

# A Discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta

by  
The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw



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by  
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Burma

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## Editor's Preface

This discourse by the late Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw was given in twelve talks over a period from the New Moon of June to the Full Moon of September 1963. An edition was published in 1996 by the Buddhadhamma Foundation in Bangkok (ISBN 9789747890525). It was edited by Bruce Evans, an Australian who was formerly a bhikkhu (Ajahn Puriso) at Wat Pah Nanachat, so there was no urgent need for me to repeat the task in my own style.

However, that book is not easily available. Searching the Internet reveals only a few second-hand copies for sale. I don't know of any copy of that edition available online for reference or reading on a computer. That being the case, I have edited the original English edition published by the Buddha Sāsānānuggaha Organization in 1983, which was available as a PDF file.

That PDF edition uses the ANSI fonts that I developed in the days before Unicode, so searching for Pāḷi words in it is impractical, even if they were correctly spelt, which is often not the case. I have done my usual editorial work of reducing excessive use of Pāḷi where it is not helpful, and restoring the correct original Pāḷi of the Sutta or Commentary where it is. To make a useful English book from twelve long discourses originally given in Burmese, is a major undertaking.

I hope I have retained the essential meaning of the Sayādaw's valuable teachings in the process. Those familiar with his teachings and the practice of Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā meditation will derive great benefit from reading these discourses carefully to stimulate and guide their meditation practice.

The Sayādaw gave weekly discourses on this Sutta, beginning on Thursday May 23rd 1963. The Burmese calendar,<sup>1</sup> being based on the lunar cycle, begins with the first waxing day of the moon leading up to the 15th waxing day, which in this month would be Mahāsamaya Day on Thursday June 6th. The waning half of the month began on the Full-moon day of the 7th June 1963. The month of Nayun ended with the New-moon on the 14th waning day, which was Thursday 20th June 1963, followed by the first waxing day of Wāso on Friday 21st June. The Myanmar Era (M.E.) starts 638 years later than the Gregorian calendar. 1325 M.E. began in March 1963

<sup>1</sup> January (*Pyatho*), February (*Tabodwe*), March (*Tapaun*), April (*Takhū*), May (*Kasun*), June (*Nayun*), July (*Wāso*), August (*Wāgaun*), September (*Tawthalin*), October (*Thadingyut*), November (*Tasonmun*), December (*Natdaw*).

(ed.) I consulted [mmcalendar.com](http://mmcalendar.com) to calculate the dates, and hope I haven't made any errors. I will be only too glad to learn if I have.

This book contains many Pāḷi technical terms from the Abhidhamma and Visuddhimagga, so I have added an index which also serves as a Pāḷi glossary. Wherever I could find references, I have added footnotes with references to the Pāḷi texts of the PTS, in the translations of which the references are usually given in the headers near to the spine, or in [square brackets] in the body of the text in the Visuddhimagga. The PDF version contains hyperlinks to other works by the Venerable Sayādaw, or to the Dictionary of Pāḷi Proper names compiled by G.P. Malalasekera.

Bhikkhu Pesala

August 2013

## Foreword

In every ordinary person (*puthujjana*), moral defilements (*kilesā*), such as greed, which have a tendency to attachment, are in abundance. These defilements crave for sense-objects such as beautiful sights and so on. While attachment occurs regarding what is pleasant and agreeable, attachment to self (*atta*) as a living entity is fundamental and very difficult to discard. It can neither be got rid of by one's own ordinary effort nor dispelled by others.

Solitary Buddhas (Pacceka-Buddhas) were capable of extirpating their own feelings of attachment to self by means of diligent efforts with their will-power without anyone's aid. However, they have no ability to eradicate the attachment to self in others. To wipe out the feeling of attachment to self that lies deep in the heart of others, one must have the aptitude and knowledge to teach and convince others about the noble qualities of the Four Noble Truths.

Solitary Buddhas have inadequate knowledge to teach others. That is why they are destined to become Solitary Buddhas without any disciples. A Solitary Buddha therefore enters nibbāna singly. He is not omniscient and does not teach the Dhamma to mankind.

### Rooting Out Attachment to Self

Supreme Omniscient Buddhas are endowed with a better intellect than Solitary Buddhas. The Supreme Buddhas fully realised the Four Noble Truths on their own initiative. They could also teach others to understand clearly the Dhamma relating to the Four Noble Truths. That is why they became Fully Enlightened Buddhas. Therefore, the Buddha was able to deliver the first discourse concerning the Four Noble Truths to the five ascetics who were present along with all celestial beings, such as devas and Brahmās. The teaching is known as "The Discourse on the Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dhamma — the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta." This famous discourse was the first teaching delivered by the Blessed One on the eve of the Full-moon of July (Wāso), exactly two months after his attainment of Enlightenment. On the conclusion of this first discourse, Venerable Koṇḍañña, the leader of the five ascetics was the first to become a Stream-winner. Having reached the stage of Stream-winning he eradicated all sceptical doubts about the truth of the Dhamma and self-view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) — the misconception of a self or living entity. Nevertheless, pride (*māna*) still lingered in his mind assuming that everything could be

achieved if done or said or imagined according to his own will. The remaining four ascetics had not yet realised the special Dhamma of awakening of higher consciousness.

### **The Hemavata Sutta**

The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta concluded in the first watch of the night on that Full Moon Day. In the middle watch of the same night, the deities Sātāgiri and Hemavata, accompanied by one thousand warrior attendants, approached the Blessed One, paid obeisance to him and respectfully posed ten questions. The Blessed One taught them the Hemavata Sutta. At the end of this discourse, they became Stream-winners. Having achieved such an attainment, they were able to eliminate their clinging attachment to self which had beset them throughout the cycle of existences (*saṃsāra*).

### **The Five Monks Attained Stream-winning**

As pride still held its grip on Venerable Koṇḍañña; and as Venerable Vappa and the other three of the group of five ascetics had not yet even obtained the 'pure and spotless eye of the Dhamma,' the Blessed One went on teaching and urged them to contemplate and note along the lines of Vipassanā Dhamma. They all eventually reached the stage of Stream-winning, which had caused the removal of their attachment to self after serious meditation with diligence. Venerable Vappa gained progressive insight on the first waning day of July, Venerable Bhaddiya on the second day, Venerable Mahānāma on the third day, and Venerable Assaji on the fourth day.

The Buddha then summoned the group of five monks who had already gained Stream-winning, and taught them his second discourse setting forth the famous doctrine of not-self. It was on the fifth Waning Day of July. Having heard this Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, all five monks attained Arahantship by virtue of which they were entirely free from human passions including pride. The Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, as its name implies, clearly expounded the doctrine of not-self, which is opposed to the false views of self, with full and critical explanations.

The Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta is not a long discourse. In the original book published by the [Sixth Buddhist Council](#) (Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana), it covers only one page. In that Sutta there is no mention of meditation exercises explaining how contemplation should be carried out. The

teaching therein is only about the nature of the Dhamma. Those who are not acquainted with the method of insight meditation would find it difficult to practise according to the right method of meditation to be able to reflect personally and appreciate the truth of not-self (*anatta*) as envisaged in that Sutta. It was possible for the five ascetics to see the truth of the not-self doctrine only because the discourse was delivered by the Buddha himself and because they were of keen intellect. These five were not only equipped with mature experience, but in the days after the teaching of the Dhammacakka Sutta, all had attained Stream-winning. That is the reason for their speedy attainment of Arahantship after making progressive strides towards realisation of the higher Dhamma.

### **Awakening Cannot Be Achieved without Contemplation**

During the lifetime of the Buddha people with great intellect who possessed mature perfections (*pāramī*) just like the five ascetics, achieved the Path (*magga*) and its Fruition (*phala*) while listening to discourses delivered by the Blessed One. Such achievements were not gained without diligently practising contemplation. The special Dhamma was attained only because they were able to devote themselves to serious meditation with deep concentration and accelerated contemplation with keen intent to gain realisation. Only a few who had adequate perfections were capable of doing so. A good many could not possibly contemplate and note with sufficient speed. Despite this obvious fact, there are some idlers who will say: "If one understands the nature of not-self from teachings given by others, it is unnecessary to practise — one could achieve the Path and its Fruition merely by listening to the teaching." With mere wishful thinking, they place themselves on the plane of the Noble Ones, which they aspire to reach. Such ideas are entertained by lazy people, so the number who have become self-appointed Noble Ones after listening to such teachings, will be more than just a few. The knowledge of not-self understood by those who merely listen to teachings without practising insight meditation, and without contemplating and noting diligently, is not true personal realisation, but mere book knowledge. If the Path and Fruition knowledge can be realised in the way stated, almost every Buddhist who knows the not-self doctrine may be considered to be an Arahant. However, as such people are not endowed with the real

attributes of an Arahant, it is obvious that they are not genuine Arahants. Referring to such improper acts, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw has given precise and clear instructions in his discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta to put these people back on the right path.

### **A Full Explanation of the Noting Method**

The Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta taught by the Buddha, being a discourse describing the nature and characteristics of not-self, does not include the method of meditation emphasising contemplation and noting. This present book on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, however, contains the full exposition of the method of contemplating and noting, and explains in detail how not-self is reflected upon leading to the attainment of nibbāna through the Path and its Fruition. It has not been so taught just wishfully without reference to the scriptural texts. Neither has it been taught prompting others to meditate without having had any personal experience of insight meditation. This has been expounded and taught after acquiring personal experience and knowledge in meditation practice under the methodical instructions of a competent teacher and after consulting the relevant Pāli texts and Commentaries.

At the time of delivering his discourse, with deep compassion, the Venerable Sayādaw elaborated fully on the concise Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta taught by the Buddha. This discourse, when produced in type-written copy, comprised 420 pages because it was meticulously transcribed by U Thein Han (a retired judge) without omitting any word or phrase from the original tape recording. U Thein Han presented the type-written copy to the Venerable Sayādaw to seek permission for publication for the benefit of those who have not heard this discourse. The Sayādaw gave his kind permission to publish this book only after summarising this long series of discourses into a condensed edition of 152 instead of 429 pages, lest the book should become too bulky, in view of the shortage of paper.

The Venerable Sayādaw is adept in amplifying what is concise and in shortening what is lengthy. He has not only abbreviated the lengthy version of the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta and “The Method of Vipassanā meditation,” but also the Dhammacakka Sutta at the time of his teaching. In doing so he is capable of making them comprehensible to all those who might prefer to read or hear the Dhamma

irrespective of whether it is in a concise or an unabbreviated form. This serves as a boon to all concerned.

Whenever he teaches or writes, the Venerable Sayādaw lays more emphasis on the essence than on principles of grammar. Despite the fact that some Nissaya Sayādaw might have translated “*Bārāṇasiyaṃ*,” as “at Benares,” stressing the grammatical sense, though it may not be regarded as incorrect the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw has described it as “in the neighbourhood of Benares,” as the Buddha temporarily resided in the deer-park near Benares (or in the province of Benares). To fall in line with the factual truth without deviating from the grammatical meaning. Similarly, in his New Nissaya on the Mahā-satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, he referred to “Kurūsu” as “the Country of the Kurū.”

### Preferring Truth to Tradition

Although significance is said to have been given to nature, the Venerable Sayādaw is not used to describing the meaning aloof from the point of grammar, which he never fails to give its due importance. In other words, he treats grammar as it deserves giving it its own significance. More than that, paramount importance is given to the natural sense in giving interpretation. Hence, in his interpretation of the meaning he does not strictly follow the traditional method; and also when citing is done, he sticks to the truth of the meaning once he has found it to be accurate and then expresses his candid opinion in writing. This is clear from his writings and expressions given in the first Volume of the “Method of Practising Vipassanā Meditation” in the chapter relating to moral conduct (*sīla*) on pages 13 to 23. In that chapter though some of the ancient texts had stated as amounting to “repaying the debt” when referring to the use of four main requisites needed for a monk: dwelling-place, robes, food, and medicine, he had refuted the aforesaid statement as erroneous, citing concrete examples in support. Moreover, in this Discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta at page 10 of the Burmese version (see footnote on [page 7](#), he expressed his opinion as follows:

“In this regard, the teachers of the old days explained the meaning of the word *ābādhāya*’ as ‘pain’ in Burmese. This explanation seems wrong from the point of view of grammar and its intrinsic meaning. The reason being, the word *ābādhāya*’ with the prefix *ā*’ cannot be interpreted as ‘pain.’ It only conveys the meaning of

‘oppressing.’ The meaning ‘injury’ for the word ‘*ābādha*’ has therefore been rendered in accordance with the Burmese terminology currently in use. It is interpreted thus, not because it has been taught as ‘likely to cause pain.’ As such, the meaning referring to the word ‘*abādḥāya*’ as ‘pain’ is regarded as unrealistic, particularly because it is not only contrary to the innate meaning of ‘*bādha*’ which conveys the meaning of ‘oppressing,’ but also out of tune with the principles of grammar. Furthermore, the material body (*rūpa*), perception (*saññā*), mental formations (*saṅkhārā*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), do not have the characteristic of ‘pain’, etc.”

### Seemingly Easy but Difficult

The teaching about impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anatta*) is very familiar to all Buddhists who know it by heart, and is often on the tips of their tongues. Whenever any accident happens, such interjections are often uttered suddenly, invoking mindfulness of the Dhamma. Thus, it might be considered as a teaching that is generally known and understood. Undoubtedly, referring to this statement, the Dhamma has been known through hearsay or book knowledge; but in reality it is a difficult truth to fully comprehend, though seemingly obvious. Among these three characteristics, the teaching on not-self is the most profound. The Blessed One had to face serious opposition from some individuals like the wandering religious mendicant Saccaka and Baka Brahmā who entertained views on self that were diametrically opposed to his teaching.

Prior to the teachings being made known by the Buddha, this not-self teaching not being clearly understood, was considered as closely related to a self connected with mind (*nāma*) and matter (*rūpa*). As against the wrong belief in self in respect of mind and matter, the Buddha elucidated these two — physical and mental phenomena — as truly not-self (*anatta*). It is most difficult to teach this Dhamma convincingly to show that it is not-self in reality, to make these persons realise the truth, since the idea of a self has been firmly rooted in them throughout the cycle of existence. If this doctrine of not-self could be known without difficulty, there would be no need for the appearance of a Buddha. Nor would the Buddha’s disciples like the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw need to take great pains to teach and write this teaching on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta.



The relentless efforts that have to be made to elucidate this teaching stand witness to the quality of this profound doctrine. Even among heretics, exceptionally few really understand what is self, let alone not-self. Our benefactor, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw has lucidly explained the doctrine of not-self in this discourse to enable those who entertain a wrong conception to find the right path.

### **One Should Not Underestimate the Suttanta**

The believers who care more for Abhidhamma, the teachings on ultimate truths (*paramattha*), are inclined to underestimate the teachings in the Suttanta. They also generally assume it to be quite easy. As the Buddha's teachings were all taught with supreme wisdom after his Enlightenment, they might not be easily comprehended by ordinary people with ordinary knowledge. Since both common usage and Abhidhamma are involved in the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, the exponents of ultimate truths may become confused regarding the source from which the terminology is derived, wondering whether it derives from the Abhidhamma or Suttanta.

The Abhidhamma states that there is no sensation of pain (*dukkha*) and pleasure (*sukha*) at the moment of seeing, hearing, and knowing the taste, and that only the neutral sensation (*upekkhā*) is present. However, according to the teachings of the Suttanta, all sensations arising out of the six sense-doors at the moment of seeing, hearing, etc., should be contemplated and noted in respect of all three feelings, whether pleasant, painful, or neutral. When such a controversial view arises, it is extremely difficult to draw a line and form an opinion to avoid contradicting the expression contained in both Abhidhamma and Suttanta. Such difficulties may arise in Suttanta teachings, which the Abhidhamma scholars hold in low estimation. This sort of difficulty has been competently dealt with by the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw on page 34 of the Burmese version (see [page 19](#)) reconciling the two divergent views without any contradiction.

