ 163:

"One understands that forms are impermanent, changing, [bound to] disappear, fade away, and cease; that all forms, both formerly and in the present, are impermanent, dukkha, and bound to cease. Recollecting this gives rise to joy. Joy of this type is called joy based on dispassion."

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

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

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

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 1068):

"When one regards as a non-gain the non-gain of forms cognizable by the eye that are wished for, desired, agreeable, gratifying, and associated with worldliness—or when one recalls what was formerly not obtained that has passed, ceased, and changed—grief arises. Such grief as this is called grief based on the household life"

MĀ 163:

"The eye comes to know forms that are conducive to joy and the mind reflects on them, desiring those forms, experiencing happiness conjoined with desire."

Those [forms] which one has not yet got, one is not able to get; those which one has already got are [soon] past and gone, scattered and decayed, having ceased or changed, which gives rise to sadness. Sadness of this type is called sadness based on attachment.”

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

Rūpānaṃ tveva aniccataṃ veditvā vipariṇānavirāganīrodham: 'Pubbe c'eva rūpā etarahi ca sabbe te rūpā aniccā dukkhā vipariṇāmadhammā 'ti, evaṃ etaṃ yathābhūtaṃ samappaññāya disvā anuttaresu vimokhesu pihaṃ upaṭṭhāpeti: 'kadā 'ssu nāma' ahaṃ tad āyatanaṃ upasampajja viharissāmi yad ariyā etarahi āyatanaṃ upasampajja viharantī'ti, itī anuttaresu vimokhesu pihaṃ uppaṭṭhāpayato uppajjati pihapaccayā domanassaṃ, yaṃ evarūpaṃ domanassaṃ, idaṃ vuccati nekkhammasitaṃ domanassaṃ.

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

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 1069):

“When, by knowing the impermanence, change, fading away, and cessation of forms, one sees as it actually is with proper wisdom that forms both formerly and now are all impermanent, suffering, and subject to change, one generates a longing for the supreme liberations thus: ‘When shall I enter upon and abide in that base that the noble ones now enter upon and abide in?’ In one who generates thus a longing for the supreme liberations, grief arises with that longing as condition. Such grief as this is called grief based on renunciation.”

MĀ 163:

“One understands that forms are impermanent, changing, [bound to] disappear, to fade away and cease; that all forms, both formerly and in the present, are impermanent, dukkha, and bound to cease. Recollecting this, one reflects: ‘When will I attain and dwell in that sphere, namely the sphere that the noble ones attain and dwell in?’ This is [one’s] aspiration for the highest liberation. The frightening knowledge of *dukkha* and sadness gives rise to sadness. Sadness of this type is called sadness based on dispassion.”

The description of unhappiness based on renunciation brings up some important terms worth discussing. *Anuttaresu vimokhesu* is a reference to the

three supreme deliverances known as *animitta*, the "signless", *appaṇihita*, the "undirected", and *suññata*, the "void".

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 1069):

"On seeing a form with the eye, equanimity arises in a foolish infatuated ordinary person, in an untaught ordinary person who has not conquered his limitations or conquered the results [of action] and who is blind to danger. Such equanimity as this does not transcend the form; that is why it is called equanimity based on the household life."

MĀ 163:

“The eye comes to know forms and there arises equanimity. That is the indifference [of one] who is not learned, who lacks wisdom, an unlearned ignorant worldling. Such equanimity towards form is not detached from form. This is called equanimity based on attachment.”

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

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

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

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

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 1070):

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

MĀ 163

“One understands that forms are impermanent, changing, [bound to] disappear, to fade away and cease; that all forms, both formerly and in the present, are impermanent, dukkha, and bound to cease. Recollecting this, one is established in equanimity, equanimity that has been attained through mental development. This is called equanimity based on dispassion.”

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

The Buddha speaks about all the thirty-six objects of sense, out of which we brought up, as a paradigm, the illustration given about the visual object, form. These thirty-six are called the thirty-six pathways of beings, *chattimsa sattapadā*, in the sense that they depict the thought patterns of beings. In this

discourse, the Buddha proclaims the basic maxim he employs in gradually channelling the thought processes of beings towards *Nibbāna* along these thirty-six pathways. The maxim is summed up in the following words: *tatra idam nissāya idam pajahatha*, "therein, depending on this, abandon this".