### **Common Usage Is Not Easy to Interpret**

Because of the numerous examples of common usage, the teachings in the Suttanta have been called "The teaching of common usage," by present-day Buddhists. To make this teaching method understood, various grammatical works of have been compiled. Thus

it can be understood that common usage is not straightforward. In the course of his explanation on the subject of grammar, while teaching the famous Subcommentary (*tīkā*), Pakokku Aletai Sayādaw U Paññā once stated, “One can be fairly conversant with Abhidhamma within three years of constant study whereas one cannot possibly become a competent grammarian though one may devote oneself to the study of grammatical texts for ten years.” The common terminology used relating to grammar is merely derived and adopted from the vocal sound commonly spoken by people of different races whose languages may be quite different from one another depending upon where they reside. Dialectic differences may also occur according to times, hence common usage may change as time goes by. Texts like the *Vohāra Dīpanī* are therefore needed.

To the extent that common usage is profound, Suttanta teaching is hard to comprehend. Now that over 2,500 years have elapsed since the Dhamma was taught by the Buddha, in some expressions, the Pāli usage and Burmese usage have diverged from one another in vocabulary, grammar, and synthesis.

As an example, in the Dīghanakha Sutta the Pāli phrase “All is displeasing to me (*sabbam me nakkhamati*),” spoken by the wanderer Dīghanakha to the Buddha, may be cited. This Pāli statement is quite different from common usage. The word “*sabbam*” in Pāli, the subject, has become an object in Burmese while the word ‘*me*’ has become a subject. Despite all of these differences and discrepancies, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw has been able to explain the usages in explicit terms in this Discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta.

When I first arrived at Wetlet Masoyein Monastery. The Venerable Shwezedi Sayādaw was then at Wetlet town where he had gone to deliver a discourse. While conversing with the Sayādaw, I asked him, “If there were such a thing as the doctrine of extinction after death, and nibbāna, which has a special feature; and whether these two might be construed as being the same?”

The Sayādaw replied, “Of course, there is nibbāna, which has its own quality and attributes. How could it be without any speciality?” As the conversation had ended abruptly. I had no chance of following up with a question as: “What is its special characteristic?”

The Sayādaw might have forgotten this insignificant episode. However, when I was reading through this Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, I

happened to recollect the previous conversation as I came upon the special explanation relating to the belief that there is no future existence and nibbāna. On [page 31](#) the Mahāsi Sayādaw has clarified the difference by elucidating the distinguishing features of the annihilationist view (*ucchedadit̐hi*) — a wrong belief that nothing remains after death and that a being is completely annihilated — and nibbāna, which has peculiar characteristics quite different from annihilation. Those who hold this false belief erroneously think that the annihilation of existence and nibbāna are the same. This concept is entirely wrong. The two are, in fact, entirely different.

There is something that ought to be known regarding annihilationism. In about 1971 (1333 M.E.), I managed to convene a congregation for teaching discourses on Satipaṭṭhāna after inviting the Mahāsi Dhamma teachers U Saṃvara and U Jotika to enable my relatives and friends in my native village to have the benefit of hearing a discourse. I arranged for a discourse at Inchaung village where many of my relatives were then residing. At this congregation, one Maung Kyi was present among the audience. This man being a leader of the Red Flag Communist Party, was a staunch believer in the doctrine of no new life after the present existence. It seemed that he had come over to join the congregation sponsored by me out of sheer courtesy as he happened to be one of my relatives. U Saṃvara and the other teacher delivered their discourses bearing in mind the mental attitude of that person. Since, the teaching made having had some sort of bearing on him, the audience comprising the village folks were apparently interested. As this man was asked to assume the role of a stand-by supporter at the time of delivering the Dhamma, there was no wonder that people got interested knowing him well as a person who had held a wrong belief in “No future existence.” The next day, early in the morning, Maung Kyi appeared at the house where I was invited for a meal offered by a donor. On the said occasion. Maung Kyi told me “Venerable Sir, I accepted the point of Dhamma touched upon by U Saṃvara on the previous night, but please do not take it amiss that I have become a convert, a believer in the doctrine of Mind (*nāma*). Since you Buddhists believe in future existences, you perform meritorious deeds with all your cravings for existence. On our part, not having entertained such a belief, we have no craving whatsoever for existence. We have extinguished all

such clinging attachment to existence.” Then, I was perforce to remark as, “This would depend on one’s own view. According to the Buddha’s teaching, clinging to existence will only be rooted out when one becomes an Arahant. Without being actually devoid of craving instincts for existence if one takes it for granted that existence is completely annihilated after demise, he will go down to hell (*niraya*) in the next existence after passing away from this existence with this false belief of annihilationism stuck in his mind on the eve of death, and with this consciousness, he would die. This is exactly in accordance with what the Buddha has taught.”

Although Maung Kyi had severed his ties with his “life existence,” his wife not being able to do so, started making preparations for ordaining her grown-up children as novices. Plunged in his bigotry Maung Kyi then said to his wife, “You need not do anything in my favour for my next existence. If you prefer to perform the going-forth (*pabbajja*) ceremony (*maṅgala*) by ordaining the children as novices, you may do so on your own. Only when the candidates are to be escorted to the monastery, I cannot possibly take the role of a benefactor by carrying the begging bowl and the fan.” In retaliation to this statement made by Maung Kyi, his wife respond “Without a benefactor (donor), I cannot lead the would-be novice (*sāmaṇera*). If you cannot act as a donor (benefactor), I will inevitably have to hire another benefactor and carry out with the necessary religious rites.” Hearing this retort, Maung Kyi, the great believer in annihilationism became very perturbed and uncomfortable, and being unable to tolerate the presence of a hired benefactor in his place, he was said to have been put in a dilemma. I heard of this incident from the lay devotees of the village.

I am confident that this discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta will enhance the faith and bring great benefit to the readers, as have other expositions taught by the illustrious Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw.

Wetlet-Masoyein U Teiktha  
(17-11-76)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This must mean 17/11/1976, which may have been when the Burmese edition of this series of discourses were first published. The talks were given in 1963, but not published in English until 1983. The Buddha Sāsānānuggaha Organization made a concerted effort to publish the Sayādaw’s teachings in English following the Sayādaw’s missionary tours to the West in 1978-79, to India/Nepal in 1980-81, and his demise in August 1982 (ed.)

# A DISCOURSE ON THE ANATTALAKKHAṆA SUTTA

Delivered on Thursday May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1963.<sup>1</sup>

*Namo tassa Bhagavāto Arahāto Sammāsambuddhassa*

The series of discourses on the Hemavata Sutta, which followed those on the Dhammacakka Sutta, concluded on the full-moon day of May (Kasun). Today I will begin my discourses on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, which was the third discourse given by the Buddha. It is essential to have a full understanding of this Sutta, since it may be said that it is a compendium of the teachings of the Buddha. All religious beliefs outside of the Buddha's dispensation fall under the category of beliefs in a self (*atta*). They hold the view that there is such a thing as a soul, a living entity. They believe that this soul resides in all living creatures, namely, men, deities, or animals such as cattle, buffaloes, dogs, *etc.* In the midst of a world holding fast to such notions of a self or soul, the Blessed One declared that the soul or living entity is not a reality — it is only a conventional truth. What really exists, in the ultimate sense, is a continuous flux of impersonal processes, just material and mental phenomena.

Thus, it is essential to understand this doctrine of not-self and impersonality taught by the Buddha thoroughly and comprehensively. The doctrine of not-self had already been dealt with by the Buddha while elaborating the Four Noble Truths during the course of teaching the Dhammacakka Sutta. At the time of teaching the Hemavata Sutta too, this doctrine was expounded when the Blessed One explained that “with the arising of the six sense-bases, (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind) there arises a being.” The doctrine of not-self was again clarified comprehensively in this Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta. Bearing in mind the importance of this Sutta, and the fact that it is now its turn to receive our attention, being the third discourse given by the Blessed One, I propose to give a series of discourses on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta starting from today.

## Introduction to the Sutta

The introduction to the Sutta was recorded by the Elders of the First Council in the Khandhavagga of the Saṃyuttanikāya in these words:—

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<sup>1</sup> The First Waxing day of Nayun 1325 M.E.

*“Ekaṃ samayaṃ Bhagavā Bārāṇasiyaṃ viharati isipatane miḡadāye. Tatra kho Bhagavā pañcavaggiye bhikkhū āmantesi: ‘Bhikkhavo’ti. ‘Bhadante’ti te bhikkhū Bhagavato paccassosum. Bhagavā etadavoca:”*

To the question put by Venerable Mahākassapa, who asked him where the Sutta was taught, by whom, and to whom, Venerable Ānanda replied:

*“At one time, the Blessed One was staying at the deer sanctuary (miḡadāye) in the sage’s park (isipatane), in the district of Benares (Bārāṇasiyaṃ).”*

### Date of the Discourse

The Dhammacakka Sutta, the first discourse, was delivered in the evening of the full-moon day of July (Wāso), 2,552 years ago counting back from the Myanmar Era of 1325. At the time of the first Discourse, only one of the group of five ascetics, namely Venerable Koṇḍañña, attained the first stage of a Stream-winner (*sotāpanna*). Having fully penetrated into all aspects of the Dhamma, with firmly established confidence and unshakeable faith in the teaching of the Buddha, he had sought and gained admission into the Order of the Buddha. The remaining four ascetics, Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahānāma, and Assaji had not yet become accomplished in the Noble Path and its Fruition. The Blessed One, therefore, urged them to engage themselves in the strenuous practice of Dhamma under his personal guidance. They did not even go out for alms. The Blessed One himself also stayed in monastery constantly without going out for almsfood to attend to them and assist them in removing the obstacles, hindrances, and impurities that arise in the course of meditation practice. Thus instructed and guided by the Blessed One and striving arduously and incessantly the Venerable Vappa attained the path and Fruition and became a Stream-winner on the first waning day of Wāso; the Venerable Bhaddiya attained the Path and Fruition on the 2nd, the Venerable Mahānāma on the 3rd, and the Venerable Assaji on the 4th respectively, becoming Stream-winners.

I have already dealt fully with the account of their attainments in the concluding part of my discourse on the Dhammacakka Sutta. I stated there that the four ascetics did not attain higher knowledge

merely by listening to the discourse; they had to strive to realise it and, therefore, the Blessed One urged them to practise the Dhamma strenuously. In view of this fact, I warned the audience in the last portion of my discourse on the Dhammacakka Sutta, not to be led astray by false teachings that irresponsibly assert that the status of a Stream-winner could be attained by just listening to the discourse, and that no effort is needed to practise insight meditation.

The Commentaries say that after all the five ascetics had become Stream-winners and received ordination as monks in the Buddha's Order, the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta was taught on the 5th waning day of July. Thus, "at one time" in the introduction means the 5th waning day of July, while the Blessed One was still staying in the deer sanctuary near Benares. At that time, the Blessed One addressed the group of five monks, "Monks," and the group of five monks replied, "Venerable Sir." Then the Blessed One taught the Dhamma that is presently to be recited. After the introduction given by the Venerable Ānanda in response to the question asked by the Venerable Mahākassapa, Venerable Ānanda continued to recite the first part of the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta in the Buddha's own words:

*"Rūpaṃ, bhikkhave, anattā. Rūpañca hidaṃ, bhikkhave, attā abhaviṣṣa, nayidaṃ rūpaṃ ābādhāya saṃvatteyya, labbhettha ca rūpe — 'Evaṃ me rūpaṃ hotu, evaṃ me rūpaṃ mā ahoṣī'ti. Yaṃ mā ca kho, bhikkhave, rūpaṃ anattā, tasmā rūpaṃ ābādhāya saṃvattati, na ca labbhati rūpe — 'Evaṃ me rūpaṃ hotu, evaṃ me rūpaṃ mā ahoṣī'ti."*

"Monks, materiality is not-self..."

Usually, people think themselves and others to be living entities with a soul, self, or ego in each of them. What is taken to be a soul is called "atta" in Pāli, which is derived from the Sanskrit expression "Ātman." This self or soul is also known as life (*jīva*). Thus *atta* conveys the concept of life, soul, or living entity. Holding the view that there exists a soul or a living entity in man is a misconception of self, a wrong view about the self (*attadiṭṭhi*).

An ordinary person (*puthujjana*) cannot be said to be free from this wrong belief in self. The only difference between individuals with regard to this wrong view lies in how firmly it is held and how plainly it is manifested. In a person who has become accomplished

in the knowledge of mental and physical phenomena, this belief in self may be considerably attenuated, but it cannot be said that he or she is completely devoid of the notion of self. He or she is still liable to misconceive that it is the self that is the thinker of thoughts, the doer of actions, the speaker of words, and the one who experiences sensations. The insight meditator who notes every phenomenon is developing keen insight that there is no self, no living entity, but mere physical and mental processes, is free from that wrong notion of self, but only for the duration of insight meditation practice. As soon as the meditator ceases to note the arising and passing away of phenomena, the misconception of self is likely to return. To remove this misconception of self and make it clear that there is no such thing as a soul or living entity in the mental and physical phenomena of one's own body or the bodies of others, the Blessed One began the discourse with the statement: "*Rūpaṃ, bhikkhave, anattā ... Material form, monks, is not-self.*"

### **Materiality Wrongly Conceived As Self**

What is the material form that is wrongly conceived and regarded as a self? The following material qualities form the foundation for a material form. They are the sensitive part of the eye that enables one to see objects; the sensitive part of the ear that enables one to hear sounds; the sensitive part of the nose that enables one to smell odours; the sensitive part of the tongue that enables one to taste flavours; the sensitive part of the body that enables one to feel touches; the material quality of the base that is the seat of consciousness; and the material quality of the life-principle. If we consider carefully, we can realise that visual-consciousness arises because of the sensitive material quality of the eye, and with visual-consciousness comes the concept of a living entity of self. Similarly, it can be understood that it is because of sensitive material qualities of the ear, nose, tongue, and body, we have the consciousness of hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. The material quality of the base that acts as the seat of consciousness is responsible for thoughts and thinking, resulting in the notion of self or living entity.

The material quality of the life-principle is the vital force that vivifies all material bodies and preserves them from decay and decomposition. This life-principle, which is just a material quality,



is wrongly believed to be a soul, a living entity. In the absence of the sensitive material qualities such as the sensitive part of the eye there is no such thing as soul or living entity. Consider, for instance, a wooden figure of a man that resembles a living person, but is devoid of the sensitive material qualities of the sense organs that can give rise to different cognition. Consequently such a wooden figure is never mistaken for a living being with a soul or a living entity. Neither does any notion of a soul or a living being arise with respect to the body of a person who has just died; the reason being that there is no longer any sensitive material qualities such as the sense faculties in that body. As long as the sensitive qualities exist, other material phenomena, which are their co-adjuncts and concomitant with them, are also wrongly conceived as a self, as a living entity.

Such material phenomena are the sight that is seen, the sound that is heard, the odour that is smelt, and tactile objects such as solidity (*pathavī*), temperature (*tejo*) and motion (*vāyo*) felt by the tactile sense base, which also indirectly recognises the moistness and fluidity of the element of cohesion (*āpo*), and the material qualities of sex responsible for masculinity and femininity. Material phenomena such as sights, sounds, or odours, which are concomitant with the sensitive material qualities of the sense-bases, are misconceived as soul or living entities when seen, heard, smelt, *etc.* In brief, the whole material body, which co-exists with the sense-bases, is regarded as a living entity. In common parlance, too, the whole body, which is composed of material qualities, is spoken of as a self, soul, or living entity. The conventional usage as a self or a living being is not the utterance of falsehood, but merely conforming to the conventions of the world. However, from the point of view of ultimate reality, the material substance of the whole body is not a self, an individual, or a being, but only an aggregate of materiality (*rūpakhandhā*). Therefore, the Blessed One declared explicitly that although individuals view the aggregate of material qualities as a living being, in reality, it is not a self, a soul, or a living being, but merely physical phenomena. Exponents of the doctrine of self, who hold that the material substance in their body is a self, are bound to come up with the question, "Why is it not a self?" Therefore, the Blessed One provided an explanation why it is not in the following way:—

“Monks, because materiality is not-self, it tends to affliction and distress, and it is not possible to say of materiality. ‘Let it be thus (good), let it not be thus (bad).’”

### How Materiality Oppresses

If materiality was a self, it should not cause suffering, but actually materiality imposes suffering in this way: it does not remain youthful and vigorous; it oppresses living beings by growing old and decaying; it oppresses by dying. Without materiality, one would be free from afflictions of getting grey hairs, broken teeth, a hunched back, deafness, weak eyesight, wrinkled skin, and physical infirmity. It is materiality that inflicts this suffering. Again, because of materiality, one is troubled by sore-eyes, ear-ache, tooth-ache, back-ache, flatulence, feeling hot, cold, pain, and itching; and with diseases of blood, skin, stomach, urine, high blood pressure, *etc.* These ailments arise because of materiality through which they manifest. We suffer from hunger and thirst because of materiality; and because of it, we are subjected to attacks by insects such as mosquitoes, or other hardships. The suffering in the states of loss (*apāya*) are also due to materiality. In brief, one suffers from all these various afflictions because of materiality. It is materiality, whose function it is to bring about distress in one’s body, that is inflicting suffering.

Materiality is also responsible for the phenomenon of death. When the material qualities of the body deteriorate and decay, death occurs. It may, therefore, be said that materiality inflicts suffering by causing death. If materiality were self, it would not afflict us with the suffering of old age, disease, and death. One might inflict suffering on others but not usually on oneself. Therefore, if materiality were self, it should not inflict suffering on itself by bringing about old age and so forth. Furthermore, even before the onset of old age, disease, and death, materiality constantly subjects us to various discomforts. A young person, although free from ailments and blessed with excellent health, cannot remain long in any one posture such as sitting, standing, or walking, but has to change postures frequently. It is the experience of all of us that we cannot remain for as long as we wish in a single posture. We find it difficult to remain seated for half an hour or one hour without

changing position; or even to lie still for two or three hours. Changing the posture is necessitated by feelings of hotness or tiredness in the limbs after a certain time in one position. All of this distress arises because of materiality. In other words, it is materiality that inflicts distress.

One may reflect that if materiality were self, it would not impose these sufferings on us.<sup>1</sup>

### Materiality Is Not Subject to One's Will

Furthermore, it is stated, "If materiality were self, the inner core, it should be possible to say of materiality, 'Let my materiality be thus (good), let my materiality not be thus (bad).'"

Truly, one should be able to exercise one's will on materiality if it were one's self or soul. All beings desire to have their material body always youthful and healthy in appearance, to keep it free from old age, illness, and decay leading to death. However, the body is not so obliging, and refuses to be subject to one's will. Its youthful vitality fades into aged debility, its robust health declines, against one's will, resulting in disease. Finally, decay results in failure of the bodily functions and death. Thus materiality is not amenable to one's control, not manageable according to one's wish. The Blessed One therefore pointed out that materiality is not one's self or soul.

Let us briefly restate the meaning of the Pāḷi passage quoted above:

"Monks, because materiality is not-self, it tends to affliction and distress, and it is not possible to say of form. 'Let it be thus (good), let it not be thus (bad).'" If form were self or soul, there would be no infliction of suffering on oneself, and it should be possible to subject it to one's will. While others may not be amenable to one's control, it should be possible to manage oneself as one desires. However, the fact is that materiality is not a self or soul. Hence, it inflicts suffering on us and refuses to be controlled."

The Blessed One continued to explain why this is so.

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<sup>1</sup> The last three lines on page 9 and the whole of pages 10 and 11 are omitted from the English translation as they merely deal with the translation of the Pāḷi word '*ābādhāya*' into Burmese (translator's note).

## Direct Evidence of How Materiality Is Not Self

*“Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, rūpaṃ anattā, tasmā rūpaṃ ābādhāya saṃvattati, na ca labbhati rūpe — ‘Evaṃ me rūpaṃ hotu, evaṃ me rūpaṃ mā ahoṣī’ti.”*

“Monks, because materiality is not-self, it tends to affliction and distress, and it is not possible to say of materiality. ‘Let it be thus (good), let it not be thus (bad).’”

It is impossible to influence or control materiality in this way. In reality, form is not-self, not one’s inner core. Hence, materiality is oppressive due to old age, disease, *etc.* Furthermore, it is not amenable to one’s wishes and control.

## Two Kinds of Soul

Those who believe in the soul say that there are two kinds: the living soul (*jīva atta*) and the supreme soul (*parama atta*). According to them, each being, whether a man, deity, or an animal, has a self, an inner core called a living soul. This soul or living entity is believed to have been created by God. However, some believers hold that these individual souls are small segments of soul that have emanated from the soul of God. The supreme soul (*parama atta*) is the soul of God who has created the world with all the creatures in it. According to some believers, this soul of God permeates the entire world, but others say it abides in the Heavenly Abode. These ideas of a small soul and a big soul are, of course, imaginary, and mere speculation. Nobody has met or seen the God that is the embodiment of the supreme soul. Belief in creation by God is also a speculative belief — a belief that existed long before the appearance of the Buddha. This is clear from the Buddha’s meeting with Baka Brahmā.

## The Story of Baka Brahmā

At one time, the Blessed One went to the realm of the Brahmās for the purpose of clearing up the wrong views held by the Great Brahmā, Baka. On arrival there, the great Brahmā Baka welcomed the Blessed One to his realm in praise of which he spoke thus: “Welcome, Venerable Gotama; your coming is good although you have taken a long time to do so. This Brahmā realm is permanent, stable, everlasting, perfect in every way. No one dies or passes away from here.” The Blessed One

rebuked the Brahmā Baka in these words: "Oh, Brahmās, how ignorant is Brahma Baka! He describes his impermanent realm to be permanent and stable." Upon this, one of the followers of Brahmā Baka protested indignantly, "Bhikkhu Gotama, do not rebuke Brahmā Baka. This Brahmā Baka is a Great Brahmā, chief of the Brahmās, conqueror over all, invincible. He sees all, wielding power and authority over every creature. He is the creator of the world, the noblest person. He assigns to each — kings, Brahmins, men, deities, animals, *etc.* — their respective station in this world. He is accomplished in attainments, the father of all past and future beings," thus praising the virtues of Brahmā Baka. In the Brahmajāla Sutta where the origin of the wrong view of the permanence of a certain individual was explained, the Buddha gave a similar account of the Brahmā.

### **Origin of the Belief in Creation**

After the previous world had perished, there was a time when a new world began evolving. The first Brahmā who made his appearance then thought and believed thus: "I am a Brahmā, a Great Brahmā, a conqueror invincible by anyone, who can see everything, almighty to have every wish fulfilled, a Lord, a Creator, the noblest of all, one who assigns to each his station. Accomplished in attainments, the father of all the past and future beings. The Brahmās who had made their appearance later in the realm of the Brahmās also thought and believed likewise. Of those Brahmās who had passed away from the realm of Brahmās to be reborn in the human world, there were some who could recall their past existence in the Brahmā realm. They boldly announced, "The Great Brahmā created the beings in the world. The Creator himself, the Great Brahmā, is permanent, eternal. The creatures he has created, however, do not last forever; they die and pass away." These bold announcements, as their personal experience, were believed and accepted by those who heard their teachings. The Blessed One explained that this was how the idea originated that only the Creators who first created things are eternal.

From the Sutta we have just quoted, one can surmise that the so-called God who is said to have created beings, the God who is said to be in the Heavenly abode, could be the Great Brahma who first appeared in the realm of the Brahmās at the beginning of the world. We could also take it that the supreme soul is the soul of that

Great Brahmā. Then it becomes clear from the teachings of the Buddha that the supreme soul of the Great Brahmā is of the same nature as the individual soul of other beings. It is just a misconception that the continuous flux of mental and physical processes are a self. Actually, there is no such thing as a self apart from the psycho-physical phenomena; it is a mere figment of the imagination.

Furthermore, the materiality and mentality of the Great Brahmā are just like those of other beings, subject to the laws of impermanence. When his life-span is exhausted, the Great Brahmā also faces death and has to pass away. In reality, the Great Brahmā cannot have his every wish fulfilled; he cannot maintain the materiality of his body according to his wish. Therefore, the materiality of the Great Brahmā is also not his self, or soul, but is not-self.

### **Attachment to Self**

In general, people hold on to the belief that there is an individual soul, a living entity, which lasts for the duration of the life-span before one dies. This is the view held by annihilationists who believe that nothing remains after death. However, the eternalists believe that the individual soul remains undestroyed after death, living on in new bodies, and never perishing. According to the eternalists, the body of a being is made up of two parts: the coarse body and the subtle body. At the end of each existence, when death occurs, the coarse body gets destroyed, but the subtle body departs from the old body to enter a new body, thus remaining eternal and never perishing. This view of the eternalists, as described in their literature, has been reproduced in full in the Subcommentary to the Visuddhimagga.

I have described in detail the various beliefs in a self, with their origin, to present the concept of not-self more clearly. Among the general populace who profess to be Buddhists, there are many who believe in the existence of a soul or a living entity, even though they have not set down their beliefs in so many words in the form of literature. They hold on to the view that life departs on the death of a being, via his nose or his mouth; when conception takes place in the womb of a mother, life enters through her nose, her mouth or piercing through her abdomen, and from birth to death, it remains steadfastly in the new body. All these views relate to a belief in the existence of a soul, a living entity.

## **Not Understanding Clinging to Self**

In reality, by death is meant just the cessation of the psycho-physical process, the non-arising of fresh mind and matter after the termination of de cease-consciousness (*cuti citta*) at the moment of death. There is no such thing as a departing soul or living entity. The new becoming means the arising of new consciousness at a new site together with the physical base on which it finds its support. Just before de cease-consciousness terminates at the moment of death, it holds on to one of the objects namely kamma, the sign of kamma (*kamma nimitta*), or the sign of destiny (*gati nimitta*). Conditioned thus by the objects held on to at the last moment of consciousness, a new consciousness arises in a new existence. This is called rebirth or re-linking consciousness as it forms a link between the previous and the next existence. When the re-linking consciousness passes away, it is followed by what we call subconsciousness (*bhavaṅga*), which is occurs continuously throughout life as prescribed by one's previous karmic energy. When sense-objects such as a sight or sound appears at the sense-doors, the subconsciousness is replaced for the respective moments by visual-consciousness or auditory-consciousness. The arising of new consciousness in the new existence as conditioned by the kamma of the past existence is conventionally called transmigration from the old to the new existence. However, in fact there is no soul nor living entity which transmigrates from one existence to another.

## **Self Must be Understood to Understand Not-self**

Some cannot grasp the concept of not-self because they do not know about the theory of self as explained in detail above. They think it is clinging to self if someone holds on to the shape and form of objects. For instance, to recognise a tree as a tree, a stone as a stone; a house as a house, a monastery as a monastery, is according to them, clinging to self. In their view the fact of not-self is clearly grasped only when concepts of shape and form are transcended and replaced by perception of ultimate truth. However, merely perceiving forms and shapes does not amount to clinging to self. Neither does it mean that belief in not-self is established once shapes and forms are no longer perceived. Recognising inanimate objects such as trees, stones, houses, or monasteries, does not constitute a belief in self; it does not amount to clinging to self-view; it is merely holding on to a

concept. It is only when sentient beings with life and consciousness such as men, deities, animals, and so on are assumed to have a soul, a living entity, or a self that it amounts to clinging to a belief in self. When one assumes oneself to be a living soul, or others as living entities, then one holds the belief in self. Brahmās of the immaterial realms, having no material body, do not perceive themselves in the conventional shapes and forms, but ordinary Brahmās are not free from the false view of self, believing as they do, in the existence of a self, a living entity. It is only when belief in existence of a self or living entity is discarded and one's own body and other's bodies are perceived as merely psycho-physical phenomena, that knowledge of not-self arises. It is essential to develop true knowledge of not-self.

### Four Kinds of Clinging to Self

There are four kinds of clinging to self arising out of the belief in a self or soul.

#### Clinging to Self as the Master (Sāmi Atta)

Believing that there is a living entity inside one's body, who governs and directs every wish and action. It is this living soul that goes, stands up, sits down, sleeps, speaks whenever it wishes to. "Clinging to self as the master is belief in a living entity in one's body, controlling and directing it as it wishes." The Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta was taught by the Blessed One particularly to remove this type of clinging to self. Now, as this Sutta was first taught to the group of five monks who had, by then, become Stream-winners, it may be asked if a Stream-winner is still encumbered with clinging to self.

A Stream-winner has abandoned self-view, but still has conceit. At the stage of Stream-winning the fetters of self-view (*sakkāya-ditṭhi*), doubt, and attachment to rites and rituals (*silabbataparāmāsa*) have been completely eradicated. However, a Stream-winner is not yet free from I-conceit (*asmi-māna*). To take pride in one's ability, one's status, "I can do," "I am noble," is to cling to the I-conceit. A Stream-winner's conceit relates only to genuine qualities and virtues actually possessed and is not false pride based on non-existing virtues. The Stream-winner needs to continue insight development to remove the I-conceit, which is still a fetter. When insight is considerably developed, this I-conceit becomes attenuated and is partially removed



by the Path of Once-returning, though it is not yet completely abolished. The Path of Non-returner further weakens it, but it is only the final Path of Arahantship that can completely eradicate I-conceit. Thus it could be regarded that the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta was taught by the Blessed One to bring about total eradication of the I-conceit that was still lingering in the minds of the group of five monks although they had attained the stage of Stream-winning.

### **Clinging to Self as an Abiding Soul (Nivāsī Atta)**

This is believing that a living entity resides permanently in one's body. It is the common belief that one exists permanently as a living being from the moment of birth to the time of death. This is clinging to self as an abiding soul. Some hold that nothing remains after death; this is the wrong view of annihilationism. Others believe in the wrong view of eternalism, which holds that the living entity in the body is not destroyed at death, but continues to reside in a new body in a new existence. It was to remove these two wrong views, and the clinging to I-conceit, that the Blessed One taught the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta. That is to eradicate the I-conceit that fettered the group of five monks and other Noble Ones; and to remove the two wrong views and the I-conceit of ordinary people. As long as one clings to the belief that a living entity exists, one would maintain that the body is amenable to one's control. It is understood that the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta was delivered to remove not only clinging to the self as master, but also the clinging to the self as an abiding soul. Once the clinging to self as the master is removed, other types of clinging to self and wrong views are simultaneously eradicated completely.

### **Clinging to Self as the Doer (Kāraka Atta)**

This is believing that it is a living entity or self that executes every physical, verbal, and mental action. This clinging to the self as the doer is more concerned with the aggregate of formations (*saṅkhārak-khandhā*). I will deal with it more fully when we come to the aggregate of formations.

### **Clinging to Self as the Experiencer (Vedaka Atta)**

This is believing that all sensations, whether pleasant or unpleasant, are felt by a living entity or self. This clinging to the self as the

experiencer is concerned with the aggregate of feelings (*vedanakkhandhā*), which I will take up fully on the coming full-moon day of June. That the aggregate of materiality is not a self, nor a living entity, but not-self has been adequately explained, but I still need to explain how meditators engaged in the practice of insight meditation come to perceive the nature of not-self.

## Contemplation of Not-self

I have described and explained practical methods of insight meditation in many of my discourses and books. I need not go over them in detail, but I will give a brief description.