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

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

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

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 1070):

"Here, bhikkhus, by depending and relying on the six kinds of joy based on renunciation, abandon and surmount the six kinds of joy based on the household life. It is thus they are abandoned; it is thus they are surmounted."

MĀ 163

"By holding to the six [types] of joy that are based on dispassion, by depending on them and dwelling in them, extinguish the six [types] of joy that are based on attachment, remove them, vomit them out. In this way they are to be eradicated."

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

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

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

on renunciation are abandoned by the six kinds of equanimity based on renunciation.

To the extent that all the above three mental states are based on renunciation, they are of a piece with each other. Also, it is the same mode of insightful reflection that gives rise to them. However, as attitudes, happiness is subtler and more excellent than unhappiness, and equanimity is subtler and more excellent than happiness, since it is nearer to wisdom. So in the second stage we see a gradual procedure arriving at a subtler and more excellent state even in the case of those three mental states based on renunciation. By the end of the second stage, only equanimity based on renunciation remains.

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

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 1070):

"There is, bhikkhus, equanimity that is diversified, based on diversity; and there is equanimity that is unified, based on unity."

MĀ 163

"There is equanimity that is of countless contacts, diverse contacts, and there is equanimity that is of a single contact, not of diverse contacts."

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

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

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

Atammayatam, bhikkhave, nissāya atammayatam āgamma, yāyam upekkhā ekattā ekattasitā, tam pajahatha tam samatikkamatha, evam etissā pahānaṃ hoti, evam etissā samatikkamo hoti.

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

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 1071):

"Bhikkhus, by depending and relying on non-identification, abandon and surmount equanimity that is unified, based on unity. It is thus this is abandoned; it is thus this is surmounted."

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

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

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

In the *Sappurisasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* we get a good illustration of the application of this principle of detachment, made known by the Buddha.

Sappuriso ca kho, bhikkhave, iti paṭisañcikkhati:

nevasaññānāsaññāyatanasamāpattiyā pi kho atammayatā vuttā Bhagavatā, yena yena hi maññanti tato taṃ hoti aññathā 'ti. So atammayataṃ yeva antaraṃ karivā tāya nevasaññānāsaññāyatanasamāpattiyā n' eva attān' ukkaṃseti na paraṃ vambheti. Ayam pi, bhikkhave, sappurisdhammo.

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

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 912):

"But a true man considers thus: 'Non-identification even with the attainment of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception has been declared by the Blessed One; for in whatever way they conceive, the fact is ever other than that.' So, putting non-identification first, he neither lauds himself nor

disparages others because of his attainment of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. This too is the character of a true man.”

MĀ 85

“One who has the nature of a true person reflects like this: ‘The Blessed One has said that the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception is of an immeasurable type; [however], if one were to measure it, then that would be clinging. Because of this [absence of clinging], he [should] receive support and respect.’

If, advancing in this way, he attains the true Dharma, without praising himself or looking down on others, then this is the nature of a true person.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

is expelled with the help of something subtler. Here we have a wonderful technique, based on the twin principles of pragmatism and relativity.

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

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

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

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

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 211):

"Just as a skilled carpenter or his apprentice might knock out, remove, and extract a coarse peg by means of a fine one, so too when a bhikkhu is giving attention to some sign, and owing to that sign there arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion, then he should give attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome."

MĀ 101

"It is just as a carpenter or a carpenter's apprentice might apply an inked string to a piece of wood [to mark a straight line], and then trim the wood with a sharp adze to make it straight. In the same way, because a sign [has led to the arising of unwholesome thoughts], the monk instead attends to a different sign related to what is wholesome, so that evil and unwholesome thoughts will no longer arise."

Now let us try to understand the point of this simile. When, for instance, a carpenter, in fitting out a door, finds that he is driving a blunt nail, he extracts it with the help of a sharper one. He takes up the sharper nail just for the purpose

of extracting the blunt nail. So also one resorts to a skilful thought to expel the unskilful thought as a means to an end. This kind of pragmatic and relative approach avoids tenacious grasping and dogmatic involvement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then the Buddha makes an explanatory statement:

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

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

Translation Bodhi (2000: 89):

"When I came to a standstill, friend, then I sank; but when I struggled, then I got swept away. It is in this way, friend, that by not halting and by not straining I crossed the flood."