Insight meditation consists of contemplation of the five aggregates of grasping (*upādānakkhandhā*), which manifest themselves at the moment of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. For the novice meditator, however, it is hard to be heedful of each and every phenomenon of seeing, hearing, *etc.* They have to start their practice with noting only a few of the most prominent objects experienced. For example, while sitting, the meditator can concentrate on the nature of stiffness and resistance felt in the body and note it as ‘sitting, sitting.’ If the meditator feels that this exercise is too simple, he or she can combine it with noting another phenomenon namely, ‘touching,’ and note as ‘sitting, touching, sitting, touching.’ However, the movements of the rise and fall of the abdomen will be more pronounced. Thus if one mindfully notes ‘rising’ as the abdomen rises, and falling as it falls, one will come to see distinctly the phenomena of stiffening, resisting, distending, relaxing, or moving that occur inside the abdomen. These are the characteristics, function, and proximate cause of the element of motion (*vāyodhātu*).

Such contemplation and noting is in accordance with the Visuddhimagga, which states that “the nature of mind and matter should be comprehended by observing its characteristics, function, manifestation, and proximate cause.” We therefore instruct beginners in the practice of insight meditation to start with observing the rising and falling of the abdomen. However, this exercise of noting the rising and falling is not all that has to be done. While noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, any thoughts that occur have to be noted too. When feeling stiff, hot, cold, or painful, the meditator has to note

these sensations as they arise. When bending or stretching the limbs, these movements should also be noted. On rising from the sitting position, the change of posture should be accompanied by heedful noting. While walking, every motion involved in each step has to be noted as, 'lifting, moving, dropping.' If possible, all physical activities including even the opening and shutting of the eyes should be closely observed. When there is nothing particular to note, the meditator's attention should revert to the rising and falling movements of the abdomen. This is a brief description of exercises involved in the practice of insight meditation.

While engaged in noting rising, falling, sitting, and touching as they occur, the desire may arise to change postures to relieve the pain, numbness, or heat that are developing in the limbs. The meditator should note these desires as they arise, but should remain still without immediately yielding to the temptation to stretch the limbs. One should tolerate the discomfort as long as possible. If the desire to stretch the limbs arises repeatedly, one should first note them as before without changing posture. Only when they become unbearable should the meditator slowly stretch the limbs, while mindfully noting these actions as 'stretching, stretching.'

During each meditation session, frequent changes of posture become necessary due to various painful sensations. With repeated adjustments of the posture, the oppressive nature of the physical body becomes apparent. Despite the intention to remain still without changing position for one or two hours, it becomes evident that one cannot do as one wishes. Then the realisation occurs that materiality is oppressive, and is not a self, soul, or living entity, but mere physical phenomena that occur in accordance with conditions. This realisation is knowledge of contemplation of not-self. One cannot remain very long either seated, lying down, or standing. The realisation also occurs that materiality is never obliging, it does not obey one's wishes, and so is ungovernable. Being uncontrollable, it is not a self or soul, but mere physical phenomena that occur in accordance with conditions. This realisation is insight into not-self (*anattānupassanā-ñāṇa*). Again, being repeatedly disturbed by having to answer the calls of nature, while engaged in meditation in sitting or lying postures, it becomes apparent that materiality is oppressive, is ungovernable, not amenable to one's will, and so is not-self. While contemplating the behaviour of

materiality, its truly oppressive nature becomes exposed when bodily filth such as mucus, saliva, phlegm, tears, sweat, *etc.*, ooze from the body. Cleanliness cannot be maintained as one desires because of this uncontrollable nature of materiality, which is, therefore, obviously not-self. In addition, materiality oppresses by inflicting hunger, thirst, aging, and disease. These afflictions are evident truths even to a casual observer. However, it is likely that the notion of self will persist in one who only observes casually. It is only by noting mindfully that materiality is exposed as not a self or a living entity, but mere physical phenomena that occur incessantly.

These are just a few examples to indicate the not-self nature of materiality. The meditator who is noting all phenomena comes to experience many more which establish the oppressive nature of materiality and make it clear how it is not amenable to one's will and how it is not-self, being ungovernable. In the course of mindfully noting all the bodily actions such as rising, falling, sitting, bending, stretching, and perceiving how materiality afflicts, how it is ungovernable, the realisation arises through personal knowledge: "Although materiality in my body appears to be self, since it oppresses me, it is not my self nor my soul because it is not amenable to my wish, and is ungovernable. I have all along erroneously taken it to be my self or soul. It is really not-self, being ungovernable and not subject to my will." This is the true insight into not-self (*anattānupassanā-ñāṇa*).

I have dealt fairly comprehensively with how the nature not-self is perceived in materiality. I will conclude my discourse today by recapitulating the summarised translation of the Pāli Text and repeating the mnemonics on clinging to self.

### Summary of Materiality is Not-self

"Monks, materiality is not-self. If materiality were self, it would not tend to affliction, and it would be possible to say of materiality, 'Let my body be thus (in the best of conditions); let my body not be thus (in the worst of conditions).'"

In reality, materiality is not-self. Because it is not-self, it tends to affliction. Furthermore, it is not possible to say of materiality, 'Let my body be thus (in the best of conditions); let my body not be thus (in the worst of conditions).'

### **Points to Remember About Clinging to Self**

1. Clinging to self as the master (*sāmi atta*), is the belief in a living entity that is controlling and directing as it wishes.
2. Clinging to self as an abiding soul (*nivāsī atta*) is the belief in a living entity permanently residing in one's body.
3. Clinging to self as the doer (*kāraka atta*) is the belief in a living entity that is responsible for every physical, verbal, and mental action.
4. Clinging to self as the experiencer (*vedaka atta*) is the belief that all sensations, whether pleasant or unpleasant, are felt by a living entity, or self.

By virtue of having given respectful attention to this discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, may you all, by noting mental and physical phenomena occurring, perceive unerringly and assuredly, the nature of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, thereby may you soon attain and realise nibbāna, by means of the Path and Fruition as you wish.

## PART TWO

Delivered on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> June 1963.<sup>1</sup>

I began my discourses on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta on the eighth waxing day of June (Nayun).<sup>2</sup> I fully explained then that the body is just the aggregate of materiality, and is not-self. Today I will deal with the aggregate of feelings to show how it is also not-self.

People in general like to encounter pleasant objects and enjoy pleasant sensations, and dislike unpleasant sensations. With regard to both the pleasant and unpleasant sensations, they assume that “I feel the sensation; I feel pleasant; I feel unpleasant. However, in reality, the feeling is not-self, not a soul but is insubstantial and not-self (*anatta*). The Blessed One explained this fact as follows:

### Feeling Is Not-self

*“Vedanā anattā. Vedanā ca hidam, bhikkhave, attā abhavissa, nayidam vedanā ābādhāya saṃvatteyya, labbhettha ca vedanāya — ‘Evaṃ me vedanā hotu, evaṃ me vedanā mā ahoṣīti. Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, vedanā anattā, tasmā vedanā ābādhāya saṃvattati, na ca labbhati vedanāya — ‘Evaṃ me vedanā hotu, evaṃ me vedanā mā ahoṣīti.”*

“Monks, feeling is not-self...”

There are three categories of feeling.

1. Pleasant feelings (*sukha vedanā*).
2. Painful, unpleasant feelings (*dukkha vedanā*).
3. Equanimous, neutral feelings (*upekkhā vedanā*), which are neither pleasant nor painful.

Equanimous, neutral feelings are not prominent. Only pleasant and unpleasant feelings are commonly known and talked about. It is such a pleasure to feel the touch of a cool breeze or cold water when the weather is scorching hot. It is very comforting to be wrapped up in warm, woollen blankets during a cold spell. One feels at ease after stretching the limbs or changing positions to relieve stiffness. All of these comfortable feelings felt through contact with pleasant objects are pleasant feelings, which sentient beings assume to be self: “I feel pleasant, I feel comfortable.” Therefore they go in

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<sup>1</sup> The Full moon day of Nayun 1325 M.E.

<sup>2</sup> In Part One it states that the series of discourses started the week before on the 1st waxing day of Nayun, so one week seems to have gone astray (ed.)

pursuit of such pleasant sensations. Suffering that arises on coming into contact with unpleasant objects, feeling hot, tired in the limbs, discomforts due to intense cold, itchiness, *etc.*, are classified as unpleasant feelings, which is also assumed by sentient beings to be self: "I feel pain, I feel hot, I feel itchy, I feel something unpleasant." People try to avoid contact with these unpleasant objects as much as possible. However, when affected by any disease that afflicts the body, they unavoidably have to endure pain.

What I have just described relates to the pleasant and unpleasant feelings with respect to the physical body. In addition we have to consider the feelings that arise in relation to states of mind. Thoughts about pleasant objects give rise to happiness and gladness. Thinking about things that arouse dejection, despondency, defeatism, sadness, grief, timidity, and so on, gives rise to unhappiness. Dwelling on ordinary everyday affairs gives rise to neutral, equanimous feelings. These are three kinds of feelings that are related to thoughts. Whilst in such various states of mind, the sentient being assumes these feelings to be self: "I feel glad, I am happy." "I feel despondent, I am unhappy." "I am not happy nor unhappy, I am equanimous."

When pleasant objects are seen, heard, smelt, or tasted, pleasant feelings arise. These are also regarded as self: "I feel good, I feel happy." Therefore they go after the good things of life, visiting places of entertainments, *etc.*, to enjoy beautiful sights or melodious sounds. They use fragrant flowers and perfumes to enjoy pleasant aromas. They go to great lengths to satisfy their appetite for delicious tastes. When unpleasant objects are seen, heard, smelt, or tasted, unpleasant feelings arise in them. These are also assumed to be self. They try to avoid anything to do with unpleasant objects. The ordinary scenes that one sees or hears, or other indifferent sense-objects, excite neither pleasure nor displeasure. This neutral feeling is also assumed to be self. People are never content with this average condition of neutrality. They strive hard to attain happiness to enjoy pleasant feelings.

### **Difference Between Abhidhamma and Suttanta**

According to the Abhidhamma, there is neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling at the moment of seeing, hearing, smelling, or tasting, but only neutral feelings. However, in the Suttanta there are discourses that describe how all three feelings arise at the sense-doors.

There are discourses exhorting the monks to contemplate these feelings at the moment of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, to comprehend their true nature. The Visuddhimagga Mahā Ṭīkā (p.36, vol. II) has explained how pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings become evident at the moment of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, in these words:

“Although it is said that visual-consciousness is accompanied by equanimity, the resultant of unwholesome kamma is in the nature of suffering. The resultant of unwholesome kamma cannot be pleasant. Likewise, the resultant of wholesome kamma is in the nature of pleasantness. All moral acts bear good, pleasant fruits.”

This explanation in the Subcommentary is appropriate and can be verified through practical experience. When a beautiful object is seen, the feeling of wholesomeness and pleasantness is evident even as the object is being seen. When a terrifying, repulsive, hateful object is seen the feeling of horror or aversion is evident even while seeing the object. These experiences are more pronounced in the case of hearing than in the case of seeing. A sweet, pleasant sound produces a sweet, pleasant effect; a loud din inflicts unbearable pain on the hearer. The effect is also distinct in smelling. A pleasant sensation arises in the nose as soon as a fragrant aroma is smelt, whereas a foul, putrid smell immediately causes nausea resulting in headaches or other discomfort. A whiff of poisonous gas may even cause death. The most pronounced effects can be experienced in the act of eating. While a tasty, delicious dish produces a delightful sensation on the tongue, the bitter taste of some medicinal pills is very unpleasant and disagreeable. A poisonous substance will cause intense suffering and may result in death. Although it is stated that sense-consciousness is accompanied by indifference, the immoral resultant equanimity that experiences disagreeable objects has the nature of suffering, and the moral resultant equanimity that experiences agreeable objects has the nature of happiness.

The comments of the Subcommentary are most appropriate. The Suttas mention that all three types of feeling are stimulated at the moment of sense contact. Alternatively, as it is possible for all three to arise at the moment of impulsion (*javana*), during the eye-door thought-process (*cakkhu-dvāra-vīthi*), the Suttas mention that all three types of feeling can be stimulated when seeing, hearing, *etc.*



## Feelings Misconceived As Self

The enjoyment of various sense-objects, pleasant or unpleasant, every time they are seen, heard, touched, or known, constitutes feeling. When an agreeable sensation is felt, there arises the clinging of self, "I feel pleasant." When the sensation is disagreeable, there arises the clinging of self, "I feel unpleasant. When the feeling is one of indifference, self is quite pronounced too as, "I feel neither pleasant nor unpleasant, I feel indifferent." This is clinging to self as the experiencer (*vedaka attā*)—believing that it is a self or soul that enjoys pleasant feelings or dislikes unpleasant ones. This is how every ordinary person clings to the notion of self.

In Indian literature, feeling is described as self or as having the attributes of a self. In Burmese, this notion does not seem to be so firmly held as to be recorded in writing. Nevertheless, there is the clinging to the belief that on happy occasions, "It is I who enjoys pleasant things, and when faced with difficult circumstances, "It is I who suffers." The reason for such beliefs lies in the fact that inanimate objects such as stones or sticks do not feel heat or cold when coming into contact with it. They feel neither happy nor sad under pleasant or unpleasant circumstances. Animate objects, sentient beings, on the other hand, suffer or rejoice according to pleasant or unpleasant circumstances. It is assumed, therefore, that sentient beings must be endowed with an animating spirit, a living entity. It is this living entity that enjoys moments of pleasure or suffers distress. In reality, it is not a self or living entity, but only a phenomenon that arises and vanishes, conditioned by circumstances. Therefore, the Buddha declared the truth that must be remembered: "Monks, feeling is not-self," and he continued to explain the reasons.

## Why Feeling Is Not Self

"Monks, if feelings were self, the inner core of the body, then feelings would not tend to afflict or oppress, and one would be able to say of feeling, "Let feeling be thus (always pleasant); let feeling not be thus (always unpleasant). It should be possible to influence feeling in this way as one wishes."

It is true, if feelings were self, they should not oppress oneself, because it is not natural to afflict oneself, and it should be possible

to manage feelings as one wishes. These should all obtain and follow from the supposition “If feelings were self.” Furthermore, if feelings did not tend to afflict, and if our feelings were always pleasant, as we desire and never unpleasant, then we should regard feelings as truly self. This hypothetical statement, ‘If feelings were self’ is a form of instruction to consider whether it afflicts one or not, whether feelings can be managed to be always pleasant as one desires. On careful examination, it will become obvious that feeling is almost always afflicting us, and that it arises, not following one’s wish, but in accordance with its own conditioning circumstances.

Those in the audience will find it within their personal experience that feeling often afflicts them; that they can never have their wish fulfilled to be always enjoying beautiful sights, melodious sounds, fragrant smells, delicious food, soft touches, *etc.* They will have discovered that unpleasant feelings outweigh pleasant ones. That one cannot have feeling as one wishes because feeling is not-self nor one’s inner core.

The Blessed One continued to explain why feeling is not-self: with direct evidence of how feeling is not-self.

“Monks, since feeling is not-self, it tends to afflict or oppress, and it is not possible to say of feeling, ‘Let feeling be thus (always pleasant); let feeling not be thus (always unpleasant).’”

In reality, feeling is not-self. Hence it oppresses by painful feelings and mental distresses. It is not amenable to one’s control, it is impossible to keep it always pleasant and never unpleasant. So the Blessed One explained that feeling is not-self, not an inner core, because it tends to afflict; and is not-self because it cannot be managed as one wishes. Although it is evident that feeling is oppressive and ungovernable, there are some people with strong attachment to wrong beliefs in self and intense craving who, trusting in pleasant sensations, cling to feeling as self and take delight in it. Careful consideration, however, will reveal that moments of joy and happiness are few compared to occasions of suffering and distress.