SĀ 1267

「名為無所攀緣，亦無所住而度駛流」 (CBETA, T02, no. 99, p. 348, b17-18)

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

*Cirassaṃ vata passāmi,
brāhmaṇaṃ parinibbutaṃ,
appatitthaṃ anāyūhaṃ,
tiṇṇaṃ loke visattikaṃ.*

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

Translation Bodhi (2000: 89):

"After a long time at last I see
A brahmin who is fully quenched,
Who by not halting, not straining,
Has crossed over attachment to the world."

SĀ 1267:

「久見婆羅門，逮得般涅槃，
一切怖已過，永超世恩愛」 (CBETA, T02, no. 99, p. 348, b19-20)

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

So we can understand why the Buddha in his very first sermon, *Dhammacakkapavattanasutta*, "Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of *Dhamma*", proclaimed as the middle path the noble eightfold path, avoiding both extremes of attachment to sensuality, *kāmasukhallikānuyoga*, and self-mortification, *attakilamathānuyoga*. Here, too, the implication is that the entire

round of existence is a water current to be crossed over by means of a systematic and gradual effort.

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

This ignorance in the form of the four pervert perceptions — namely the perception of permanence in the impermanent, the perception of pleasure in the painful, the perception of beauty in the repulsive, and the perception of self in the not-self — gives rise to the run-away current of water which keeps running round and round between consciousness and name-and-form. This is the *samsāric* vortex, *samsāravatṭa*.

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

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

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

*'Ajjhattasantī' ti yam etam attham,
kathan nu dhīrehi paveditam tam.*

"That which they call 'inward peace',

In what terms have the wise proclaimed that peace?"

Translation Bodhi (2017: 301):

“As to that matter called ‘the peace within,’
how is it proclaimed by the wise?”

The Buddha's answer took the following form:

Na diṭṭhiyā na sutiyā na ñāṇena,

sīlabbatenāpi visuddhim āhu,

adiṭṭhiyā assutiyā aññāṇā

asīlatā abbatā no pi tena,

ete ca nissajja anuggahāya

santo anissāya bhavaṃ na jappe.

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

Nor yet by virtue and holy vows, they say, can purity come,
Neither can it come by without views, learning and knowledge,
Without virtue and holy vows,
Letting go of them all and grasping not one,
That peaceful one, leaning on none,
Would hanker no more for existence."

Translation Bodhi (2017: 301)

"Not by view, nor by learning, nor by knowledge,
nor do I speak of purity through good behavior and observances;
but neither without view, without learning, without knowledge,
without good behavior, without observances—not in that way.
But having relinquished these, not grasping any of them,
peaceful, not dependent, one should not hanker for existence."

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

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

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

Translation Bodhi (2017: 301)

"If indeed it is not by view, by learning, nor by knowledge,
nor by good behavior and observances, that one speaks of purity;
nor without view, without learning, without knowledge,
without good behavior and observances—not in that way,
I think this is an utterly confused teaching;
some fall back on purity by means of view."

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

The commentarial explanation of these two verses seems to go off at a tangent. It says that the negatives in the first two lines of the Buddha's reply

refer to wrong views, wrong learning, wrong knowledge, wrong virtue and wrong vows, and that the third and fourth lines refer to right view, right learning, right knowledge, right virtue and right vows. In other words, it is only a question of wrong view, *micchā diṭṭhi*, and right view, *sammā diṭṭhi*.

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

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

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

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

Translation Bodhi (2017: 301)

"But having relinquished these, not grasping any of them,
peaceful, not dependent, one should not hanker for existence."

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

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

Now we come to a discourse which clearly and unmistakably presents this extraordinary first principle. The discourse is the *Rathavinītasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*. Here it is not a case of arguing with a Brāhmin. The interlocutors in this discourse are two stalwarts of this dispensation, namely Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Puṇṇa Mantāniputta. Their long discussion on the path of practice, unfolding itself in dialogue form, was not meant for any clarification of doubts for themselves. It was probably inspired by a benevolent

wish to help those ‘Māgandiyas’ in the world, who are ignorant of the pragmatic nature and relative value of the Buddha's middle path. For easy comprehension, we shall present this discourse in three parts.

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

And Venerable Puṇṇa Mantāniputta replies: "No friend."

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

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

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

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 242):

“But, friend, is it for the sake of purification of virtue that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One?”—“No, friend.”—

“Then is it for the sake of purification of mind that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One?”—“No, friend.”—

“Then is it for the sake of purification of view that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One?”—“No, friend.”—

“Then is it for the sake of purification by overcoming doubt that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One?”—“No, friend.”—

“Then is it for the sake of purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One?”—“No, friend.”—

“Then is it for the sake of purification by knowledge and vision of the way that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One?”—“No, friend.”—

“Then is it for the sake of purification by knowledge and vision that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One?”—“No, friend.”