### **How Feeling Oppresses**

There has to be constant accommodation and adjustment to conditions to maintain ourselves comfortably. One suffers discomfort

from feeling stiff, cramped, hot, or aching when confined to one position for too long, unless one makes adjustments in one's posture to relieve the pain. The oppressive nature of feeling is quite evident even if we consider only the case of the eye, which needs constant accommodation by frequent blinking. Without these adjustments, tiredness in the eye will become unbearable. Other organs of the body also need similar accommodations. Even with constant adjustments, under certain circumstances, feeling is likely to inflict severe pain and suffering, which may lead to serious ailment and illness resulting even in death. There are many examples where an afflicted person, unable to bear the oppression any longer, has sought the termination of their own life by committing suicide.

The physical pain and suffering just described are not inflicted entirely by feeling; materiality also contributes its share of oppression, being the original source of troubles. In the previous discourses on the suffering caused by materiality I described different types of feelings, which may be regarded as afflictions brought about by feeling also. Mental distress on the other hand is affliction caused solely by feeling, without the aid of materiality. On the death of one's loved ones — parents, husbands and wives, sons and daughters — feeling inflicts sorrow, grief, and lamentation on the bereaved. Likewise, there is intense mental suffering, which may even result in death, on loss of wealth and property. Frustration and discontent due to one's failure to resolve life's problems, separation from one's associates and friends, unfulfilled hopes and desires, are other forms of oppressions inflicted by feeling. Even pleasant feelings, which are very comforting by giving happiness while they last, prove to be a source of distress later. When they disappear after their brief manifestation, one is left with a wistful memory and yearning for them. One has, therefore, to be constantly striving to maintain the pleasant happy state. Thus people go in pursuit of pleasant states even at the risk of their lives. If they happen to use illegal and immoral means in such pursuits, retribution is bound to overtake them either in this life or in the states of loss. Thus apparently pleasant sensations also inflict pain and distress.

Equanimous feeling, like pleasant feeling, affords comfort and happiness, and like pleasant feeling, it requires constant effort to maintain its state, which is a heavy burden. Neither pleasant nor

equanimous feelings endure. Being fleeting by nature, they require constant labour for their continuous arising. Such activities that entail continuous striving, constitute the suffering due to formations (*saṅkhāra-dukkha*). This is just a brief indication of the oppressive nature of all three feelings: pleasure, pain, and equanimity. If there were no feeling there would be no experiencing of pain or pleasure either physically or mentally. There would be freedom from suffering. Take for instance a log, post, stone, or lump of earth. Having no feelings they do not suffer in any way. Even when subjected to hacking, beating, crushing, or burning, they remain unaffected. The continuum of mentality and materiality, which are associated with feeling, however, is afflicted with suffering in many ways. Thus it is plain that feeling is not-self or soul.

### **Feeling Is Ungovernable**

Feeling is ungovernable and not amenable to one's will. Just consider the fact that we cannot manage things as we wish so that we may see and hear only what is pleasant; taste and smell only what is delicious and sweet. Even when with great effort, we select only what is most desirable to see, hear, smell, or taste, these objects are not enduring. We can enjoy them only for a short while before they vanish. Thus we cannot manage as we wish and maintain a state in which pleasant and desirable things will not disappear, but remain permanently. When pleasant sense-objects vanish, they are replaced by undesirable sense-objects, which, of course, cause suffering. It was stated earlier that harsh sounds are more oppressive than ugly sights; foul odours are worse than harsh sounds; and a repulsive taste is worse still. Toxic substances when taken internally may even cause death. The worst of all is the unbearable sense of touch. When pricked by thorns, injured by a fall, wounded by weapons, scorched by fire, afflicted by disease, the suffering that ensues is very oppressive; it may be so intense as to make the victim cry out, and may even result in death. These are instances of unpleasant feelings that cannot be commanded to go away. That which is ungovernable is surely not-self. Feeling is thus not-self and it is not fitting to cling to it believing it to be self, one's inner core. What I have so far described relates only to feelings experienced in the human world. The feelings of the four states of loss are far more

excruciating. Animals such as cattle, poultry, and pigs have to face torment almost constantly with no one to assist them or guard them against these afflictions. The hungry ghosts (*peta*) have to suffer more than the animals, but the denizens of hell (*niraya*) suffer the most. We cannot afford to remain smug with the thought that these four states of loss have nothing to do with us. Until and unless we have attained the status of Noble Ones, there is always the possibility that we may have to face the sufferings of the states of loss. Thus as feeling tends to affliction in every existence, it cannot be regarded as self or the inner core of an individual being of each existence, and it is not possible to manage as one wishes so that unpleasant feelings should not arise; undesirable feelings arise of their own accord. Mental distress, which we do not want to arise, appears nevertheless. This all proves the uncontrollable nature of feeling. Each being has to contend with feelings that cannot be managed, and hence cannot be a self or one's own inner core. To reiterate:

“Monks, since feeling is not-self, it tends to affliction, and it is not possible to say of feeling, ‘Let feeling be thus (always pleasant); let feeling not be thus (always unpleasant). In reality feeling is not-self, one's inner core. Therefore it tends to afflict or oppress, and it is not possible to say of feeling, “Let feeling be thus (always pleasant); Let feeling not be thus (always unpleasant).”

As stated in this Canonical text, the feeling that is felt in one's own body tends to affliction and is not amenable to control. Hence it is clear that feeling is not-self, not one's own inner core. Nevertheless, every ordinary person clings to the belief: “It is I who suffers after experiencing happiness; it is I who enjoys as circumstances favour, after going through distress.” Clinging to belief in self is not easy to eradicate. This wrong belief in self with respect to feeling is abandoned only through personal realisation of the true nature of feeling; this realisation can be brought about by contemplation of feelings in accordance with the practice of Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā, otherwise known as the Middle Path (*majjhima paṭipadā*), as instructed by the Blessed One.

I will now deal with how this clinging to self can be discarded by contemplation of feelings. A brief description of insight meditation has been given in the first part of these discourses. The meditator who notes

rising, falling, sitting, *etc.*, as described therein will soon come to notice uncomfortable sensations of pain, stiffness, heat, *etc.* One has to concentrate on these various feeling as they arise by noting “pain, pain,” “stiff, stiff,” “hot hot,” *etc.* During the initial phase when concentration is still weak, these distressing sensations may get more and more intense. However, the meditator has to endure the pain and discomfort as long as possible and continue noting the various sensations as they arise. As concentration gets stronger, the pain and discomfort will gradually lose its intensity and begin to fade. With very deep concentration they will vanish as if removed by hand even while they are being noted. These feelings may never come back again to trouble the meditator.

We can find examples of such cessation of feelings, when the Venerable Mahākassapa and others found themselves, after listening to the discourse on the Bojjhaṅga Sutta, relieved of ailments that had afflicted them. However, prior to the advent of strong concentration, the meditator will find the painful sensation in one place disappear only to rise in another form elsewhere. When this new sensation is mindfully noted, it vanishes to be replaced by another form of sensation in yet another place. When the distressing feelings have been observed for a considerable time to be repeatedly appearing and vanishing in this way, personal realisation comes to the meditator that: “Feeling is always oppressive. Unpleasant feelings cannot be prevented from arising, and is ungovernable. Pleasant as well as unpleasant feelings are not-self, not one’s inner core. It is not-self.”

This is direct knowledge of contemplation on not-self. The meditator who has observed the vanishing of feelings in the course of contemplation recalls the oppressive nature of feeling while it persisted; he or she knows that feeling has disappeared not because of wishing nor in obedience to the command to do so, but as a result of necessary conditions brought about by concentrated mental power. It is truly ungovernable. Thus the meditator realises that feeling, whether pleasant or painful is a natural process, arising of its own accord; it is not a self nor inner core, but not-self.

Furthermore, the incessant arising and vanishing of feeling as it is being noted also establishes the fact that feeling has the nature of not-self. When the meditator reaches the stage of knowledge of arising and passing away (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*), he or she notices that the practice of noting phenomena is being accomplished with ease and

comfort, unaccompanied by pain or suffering. This manifests as a specially pleasant feeling, which cannot be maintained for long, however much one may wish for it. When concentration wanes and becomes weaker, the very pleasant feeling vanishes and may not arise again in spite of yearning for it. Then it dawns on the meditator that feeling is not subject to one's will and is ungovernable. Hence it is not-self, not an inner core. The meditator then realises through personal experience the not-self nature of feeling. He or she also vividly sees the not-self nature of feeling because of its dissolution on each occasion of noting.

In the initial stages of meditation the meditator suffers from physical discomfort: stiffness, itching, or feeling hot. Occasionally, he or she also suffers mental distress such as disappointment, dejection, fear, or repugnance. One should keep on noting these unpleasant feelings. One will come to know that while these unpleasant feelings are manifesting, pleasant sensations do not arise. On some occasions, however, the meditator experiences in the course of meditation very pleasant physical and mental sensations. For instance, when one thinks of happy incidents, feelings are involved. One should keep on noting these pleasant feelings as they arise. One will come to know then that while pleasant feelings are manifesting, unpleasant feelings do not arise. On the whole, however, the meditator is mostly engaged in noting the origination and dissolution of ordinary physical and mental processes such as the rise and fall of the abdomen, which excite neither painful nor pleasant sensations. The meditator notes these occasions when only neutral feeling is evident. He or she knows therefore, that when the equanimous feeling arises, both painful and pleasant feelings are absent. With this personal knowledge, comes the realisation that feeling is that which makes a momentary appearance, only to vanish soon; hence it is transitory, and is not a self or ego to be regarded as permanent.

### **The Dīghanakha Sutta**

At this point I would like to include the Dīghanakha Sutta in my discourse because it affords a good illustration of how such realisation comes about. We must, however, first begin with an account of how the Venerable Sāriputta, who was chiefly concerned with the Dīghanakha Sutta, attained to higher knowledge.

Two young men, Upatissa and Kolita, who were later to become known as the Venerable Sāriputta and Moggallāna respectively, became wandering ascetics under the famous teacher Sañcaya, with a view to seek the ageless, undecaying, and deathless state. They learnt all that Sañcaya taught in a few days, and realised that there was no substance in his teaching. Consequently, they left Sañcaya and roamed about the entire middle country of India in search of the truth. Not finding it anywhere, they returned to Rājagaha. It was in that city that Upatissa came upon the Venerable Assaji, the youngest member of the group of five monks, while he was walking for alms. Upatissa followed him closely to where he would eat his meal after his almsround. Upatissa prepared a seat for him and offered him drinking-water from his water-bottle. When the meal was over, Upatissa asked the Venerable Assaji who his teacher was and what was his teaching. The Venerable replied that his teacher was the Perfectly Enlightened One, the Buddha. As to the teaching, since he had just come to the Buddha's dispensation, he knew only a little of it. Upatissa then said, "Please tell me whatever little you know of the Teaching. I shall expand upon it myself." Thereupon, the Venerable Assaji gave the wanderer Upatissa this short summary of the Buddha's Teaching:

*"Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā, tesaṃ hetuṃ Tathāgato āha.  
Tesañca yo nirodho, evaṃvādī mahāsamaṇo"ti.*

"There are phenomena that have arisen because of certain causes. Our teacher the Perfect One has told about these causes. There is this state where all these phenomena and their causes come to cessation. The Perfect One has told of this cessation too. This is the teaching of the great recluse."

This is then the short account of the teaching given by the Venerable Assaji. Very brief: "There are resultants to a certain cause. Our teacher had taught about these causes." However, this condensed teaching was sufficient for the wanderer Upatissa to see the light of the Dhamma, attaining the knowledge of the first Path, and becoming a Stream-winner. It was a very speedy achievement. We find that present meditators show no remarkable progress after meditating for a whole day and night. Only after seven days of hard work, they begin to get a glimpse of the physical and mental processes and the nature of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. Most



meditators take about a month and a half to reach the stage when they may be believed to have attained the knowledge of the first Path. It may be two and half to three months before some of them may be believed to have made similar attainments. It is quite a long time, is it not? The speedy achievement of the wanderer Upatissa may be attributed to the fact that he had already made efforts at meditation to a stage close to the first Path throughout his previous existences. Since the time of these past existences, he had been in a position to achieve the knowledge of the Path, but for the vow he had taken to become a Chief Disciple of a Buddha. In this last existence (when his vow of achieving the status of a Chief Disciple would be fulfilled), propelled by the momentum of insight practices of his previous existences, he made a speedy passage through the progressive stages of insight knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*) to attain Stream-winning.

Although the teaching imparted by the Venerable Assaji was brief, it was the spark of inspiration for the development of insight. Prior to hearing the teachings of the Buddha, it was generally held that "Each individual being has a living entity, an inner core, a self, that is everlasting. This living entity is not that which has just arisen depending on causes; it has always been in existence, the embodiment of eternity." The message given by the Venerable Assaji was to the effect that there was no such permanent entity as a self; there was only the truth of suffering, otherwise known as mind and matter, being the resultants of craving and clinging, otherwise called the truth of origin of suffering. These effects are none other than one's own mentality and materiality, which are involved in seeing, hearing, *etc.* The wanderer Upatissa, who would later become the Venerable Sāriputta, realised at once that there was only the process of incessant arising and perishing of mind and matter, which have been manifesting themselves in every act of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and knowing since the time of birth. They have arisen as a result of craving for and clinging to one's own life and existence.

It should be regarded that the wanderer Upatissa developed insight by noting change even as he was receiving the message from the Venerable Assaji and in consequence attained the knowledge of the Path instantly. Having become a Stream-winner, the wanderer Upatissa asked the Venerable Assaji where the Blessed One was residing. When the Venerable Assaji departed, Upatissa informed

him that he would be coming to where the Buddha was. He then went back to his friend the wanderer Kolita. Who, noticing his composed features and clear countenance asked him, “Well, friend, is it possible that you have found the deathless?” The wanderer Upatissa admitted that he had indeed found the deathless and recounted to his friend what had happened. In doing so, he quoted the verse recited for him by the Venerable Assaji. As a consequence, the wanderer Kolita also became a Stream-winner instantly having achieved the knowledge of the first Path. The two of them then decided to go to the Blessed One. However, first they went to the great teacher Sañcaya and invited him to come along with them to the Blessed One. The wanderer Sañcaya declined their invitation and told them, “You go along. I have no wish to come. From being like a big storage jar, I cannot become a water-carrying pot, becoming a disciple of others.” The two friends reminded the wanderer Sañcaya, ‘The Blessed One is a truly enlightened One, people will go to him instead.’ The wanderer Sañcaya replied, “Do not worry on that account. There are more fools in this world than the wise. The wise will go to the Samaṇa Gotama. The fools — who form the majority — will come to me. You go along as you wish.”

Nowadays, there are many impostors and bogus religious teachers who hold such views as that of this wanderer Sañcaya. People should take great care with regard to such teachers. Then the wanderers Upatissa and Kolita went with two hundred and fifty wanderers, who were their followers, to the Blessed One. After listening to the discourse given by the Blessed One, the two hundred and fifty followers became Arahants. The two leading wanderers together with the two hundred and fifty followers who had attained Arahantship requested admission to the Order. The Blessed One gave them ordination by saying, “Come, monks (*etha bhikkhavo*).” From that time the wanderer Upatissa became known as the Venerable Sāriputta, and the wanderer Kolita, the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna. Having been thus ordained, they continued with practice of meditation. The Venerable Moggallāna attained Arahantship within seven days of ordination. The Elder Sāriputta, however, was still engaged in insight meditation up to the full-moon day of February (Tabodwe), employing the step-by-step (*anupada*) method of meditation, reviewing and analysing with insight all levels of consciousness step-by-step.

On that full-moon day of February, the wanderer Dīghanakha, who stayed behind with the teacher Sañcaya thought thus: “My uncle Upatissa, when he went to see other religious teachers, always came back soon. On this visit to the recluse Gotama, however, he has been gone for a fortnight and there is no news from him. What if I followed him to find out if there is any substance in Gotama’s teaching?” He therefore went to where the Venerable Sāriputta was to inquire about the teachings of the Blessed One.