...

For the sake of what then, friend, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One?”

MĀ 9:

"Are you practicing the holy life under the renunciant Gotama for the sake of purification of mind ... for the sake of purification of view ... for the sake of purification [from] the hindrance of doubt ... for the sake of purification by knowledge and vision of [what is] the path and [what is] not the path ... for the sake of purification by knowledge and vision of the way ... for the sake of

purification by knowledge of the way to abandoning?" To each question Puṇṇa Mantāṇiputta] replied: "Not so." ...

"In that case, for the sake of what are you practicing the holy life under the renunciant Gotama?"

MN 24: *bhagavati no, āvuso, brahmacariyaṃ vussatī ti?*

MĀ 9: 賢者, 從沙門瞿曇修梵行耶.

SHT VI 1329 B1 *śuddhyartham [śra]maṇe*

SHT VI 1329 B2 *[ā]yuṣmaṃ [gautā]ma*

But SHT VI 1329 A 4 *bhagavān anupādā*

"The Seven Stages of Purification in Comparative Perspective", *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Sri Lanka*, 2005, 3: 126–138.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sīlavisuddhiñce āvuso Bhagavā anupādā parinibbānaṃ paññāpessa, sa-upādānaṃ yeva samānaṃ anupādā parinibbānaṃ paññāpessa. "Friend, if the Fortunate One had designated purification of virtue as perfect *Nibbāna* without

clinging, he would have designated what is still accompanied by clinging as perfect *Nibbāna* without clinging."

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 243):

"Friend, if the Blessed One had described purification of virtue as final *Nibbāna* without clinging, he would have described what is still accompanied by clinging as final *Nibbāna* without clinging."

MĀ 9

"Venerable friend, if the Blessed One, the renunciant Gotama, were to designate Nirvana without remainder for the sake of purification of virtue, then that would be to praise what is with a remainder [of clinging] as being without a remainder [of clinging]."

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

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

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 243):

"And if final *Nibbāna* without clinging were to be attained without these states, then an ordinary person would have attained final *Nibbāna*, for an ordinary person is without these states."

MĀ 9

"Venerable friend, if the World-honored One were to designate Nirvana without remainder apart from these things, then a worldling should also [have attained] Nirvana without remainder, because a worldling is also apart from these things."

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

attained without these states, then even an ordinary worldling would have attained it, for he has none of them.

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

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

Evameva kho, āvuso, sīlavisuddhi yāvadeva cittavisuddhatthā, cittavisuddhi yāvadeva diṭṭhivissuddhatthā, diṭṭhivissuddhi yāvadeva kaṅkhāvitaraṇavisuddhatthā, kaṅkhāvitaraṇavisuddhi yāvadeva maggāmaggañānadassanavisuddhatthā, maggāmaggañānadassanavisuddhi yāvadeva paṭipadañānadassanavisuddhatthā, paṭipadañānadassanavisuddhi yāvadeva ñānadassanavisuddhatthā, ñānadassanavisuddhi yāvadeva anupādā parinibbānatthā. Anupādā parinibbānattham kho, āvuso, Bhagavati brahmacariyaṃ vussati.

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

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 244):

"So too, friend, purification of virtue is for the sake of reaching purification of mind; purification of mind is for the sake of reaching purification of view; purification of view is for the sake of reaching purification by overcoming doubt; purification by overcoming doubt is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path; purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision of the

way; purification by knowledge and vision of the way is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision; purification by knowledge and vision is for the sake of reaching final Nibbāna without clinging. It is for the sake of final Nibbāna without clinging that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One.”

MĀ 9

“In the same way, venerable friend, through purification of virtue, one attains purification of mind; through purification of mind, one attains purification of view; through purification of view, one attains purification [from] the hindrance of doubt; through purification [from] the hindrance of doubt, one attains purification by knowledge and vision of [what is] the path and [what is] not the path; through purification by knowledge and vision of [what is] the path and [what is] not the path, one attains purification by knowledge and vision of the pathway; through purification by knowledge and vision of the way, one attains purification by knowledge of the way to abandoning; through purification by knowledge of the way to abandoning, the Blessed One designates Nirvana without remainder.”

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

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

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