### The Wanderer Dīghanakha

On that day, at that time the Blessed One was staying in the Boar’s cave (*Sūkarakhatalena*) on Vultures’ Peak (*Gijjhakūṭa*). The Venerable Sāriputta was standing behind the Blessed One, gently waving a fan. The wanderer Dīghanakha approached the Blessed One and after exchanging greetings said, “My theory and view is this, Venerable Gotama, “Nothing is acceptable to me.”<sup>1</sup> What he meant by this statement was that he did not like any belief; in other words, the belief that a new existence arises after passing away from the present one. However, since he said he had no liking for any belief, it amounted to declaring that he did not like his own belief (annihilationism) either. Therefore the Blessed One asked him, “Have you no liking for this view of yours: ‘Nothing is acceptable to me!’” To this, the wanderer Dīghanakha gave an ambiguous reply, “Even if I had a liking for this view of mine, it would be all the same.” This is in keeping with the practice of those who, holding on to wrong views, equivocate when they realise that what they believe in or what they have said, is wrong. To bring out the view held by the wanderer, the Blessed One said, “The belief in eternalism (*sassataditṭhi*) is close to passion (*sārāgāya*), close to being fettered (*saññogāya*), to delighting (*abhinandanāya*), to clinging (*ajjhosānāya*), close to attachment (*upādānāya*). The belief in annihilationism is close to dispassion, to being unfettered, to disenchantment, to letting go, and detachment.” Upon this the wanderer Dīghanakha remarked, “Venerable Gotama praises my view; Venerable Gotama commends my view.” The Blessed One, of course, was merely explaining the true virtues and faults of the views of the eternalists and annihilationists. The eternalists abhor and avoid demeritorious acts, so

<sup>1</sup> *Sabbaṃ me nakkhamatī*ti. All (*sabbaṃ*), to me (*me*), is not (*na*), acceptable (*khamati*). This may not be very meaningful if we translate it literally. “Nothing is acceptable to me,” is Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation. The Sayādaw explains it later (ed.)

that they do not have to face the evil consequences in coming existences. They engage themselves in wholesome deeds, but they relish and take delight in pleasures that would promote further rounds of existence. The Commentary says that it is very hard to abandon the eternalistic view that "Self, the living entity is indestructible, and remains stable eternally." Therefore, even those who profess to have embraced Buddhism find it difficult to accept that there is no self, no living entity, there is only a continuous process of mental and physical phenomena.

For Arahants, having completely eradicated clinging, there is no fresh arising of mind and matter in a new existence after their parinibbāna. The continuous process of mind and matter comes to a complete cessation. Eternalists would like to believe that after their parinibbāna, the Arahants continue to exist in special forms. The Commentary has this to say on the subject: "The eternalists know that there is a present life and an after-life. They know there are pleasant and unpleasant effects of wholesome and unwholesome deeds. They engage themselves in meritorious actions. They recoil from doing evil deeds. However, they relish and take delight in pleasures, which could give rise to fresh existences. Even when they get to the presence of the Blessed One or his disciples, they find it hard to abandon their belief immediately. So it may be said of the eternalist belief that although its faults are not grave, it is hard to discard." On the other hand, annihilationists do not know that there is passage to the human world from other existences and there is an after-life. They do not know there are pleasant and unpleasant effects of wholesome and unwholesome deeds. They do not engage in meritorious actions, and have no fear of unwholesome deeds. They do not relish and take delight in wholesome deeds, which could give rise to fresh existences, because they do not believe in an after-life. However, when they get to the presence of the Blessed One or his disciples they can abandon their belief immediately. Thus with regard to the annihilationists belief, it may be said, that its faults are grave but it is easy to be discarded.

The wanderer Dīghanakha could not grasp the motive behind the Blessed One's statement. He assumed that the Blessed One was commending him for his view that there is nothing after death. Hence his remark, "The Venerable Gotama praises my view; the Venerable Gotama commends my view." To enable him to abandon his view, the Blessed One continued to give a critical review of three beliefs

current in those days: namely the eternalist view which holds: "All is acceptable to me;" the annihilationist view which holds: "Nothing is acceptable to me;" and a form of eternalist view which holds: "Some are acceptable to me, and some are not."

To summarise what the Blessed One said: he explained that when one holds fast to any one of the above views, there is a likelihood of conflict with those holding both the other views. When there is a clash of views, there will be disputes, which would lead to quarrels. When there are quarrels, there is harm. Therefore the Blessed One urged that all the three beliefs should be discarded. Here it may be asked whether the Buddhist view that: "Fresh becoming arises in new existences as conditioned by one's kamma," is not the same as the eternalist view. The answer is no, it is not the same. By saying "Fresh becoming arises in new existences as conditioned by one's kamma," the Buddhist view does not mean the transfer of a self or a living entity from one existence to another. It means only the arising of new mind and matter in the new existence depending on one's previous kamma, whereas the eternalist believe that it is the self or the living entity of the present life that migrates to a new existence. The two views are quite different from each other. Again, the question may arise whether the Buddhist teaching of the cessation of mind and matter after the parinibbāna of Arahants and the non-arising in a new existence is not the same as the annihilationist view, which holds that nothing remains after death. Here, too, there is no similarity between the two views, because according to the annihilationists, there exists before death a living entity that disappears after death. No special effort is needed to make it disappear — it makes its own exit. In addition, although materialists think that there is no self in their view, they believe that nothing remains after death. Pleasant or unpleasant sensations are experienced only before death. This clinging to the notion of suffering or enjoyment before death is clinging to self. In Buddhist teaching, the Arahant before parinibbāna has no self, but only a continuous process of mind and matter.

Suffering and enjoying sensations is the nature of feeling, which is manifesting itself recurrently. After parinibbāna, the continuous process of mind and matter ceases in an Arahant. However, this cessation does not come about on its own. It is by virtue of the Noble Path, by means of which the defilements and kamma that are

responsible for the arising of mind and matter are eradicated. When the cause of their becoming — defilements and kamma — disappears, no new mind and matter arise again. Thus there is a world of difference between cessation after parinibbāna described in Buddhist teachings and the cessation envisaged by the annihilationists.

A further question may be asked: “Just as the eternalists hold disputes over their beliefs with the annihilationists, is there not the possibility of disputes between those who believe in not-self and those who hold on to the notion of self? Teaching or talking about right-view does not amount to engaging in disputes. It should be regarded as promotion of the knowledge of the truth for the benefit and welfare of humanity. The teaching, “There is only a continuity of process in the phenomenon of change from the old to the new mind and matter; there is no self that lasts eternally,” is the doctrine of not-self, otherwise known as right-view. Explaining right-view is not engaging in controversy, not engaging in polemics. It is just imparting the knowledge of truth to the uninstructed. Thus for those who hold the right-view of not-self, there is no likelihood of involvement in disputes or controversies. We will find the Buddha’s own explanation on this point when we come to the last part of this Sutta.

After exhorting him on how the three wrong views of eternalism, annihilationism, and partial eternalism should be abolished, the Blessed One went on to advise Dīghanakha how to discard clinging to the material body. “Wanderer Dīghanakha of the Aggivessana clan, this material body of yours is made up of the four primary elements, has grown out of the blood and sperm of parents, built up in dependent on rice and curry.<sup>1</sup> Being subject to impermanence it has to be maintained by massages and ointments; even when sustained thus, it still dissolves and disintegrates. It must be regarded as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, as a spike, as an abscess, as an evil, as an ailment, as alien, as destructible, as void of self: it is not-self. When it is regarded so, there is abandonment of craving and clinging to it.” Having thus discoursed on the nature of materiality, the Blessed One continued with the teaching on the nature of mentality. “Wanderer Dīghanakha of the Aggivessana clan, there are three kinds of feeling: pleasant feeling, painful feeling, and neutral feeling. When a person

<sup>1</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi translates “*kummāsa*” as “porridge.” The PTSD translates it as junket, a curdled milk product. I think it more appropriate, if less literal, to use the modern idiom “rice and curry.” The original translation here was “rice and bread,” (ed.)

feels any one of the feelings he does not feel the other two. Since each feeling arises singly, it should be known that it is impermanent, conditioned (*saṅkhatā*), dependently originated (*paṭiccasamuppanā*), subject to destruction (*khayadhammā*) and dissolution (*vayadhammā*), fading (*virāgadhammā*), and ceasing (*nirodhadhammā*)."

It should be noted that by these words the Blessed One had shown how, by contemplating feeling, one comes to know its arising depending on circumstances and its immediate destruction, fading, and dissolution. The meditators who are noting the mental and physical phenomena beginning from the rise and fall of the abdomen as instructed by us should also concentrate on feeling and note it as "painful, painful," when a painful feeling arises. When an unhappy feeling appears, it should be noted as "sad, sad." When a pleasant feeling arises, it should be noted as "pleasant pleasant," when feeling happy, it should be noted as "happy happy." When the sensation is not vividly pleasant nor painful, attention should be directed on the matter or the mental state that is observable distinctly.

While thus engaged in observing the feelings mindfully, the pleasant or painful feelings will be perceived clearly arising recurrently and vanishing instantly. They may be likened to raindrops falling on the uncovered body of a person walking in the rain, and their disappearance. Just like the feelings that keep falling from outside, the individual raindrops also appear as if they have fallen on the body from an external source. When this phenomenon is clearly seen, realisation comes to the meditator that these feelings are impermanent, suffering because of incessant arising and ceasing, and are not-self, not an inner core, and have no substantiality. As a consequence of such realisation, a sense of weariness and dispassion develops, which the Blessed One continued to explain.

### **Weariness Through Contemplating Feeling**

"Wanderer Dīghanakha of the Aggivessana clan, when the meditator sees the three forms of feeling in their characteristics of impermanence, he gets weary of pleasant feeling, painful feeling, and neutral feeling, which is neither painful nor pleasant."

These words of the Blessed One should be specially borne in mind. The purpose of insight meditation is to develop knowledge of disgust (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*), which means dispassion or weariness. Only when the

phenomenon of incessant arising and ceasing has been personally seen and experienced, can the nature of impermanence be thoroughly grasped. It is only then that a sense of weariness develops. In this Dīghanakha Sutta, no mention was made about detailed observation of the separate components of materiality. The aggregate of materiality has to be contemplated. This fact should be carefully noted. From these words quoted above, it is clear that it is possible to develop weariness without contemplating on separate components of materiality as described in the Abhidhamma. Furthermore, in connection with the contemplation on mentality, only three components of feeling are mentioned. Nothing was said of other components — perceptions and mental formations. It is clear here too that noting only the three kinds of feeling at the moment of their arising will develop the sense of weariness. However, it must be borne in mind that it is not only painful feeling, but all three kinds of feeling that should be contemplated, because it must be understood that all three kinds feeling are manifesting. The Blessed One then went on to explain how knowledge of the Path and Fruition, and knowledge of reviewing (*paccavekkhaṇa-ñāṇa*) arise after development of the sense of weariness or knowledge of contemplation of dispassion.

### **The Path and Fruition through Dispassion**

When weariness or dispassion has developed, lust and craving fade away. In other words, one becomes dispassionate and the knowledge of the Noble Path arises. With the fading away of craving or by virtue of knowledge of the Noble Path, which has caused the destruction of craving, he is liberated or emancipated. In other words, the Fruition of Arahantship appears when one is thus liberated, and the knowledge arises that the mind is liberated. One understands by the knowledge of reviewing that, “Birth is exhausted, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is nothing more of this to come.” In these words, the Blessed One described how Arahantship was attained and knowledge of reviewing developed. Then he continued to explain that the liberated person, after attaining Arahantship, does not quarrel or dispute with anyone. “Wanderer Dīghanakha of the Aggivessana clan, the monk who is thus liberated from taints, does not side with anyone (*saṃvadati*), nor dispute with anyone (*vivadati*). Although he employs conventional



expressions (e.g. 'I, you, man, woman') he does not hold wrong notions that they are ultimate truths."

He does not dispute with anyone because he knows the truth and talks only about the truth.

### One Who Speaks the Truth Does Not Dispute

The Puppha Sutta<sup>1</sup> has this to say:

*"Nāhaṃ, bhikkhave, lokena vivadāmi, lokova mayā vivadati.  
Na, bhikkhave, dhammavādī kenaci lokasmiṃ vivadati."*

"Monks, I do not dispute with the world. It is the world<sup>2</sup> that disputes with me. One who speaks the truth, does not dispute with anyone in the world."

In other words, as he speaks the truth, it cannot be said that he is argumentative. This passage shows that it is not only the Blessed One, but anyone who teaches the Dhamma is not engaged in disputes when explaining the truth to others. He is only helping the uninformed to arrive at the truth in the matter of beliefs.

### Venerable Sāriputta Attains Arahantship

While the Blessed One was teaching the wanderer Dīghanakha how the three feelings should be contemplated, and how through such contemplation Arahantship may be gained, the Venerable Sāriputta was standing behind the Blessed One fanning him. While listening to the discourse on the three kinds of feeling, the Venerable Sāriputta, then already a Stream-winner, gained the highest knowledge of Arahantship even as he was fanning the Blessed One.

In the Anupada Sutta,<sup>3</sup> his attainment of Arahantship is described. The Venerable Sāriputta attained the first *jhāna*, second *jhāna*, etc. When he came out of *jhāna*, he contemplated the nature of each *jhāna*, and by such contemplation, he became an Arahant on the fifteenth day of meditation. In another Sutta it is said that the Venerable Sāriputta himself explained that he attained Arahantship through contemplating the physical and mental processes occurring within. The three Suttas may be reconciled by taking that "the Venerable Sāriputta had attained *jhānas* while listening to the discourse on the

<sup>1</sup> S.iii.138, Khandhavagga, Saṃyuttanikāya.

<sup>2</sup> Such as the wanderers Saccaka, Uttiya, and Vekhanassa, the young man Assalāyana and the rich man Upāli.

<sup>3</sup> M.iii.24.

three feelings and consequently attained the highest Path and its Fruition. His nephew, the wanderer Dīghanakha, became a Stream-winner while listening to the discourse. It must be understood here that he became a Stream-winner by virtue of insight developed by contemplating the three kinds of feeling that manifested in him while listening to the discourse.

### A Spontaneous Congregation of Arahants

At the end of the Discourse, the Blessed One returned from Vultures' Peak (*Gijjhakūṭa*) to the Bamboo Grove (*Veḷuvana*) by means of his psychic powers, and convened a conference of his disciples. The Venerable Sāriputta came to know of the conference being convened through reflective insight and made his way to Veḷuvana by means of psychic powers. The distinguishing features of this congregation of disciples were:

1. It was held on the full-moon day of February (Tabodwe) when the constellation of the lion comes into prominence.
2. The monks attending the conference must have come uninvited by anyone.
3. These attending monks must all be Arahants endowed with the six kinds of higher knowledge (*abhiññā*).
4. All must have been ordained by the "Come monk (*ehi bhikkhu*)," ordination.

It is stated that one thousand two hundred and fifty Arahants attended the conference convened by the Blessed One.

I have digressed from the original discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta by including the Dīghanakha Sutta in my discourse. I will conclude my discourse by recapitulating the passage from the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta that says feeling is not-self.

"Monks, since feeling is not-self, it tends to affliction, and it is not possible to say of feeling, 'Let feeling be thus (always pleasant); let feeling not be thus (always unpleasant).'"

"Monks, since feeling is not-self, it tends to affliction, and it is not possible to say of feeling, 'Let feeling be thus (always pleasant); let feeling not be thus (always unpleasant). In reality feeling is not-self, one's inner core. Therefore it tends to afflict or oppress, and it is not possible to say of feeling,

“Let feeling be thus (always pleasant); Let feeling not be thus (always unpleasant).”

Clinging to the belief that all feelings, whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, are felt by a living entity, is called “*Vedaka atta.*”

By virtue of having given respectful attention to this Discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, may you all soon attain and realise nibbāna by means of the Path and its Fruition as you wish.

## PART THREE

Delivered on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 1963.<sup>1</sup>

### Perceptions Are Not-self

I began my discourses on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta on the 8th waxing day of June (Nayun) and I have dealt with the sections on matter and feeling being not-self. Today I will continue with the explanation of perception (*saññā*) being not-self.

*“Saññā, anattā. Saññā ca hidam, bhikkhave, attā abhaviṣṣa, nayidaṃ saññā ābādhāya saṃvatteyya, labbhettha ca saññāya — ‘Evaṃ me saññā hotu, evaṃ me saññā mā ahoṣī’ti. Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, saññā anattā, tasmā saññā ābādhāya saṃvattati, na ca labbhati saññāya — ‘Evaṃ me saññā hotu, evaṃ me saññā mā ahoṣī’ti.”*

“Monks, perception is not-self...”

Perception (*saññā*) is of six kinds:

1. Perception born of eye-contact.
2. Perception born of ear-contact.
3. Perception born of nose-contact.
4. Perception born of tongue-contact.
5. Perception born of body-contact.
6. Perception born of mind-contact.

People in general think, every time an object is seen, heard, smelt, tasted, touched, or known, that “It is ‘I’ who perceives; objects are remembered by me.” On seeing a sight, it is perceived as a man or a woman: or as an object perceived at such and such a time, at such a place. Likewise, with regard to audible objects, *etc.* This perception is wrongly regarded as a personal achievement: “I remember, my memory is good.” The Blessed One explained that this view is wrong, that there is nothing individual or personal in the process of perceiving. There is no living entity involved, it is just an insubstantial phenomenon, and is not-self.

### Why Perception Is Not-self

To continue to explain how perception is not-self:

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<sup>1</sup> The new moon day of Nayun 1325 M.E.

“Monks, perception is not-self; if perception were self, then it would not tend to oppress, and one should be able to wish for and manage thus: “let my perception be thus (all wholesome); “let my perception be not thus (unwholesome).”

If perception were a living entity, one’s inner core, there is no reason for it to inflict and oppress. It is not normal to cause injury and harm to oneself. It should be possible to manage in such a way that only good things are allowed to be perceived, bad things are not allowed to be perceived. However, since perception is oppressing and does not yield to one’s wish, it is not-self.

### **How Perception Oppresses**

“Monks, since perception is not-self, it tends to affliction, and it is not possible to say of perception, ‘Let perception be thus (good); let perception not be thus (bad).”

One can view perception from the angle of its good aspects. Cognition of things and objects by way of their characteristics is certainly very useful. So too is a retentive memory: remembering facts and retaining what has been acquired from learning mundane and supramundane knowledge is a valuable function of perception, and is beneficial and helpful. However, mental retention or recalling to mind what is sad, sorrowful, disgusting, horrible, *etc*, are bad aspects of perception, which cause distress and therefore oppressive.

Some people suffer from haunting memories of departed loved ones such as sons, daughters, husbands, or wives; or of financial calamities that have befallen them. These lingering memories bring constant sorrow and distress; only when such memories fade away, is one relieved of the suffering. Thus perception, whose function is manifested in recognition and remembering, is truly oppressive. As long as perception brings back memories of bereavement or financial losses, sorrow and lamentation will cause intense suffering, which may even result in death. This is how perception oppresses by recalling the sad experiences from the past. During one’s meal-time, suddenly recalling some disgusting object is bound to impair one’s appetite. Having seen a dead body earlier in the day, one’s sleep may be disturbed at night by vivid memories of it. Some may imagine a dangerous situation that they constantly anticipate anxiously, causing

themselves intense suffering. Thus perceptions oppress by recollecting distressing mental objects. Perception is not-self, its appearance being dependent on conditions. It cannot be manipulated as one wishes, to recall only those experiences that are beneficial, suppressing those that will cause distress. It is ungovernable and not amenable to one's will. Because it is ungovernable, it is not-self, nor a living entity, but insubstantial, and dependent on conditions.

I will repeat the translation of the Pāli Text: "Monks, since perception is not-self, it tends to affliction, and it is not possible to say of perception, 'Let perception be thus (always pleasant); let perception not be thus (always unpleasant)'. Perception in one's own person, as stated in this text, is oppressing, ungovernable, not subject to one's will. Thus it is obvious that perception is not one's self, not an inner core, nor a living entity. However, people in general find, on recalling past experiences, that some are retained in memory and conclude, therefore, that, "It is 'I' who have stored these experiences in my mind, and it is I who recalls them. The same 'I' who remembered them before recalls them now." They cling to the belief that there is only one individual who remembers and recalls past experiences. This wrong view arises because of lack of mindful noting at the moment of sense-cognition, and because the true nature of the phenomena is not yet known by insight. When the constant arising and ceasing of phenomena is seen as it truly is by insight, then realisation dawns that perception is also a natural phenomenon that is constantly arising and ceasing.

Here, it may be asked, in view of the impermanent nature of perception, how does recollection occur of things that were cognised previously? The retentive power of the preceding perception is passed on to the succeeding perceptions. As this retentive power increases on being inherited by the succeeding generations of perception, some people become equipped with the faculty of recalling past lives. This is how the perception in the subconsciousness or decess-consciousness of a past life ceases, but arises again, with reinforced power of recalling, as the birth consciousness and subconsciousness of the present life. It is because of this handing over of retentive power by the previous perceptions to the succeeding perceptions that we can recollect both what is wholesome and pleasant as well as that which is unwholesome and unpleasant.

Without even thinking about them, the experience of days gone by may sometimes resurface.

Those engaged in meditation may recall episodes that happened earlier in life as concentration gets stronger. The meditator should dispel them by noting them as they appear. Remorse over past mistakes, faults in speech and deeds may lead to worry and restlessness in the course of meditation. Worry is a form of hindrance, and it should be discarded by noting it. Worry and restlessness may become a great hindrance, delaying the development of concentration and insight. Thus perception, which recalls past incidents producing worry and fret, is oppressive. For this reason, it may be taken that perception is not-self. As explained in the previous discourse on feeling, there are four ways of clinging to self, and perception is concerned with three of them namely, clinging to self as the master (*sāmi atta*), as an abiding soul (*nivāsī atta*), and as the doer (*karaka atta*). Thinking that there is control over perception, remembering things as willed and not remembering things when there is no wish to do so, is clinging as the master, that is exercising control over the process of remembering. This clinging as the master is rejected by the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, which states that it is not possible to say of perception, "Let perception be thus (all wholesome), let perception be not thus (all unwholesome). Thinking there is a self or living entity ever present in the body, constantly engaged in the task of remembering things, is clinging to the self as an abiding soul. This type of clinging can be discarded by noting every mental phenomenon that arises. By so doing one perceives by one's own knowledge that the remembered things keep appearing afresh and vanishing instantly. Also by noting the past incidents in one's life as they reappear in the mind's door, one comes to realise that there is no such thing as permanent retentive perception. There are only recurrent phenomena, renewing by arising and ceasing incessantly. This realisation drives home the fact that there is no permanent self or living entity residing in one's body performing the task of recollecting.

Thinking it is I or a self who is doing the recollection is clinging to self as the doer (*karaka atta*) and this may also be removed by contemplation. When perception takes place of every sight or sound, the meditative noting observes its arising and vanishing. When it is thus observed that perception of sight or sound arises and vanishes,

the realisation occurs that perception of sight and sound is merely a recurrent mental phenomenon and not the action of any abiding self or inner core. In accordance with the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, it cannot be managed in such a way that only pleasant wholesome memories persist for ever and that memories of unpleasant, unwholesome incidents fade into oblivion. Since it is ungovernable, the meditator realises that perception is not a self, not a living entity, but merely a natural process dependent on conditions, renewing and vanishing incessantly. The Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta was taught by the Blessed One specifically for the purpose of removing clinging to self through such personal realisation of the true nature of the five aggregates.

Here a question may arise what the difference is between perception at the moment of contact, and heedful noting at the moment of occurrence according to the Satipaṭṭhāna method. The answer is that there is a world of difference between the two. In fact, it may be said that the two are diametrically opposed to each other in purpose of objective. Perception tries to retain everything that is cognised in memory so that it may be recalled. It may take in the form, shape, or condition of the object observed. Noting according to the Satipaṭṭhāna method is concerned just with the passing events of mental and physical phenomena to realise their impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and insubstantiality.

This should now be sufficient elaboration on the aggregate of perceptions (*saññākkhandhā*) being not-self. I will go on to explain how the aggregate of mental formations is not-self.

## Mental Formations Are Not-self

*“Saṅkhārā anattā. Saṅkhārā ca hidamaṃ, bhikkhave, attā abhaviṣṣaṃsu, nayidamaṃ saṅkhārā ābādhāya saṃvattēyyuṃ, labbheṭṭha ca saṅkhāresu — ‘Evaṃ me saṅkhārā hontu, evaṃ me saṅkhārā mā ahesu’nti. Yaṃ mā ca kho, bhikkhave, saṅkhārā anattā, tasmā saṅkhārā ābādhāya saṃvattanti, na ca labbhati saṅkhāresu — ‘Evaṃ me saṅkhārā hontu, evaṃ me saṅkhārā mā ahesu’nti.”*

“Monks, mental formations are not-self...”

Here, it should be noted that mental formations are of two kinds: conditioned things and conditioning things. The conditioned things are those aggregates that have arisen through such causes as kamma,



mind, climate, and nutriment. Immediately after rebirth consciousness occurs, mental and material phenomena arise as resultants (*vipāka*) of kamma. Resultant types of consciousness with mental concomitants and the material heart-base (*hadaya rūpa*) together with kamma produced materiality such as the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body spring up. They are all conditioned things, resultants of volitional activities and are called resultant mental formations conditioned by kamma. So too are mind produced materiality and resultant mental formations. Physical changes involved in acts of bending, stretching, moving, going, standing, sitting, talking, smiling, *etc.*, are examples of such resultant mental formations. Being born of thoughts generated by a person, they are known as resultant mental formations conditioned by mind. With regard to mind and its concomitants, they are both mutually conditioned and conditioning and we thus have mental formations as causal agents as well as mental formations as resultants. Material phenomena produced by climatic conditions are resultant mental formations conditioned by climatic conditions. Material phenomena that arise through eating food are resultant mental formations conditioned by nutriment. Finally all the succeeding mental states with their concomitants are resultant mental formations being dependent on the preceding mental conditions and their concomitants for their arising. All such aggregates that arise because of kamma, mind, climate, and food are resultant mental formations as conditioned by their respective causes. This is summarised in the formula: *“Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā. Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā”* — “All things conditioned by causes are impermanent; all things conditioned by causes are suffering.”

These aggregates of mind and matter manifest during sense-cognition. These five groups of grasping must be realised by insight as being impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. The Blessed One exhorted in the above formula that they should be seen as such. To see them in this light, one must take heedful note of the arising of these aggregates whenever they appear. While observing them in this way, as concentration gets stronger, one becomes aware that the aggregates are arising and vanishing incessantly. In accordance with the statement in the Commentary:<sup>1</sup> *“Hutvā abhāvato,”* it is impermanent because it perishes after having arisen, and it is terrible due to

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<sup>1</sup> Cūḷaniddesa Commentary, p.107 (ed.)

being oppressed by constant arising and vanishing in accordance with the statement, “*Udayabbaya paṭipīlanato.*” This is the way of contemplation conforming to the words of the Blessed One.

### Contrary to the Buddha’s Teaching

Some harm the Buddha’s dispensation by teaching in a way diametrically opposed to what the Buddha taught. In the above formula of “*Sabbe saṅkhārā ...*” they teach that “*saṅkhārā*” means not conditioned things as explained above, but “activities.” Thus according to them, the above formula means: “All activities are suffering.” Hence they warn that any kind of activity such as giving alms, keeping precepts, and practising meditation, as these activities will produce only suffering. They advise, therefore, to keep the mind as it is. Such teachings are readily accepted by the uneducated and those who are reluctant to make effort in meditation practice. Anyone, even with a limited knowledge of the Dhamma, can see that such teachings are contrary to the Buddha’s teaching. Accepting such teachings that contradict the Dhamma amounts to rejecting the teachings. Once the teaching is rejected, one will find oneself outside the Buddha’s dispensation, which is a matter for serious concern.

In the Pāli text, “*Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkha,*” *saṅkhārā* means conditioned things, resultants of determining factors and not “volitional activities” or making efforts. All mental formations as conditioned things are to be contemplated on as impermanent and suffering. It is wrong to interpret *saṅkhārā* in this context, as meritorious activities. What is required here is to observe and note carefully all the conditioned aggregates in one’s own body until their true nature is seen, and dispassion developed regarding them.

### Mental Formations in the Context of This Sutta

The mental formations that we have described so far, the conditioned things produced by kamma, mind, climate, and food have no connection with the *saṅkhārā* mentioned in this Sutta. In the context of this Sutta, *saṅkhārā* means one of the five aggregates, namely, the mental formations or volitional activities that condition things and produce kamma. The Khandhavagga Saṃyutta Pāli text gives the following definition: “That which brings about physical, verbal, and mental activities is *saṅkhārā.*”

Of the five aggregates, the aggregate of materiality has the quality of being transformed by opposing circumstances. It cannot by itself bring about any action or change, but as it has mass, the actions of the mental formations are manifested in the material body, which then appears to be performing the action. The aggregate of feeling experiences the sensations, pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. It cannot effect any action productive of results. Neither can the aggregate of perception, which merely recognises or remembers things, just like a clerk in an office records notes for future reference. The aggregate of consciousness also just knows that a sight is seen, a sound is heard, *etc.* It is not capable of causing any action. It is the aggregate of mental formations that is responsible for physical, verbal, or mental actions such as going, standing, sitting, laying down, bending, stretching, moving, smiling, talking, thinking, seeing, hearing, *etc.* The wish to go, stand, sit or lie down is expressed by this aggregate of mental formations, and all physical, verbal, and mental activities are instigated and organised by it.

To think that all these activities are carried out by one's self is to hold the wrong view of self in the mental formations and is known as clinging to self as the doer (*kāraka atta*). To think that this self, doing all the activities resides all the time as a living entity in one's body is to hold the wrong view of clinging to self as an abiding soul (*nivāsī atta*). Thinking that this self or living entity in one's body can act according to its wishes; that its actions are subject to its will is clinging to self as the master (*sāmi atta*). The mental formations are clung to by all these three modes of clinging. In reality, however, there is no self, no living entity, but merely natural processes occurring according to conditions. The Blessed One taught that mental formations are not living entities that carry out these activities.

### Why Mental Formations are Not-self

From the conventional viewpoint, a living entity that executes the actions of going, standing, sitting, *etc.*, obviously exists. However, the Blessed One refutes this belief by stating:

“Monks, mental formations are not-self. If mental formations were self, they would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to say of mental formations, ‘Let mental formations be thus (in the best of conditions); let mental formations not be thus (in the worst of conditions).’”

These mental formations are mental states lead by volition (*cetanā*). There are fifty-two kinds of mental states. Except for feeling and perception, the remaining fifty mental states constitute the aggregate of mental formations (*saṅkhārakkhandhā*). In the Suttanta, only volition is enumerated as representing the volitional activities. However, according to the Abhidhamma, we have other mental formations such as attention (*manasikāra*), initial application (*vitakka*), sustained application (*vicāra*), joy (*pīti*), greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), delusion (*moha*), non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*), and wisdom (*paññā*), that can produce kammic effects. These fifty kinds of mental formations are responsible for all kinds of activities. It is these fifty mental formations that instigate and direct actions such as going, standing, sitting, lying down, bending, stretching, smiling, or speaking. These actions are being carried out as directed and motivated by the mental formations, which also instigate and direct mental activities such as thinking, seeing, or hearing.

### How Mental Formations Inflict Suffering

The Blessed One urged us to reflect: “If mental formations — which are responsible for all actions — were self they would not be oppressive. However, they do oppress us in many ways. Engaging in activities out of desire or greed, one finds oneself exhausted and distressed. If one says something that should not be said, one is embarrassed. Criminal offences are likely to lead to punishment. One may torture oneself, longing for what is unattainable, suffering loss of appetite or sleep. Due to evil deeds such as stealing or telling lies, one will be reborn in the states of loss, where one has to undergo intense suffering. Likewise, volition accompanied by hate motivates unwise physical and verbal actions, which produce distress and suffering. Volition accompanied by delusion, conceit, and wrong view also leads one to suffering in the present life and in the states of loss. These are various ways in which mental formations oppress. If mental formations were self, they would not be oppressive.

### Mental Formations Are Ungovernable

If volitional activities or mental formations were one’s self, one’s inner core, it should be possible to arrange and organise them in such a way that only wholesome activities productive of benefit are carried

out as one wishes, and not those that are harmful. Actually it is not possible to manage their activities as one wishes. One will find oneself engaging in activities that one should not do, saying things that one should not say, and thinking unsuitable thoughts. It can be seen that mental formations are not governable and are therefore not-self, not one's inner core. To enable one to see this the Blessed One taught directly: "Monks, mental formations are not-self, not one's inner core. That is why they lead to affliction. Furthermore, it is not possible to say of mental formations: 'Let mental formations be thus (all wholesome); let them not be thus (all unwholesome).'"

Volitional activities are, therefore, not-self, not one's inner core, but insubstantial, occurring in accordance with conditions. These volitional activities are thus oppressive, and how they oppress has been described above. Through bad companionship, defective guidance of poor teachers, and through the wrong mental attitude, one gets involved in activities that one should not do, says what one should not say, and thinks unsuitable thoughts. With respect to mundane affairs, one gets involved in blameworthy or illegal activities, and indulges in bad habits such as drinking, taking drugs, or gambling. Also, because of greed or anger, one says what should not be said. Such activities result in destruction of one's prosperity, punishment by the authorities, and loss of friends. From the spiritual and moral point of view, evil deeds produce bad results, leading to misery in the states of loss. Thus volitional activities oppress by producing bad effects. Here, I should recount a story of how the unwholesome activity of slandering resulted in dire distress.

### **A Hungry Ghost Tormented by Needles**

Once the Venerable Lakkhaṇa and Venerable Moggallāna came down from Vultures' Peak to walk for alms. On their way down, the Venerable Moggallāna saw a hungry ghost (*peta*) by means of his divine-eye. He saw needles piercing the body of the ghost. Some needles entered its head and emerged from its mouth. Some entered its mouth and came out from its chest. Some entered its chest and left from its stomach. Some pierced its stomach leaving from its thigh. Some entered its thighs and left by its legs. Some entered by way of its legs and left from its feet. The ghost was subjected to great suffering and was running about with intense pain. The needles

chased him whenever he ran and pierced his body. On seeing his plight, the Venerable Moggallāna reflected on the fact that he had become free from all kammic effects that would land him in the existence of hungry ghosts. Pleased with the thought of being liberated, he smiled. This was noticed by his companion, who asked him why he smiled. The Venerable Lakkhaṇa was not developed enough to see the ghost, and may have disbelieved the existence of such a ghost, entertaining doubts, so the Venerable Moggallāna did not tell him then what he had seen, but told him to ask about it again when they got to the presence of the Blessed One.

After the meal, when they reached the presence of the Buddha, the Venerable Lakkhaṇa asked again why the Venerable Moggallāna had smiled as they were coming down from Vultures' Peak. The Venerable Moggallāna said then that he had seen a hungry ghost afflicted by needles piercing his body, and he smiled because he realised on reflection that he had become free from any unwholesome volitional activities that would lead to such an existence. Then the Blessed One praised him, "My disciples are well equipped with penetrative insight, (mind's eye). I saw this same hungry ghost on the eve of my Enlightenment while seated on the throne of wisdom. However, since there was no other eye-witness, I have not said a word about this ghost before. Now that I have the Venerable Moggallāna to corroborate the story, I will tell you about it."

The Blessed One said that while enjoying a human existence, that ghost had committed the grievous misdeed of slander for which unwholesome kamma he had to undergo intense suffering for many millions of years. Having come up from that abode, he had become this ghost to suffer for the remaining portion of the resultant of that kamma. The ghost was invisible to the ordinary vision. Hence the Venerable Lakkhaṇa did not see him. The needles that pierced and tormented the ghost did not affect other beings. They afflicted only the ghost who had done unwholesome volitional activities before. This is then an example of how mental formations are oppressive.

There were other ghosts also visible to the Venerable Moggallāna. For example, there was the cattle-slaughterer who had become a ghost chased by vultures, crows, and eagles, which attacked him with their beaks. The poor ghost was shrieking wildly and running about to escape from the merciless attacks of the birds. Then there

was the bird hunter who had become a ghost in the shape of a piece of meat. He was similarly tormented by vultures, crows, and eagles, and was also wailing and fleeing from the attacking birds. A sheep-slaughterer ghost had no outer skin covering its body. A bloody mass of flesh, he was also targeted by vultures, crows and eagles, and he too was shrieking and fleeing from the birds. A ghost who was a pig-slaughterer before had knives and double-edged swords falling upon him and cutting him up. A hunter of wild animals had spears piercing him. They were all running about wildly, shrieking and wailing. Furthermore, the Venerable Moggallāna saw ghosts who were suffering because of unwholesome kamma such as torturing others and committing adultery. They are further examples of the oppressive nature of unwholesome mental formations. The denizens of the lower worlds, and beings in the animal realm, are suffering because of unwholesome kamma that they had done in the past. In the human world too, misery due to difficulties earning a living, diseases, and mistreatment by others, have their origins in past unwholesome kamma. These mental formations are oppressive because they are not-self, not one's inner core. They are not possible to manage so that unwholesome mental formations do not arise and only wholesome mental formations appear.

This is within the personal experience of meditators. They want to develop only mental formations confined to insight meditation, but they find, especially at the initial stages of meditation, that undesirable distractions arise. Under the influence of desire, various thoughts suggesting easier meditation methods may arise. Thoughts may arise to do misdeeds influenced by ill-will or conceit. Meditators have to discard these thoughts by noting, "liking," "wanting," "thinking," *etc.* As stated above, all these volitional activities tend to affliction; they are ungovernable and are therefore not-self, not one's inner core, but insubstantial and dependent on conditions.

They may be likened to the weather. We have nothing to do with the rain, sun, or wind and have no control over them. When we wish for rain, we may not get it unless conditions such as clouds, humidity, and temperature make it possible. When the conditions are right, we may get rain even if we do not want it. Likewise with the sun. When covered by clouds, there is no sunshine even if we wish for it. In the absence of the covering clouds, the sun shines brightly whether we

want it to or not. The wind blows only when atmospheric conditions are right. When conditions are not favourable, there is no wind however much we wish for it. These external phenomena have nothing to do with us, and we have no control over them. Similarly, mental formations are internal phenomena over which we have no control. They occur in accordance with conditions and are, therefore, not-self. I will recite again the summary of the Pāḷi text:

“Monks, mental formations are not-self. If mental formations were self, they would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to say of mental formations, ‘Let mental formations be thus (in the best of conditions); let mental formations not be thus (in the worst of conditions).’”

### **How Realisation of Not-self Occurs**

To meditators who are constantly noting mental and physical phenomena, it becomes very obvious how mental formations are not amenable to one’s will, how they are ungovernable. While contemplating the movements of the abdomen and the body postures, and noting them as “rising, falling, sitting, touching,” *etc.*, when stiffness arises, it should be noted as “stiff, stiff.” Then the desire to change posture follows. This desire is nothing but mental activity lead by volition. It is volition that is giving silent instructions, “Change the posture now, move the limbs.” The meditator wants to continue noting without changing position, but because of the insistent urging of volition, he or she changes the posture. This is an unwanted mental formation. Likewise, while noting the unpleasant feelings of pain, heat, or itching, the posture is changed as directed by the ungovernable mental formations. Again while meditating, thoughts of sensual pleasures may occur. These are mental formations that a meditator does not wish for. These have to be banished by incessant noting. At the same time, mental formations may urge the meditator to go and talk to someone, to look around here and there, or to do some chores. These are all undesirable mental formations that arise whether one likes it or not. These demonstrate the ungovernable nature of mental formations. They should not be welcomed, but should be discarded by heedful noting. To think that there is a manageable, controllable self, an inner core, is clinging to self as the master.



The meditator who notes the mental and physical processes as they occur notices clearly that what one desires does not happen, what is not desired is happening. In this way one can get rid of the clinging to self as the master. As one observes the origination and dissolution of phenomena taking place in rapid succession, and sees that what one wishes to be maintained gets dissolved, clinging to self as the master is abandoned. Nothing is seen to remain forever, everything is perishing and disappearing. In this way, the clinging to an abiding soul, which believes in the permanent existence of a self or inner core can be banished too. Then the meditator perceives too that any event occurs only when the necessary conditions for its occurrence are fulfilled. Take, for instance, the arising of visual-consciousness. There must be the eye, the object of sight, as well as sufficient light. Then there must be the intention to look. When there is the eye and the object of sight, very clearly visible, the act of seeing is bound to occur. Likewise a sound is heard only when there is the ear, the sound, unobstructed space, and listening. When there is an ear and a clearly audible sound, hearing will surely occur. Touching will occur when there is object, a sensitive part of the body, bodily contact, and intention to touch. Seeing that respective results of seeing, hearing, touching occur when the corresponding causes necessary for the arising of the events have come together, the meditator decides that no self or living entity exists that is capable of causing seeing, hearing, or touching. One thus banishes the clinging to self as the doer, which holds that there is a self or living entity master-minding all kinds of activities.

To remove this clinging to self as the doer, the Blessed One taught that mental formations are not-self, not a living entity.

I have now dealt fairly comprehensively with the explanation of mental formations being not-self. I will conclude the discourse here for today. By virtue of having given respectful attention to this discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, may you all soon realise nibbāna by means of the Path and its Fruition as you wish.

## PART FOUR

Delivered on the 5<sup>th</sup> July 1963<sup>1</sup>

Today is the full-moon day of July, the Uposatha. A year ago today I began giving my discourse on the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta after which I continued teaching the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta sequentially. As to the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, I have so far dealt with the account of how mental formations are not-self. Today I will discuss how consciousness is not-self.

### Consciousness Is Not-self

*“Viññāṇaṃ anattā. viññāṇaṃca hi daṃ, bhikkhave, attā abhavissa, nayidaṃ viññāṇaṃ ābādhāya saṃvatteyya, labbhettha ca viññāṇe — ‘Evaṃ me viññāṇaṃ hotu, evaṃ me viññāṇaṃ mā aho sī’ti. Ya smā ca kho, bhikkhave, viññāṇaṃ anattā, tasmā viññāṇaṃ ābādhāya saṃvattati, na ca labbhati viññāṇe — ‘Evaṃ me viññāṇaṃ hotu, evaṃ me viññāṇaṃ mā aho sī’ti.”*

“Monks, consciousness is not-self...”

By consciousness is meant visual-consciousness, auditory-consciousness, olfactory-consciousness, gustatory-consciousness, tactile-consciousness, and mind-consciousness. These six kinds of consciousness are clung to as a self, as living entity: “It is I who see; I see it.” “It is I who hear; I hear it.” In this way, all six kinds of sense-cognition are attributed to a single self — ‘I’ or ‘me.’ Clinging to self is ordinarily inevitable. Those objects that are devoid of cognition such as a log, a post, a lump of earth, a stone are regarded as inanimate; only those objects invested with the faculty of cognition are regarded as animate, living entities. Therefore, it is not surprising that sense-consciousness is taken to be a self, a living entity. However, sense-consciousness is not a self, not a living entity. Therefore, the Blessed One declared that consciousness is not-self. He explained why not as follows:

### Why Consciousness Is Not Self

If consciousness were self, an inner core, it would not tend to affliction. It is not usual to oppress oneself. It should also be possible to manage it to always have wholesome states of mind and not to have unwholesome ones. However, the fact is that consciousness

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<sup>1</sup> The full-moon day of Wāso 1325 M.E.

tends to affliction and is not amenable to one's control. Thus, it is not a self, not one's inner core.

“Monks, consciousness is not-self. If consciousness were self, it would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to say of consciousness, ‘Let consciousness be thus (in the best of conditions); let consciousness not be thus (in the worst of conditions).’”

People are generally more acquainted with mind (consciousness) than they are with the fifty-two mental states (*cetasikā*). Burmese people talk about mind (*citta*). They rarely speak of the concomitant mental states such as contact (*phassa*) that always appear in conjunction with consciousness. Furthermore, they are attached to that mind as ‘I’ or ‘me,’ as a self. They think, “I see,” “I hear,” *etc.* Not only human beings, but also deities and other creatures cling to the belief that consciousness is self. However, consciousness is definitely not-self. Not being a self, it tends to be oppressive.

### **How Consciousness Oppresses**

Consciousness oppresses when seeing a repulsive sight; when hearing a loud or unpleasant sound or harsh speech; when smelling a foul odour; when tasting sour or bitter food; when feeling painful sensations; or when remembering distressing, sorrowful, or frightening mental objects. All beings like to dwell only on pleasant sights, but according to circumstances, they may have to see repulsive sights. For unfortunate people, mostly what they see is undesirable objects. This is how visual-consciousness tends to oppress. Although they wish to hear sweet sounds and kind words, circumstances may compel them to listen to harsh sounds; stricken with misfortune, they may often be subjected to dreadful noises, threats, and rebukes. This is how auditory-consciousness oppresses. Again, all beings like to enjoy fragrant and pure odours, but they may have to put up with foul and fetid odours. This is how olfactory-consciousness oppresses. Oppression by visual, auditory, and olfactory-consciousness is not too prevalent in the human realm, but in the animal realm, the world of hungry ghosts, and in hell, the oppressive nature of consciousness is pervasive. Animals live in almost constant fear, seeing and hearing dreadful sights and sounds. Those creatures that live in rotting matter have to smell putrid, foul odours. It goes without saying that ghosts

and beings in hell will fare worse than animals. They will be constantly submerged in distress, seeing dreadful sights, hearing harsh sounds, and smelling foul odours. In some hells everything seen, heard, smelt, tasted, touched, and thought is unpleasant — there is nothing pleasant there at all. They are subject to constant oppression by all six types of consciousness.

Everyone likes to enjoy only good taste, but the poor subsist on bad food. This is how tongue consciousness oppresses. In this respect too the oppression is more apparent in the four states of loss. Human beings like to enjoy only pleasant sensations, but when circumstances do not allow it, they will have to put up with undesirable experiences, for instance, when they are suffering from a disease. At such times their suffering is so oppressive that they may even long for instant death to get free from suffering. It is far worse, of course, in the four states of loss. Everyone would like to live a carefree life, but circumstances do not allow it. Instead, many are possessed by depression, disappointment, sorrow, and lamentation. Some people never get out of the slough of misery throughout their life, being victims of oppression by mind-consciousness.

### **Consciousness Is Not Subject to One's Will**

The oppressive consciousness is not subject to one's will. Arising as determined by circumstances, consciousness is ungovernable. Although one may wish for a pleasant sight, in the absence of pleasant objects, one cannot see a pleasant sight. On the other hand, hateful, horrible sights will be seen. When there are unpleasant objects around, and when the eyes are kept open. This is an example of how visual-consciousness, not being subjected to one's will, arises of itself, dependent on conditions. Likewise, although one may wish to hear only pleasant sounds, in the absence of pleasant audible objects such as kind speech it cannot be heard. That is why people have radios, cassette-recorders, *etc.*, to reproduce pleasant sounds and voices whenever they wish. Though we are reluctant to hear undesirable sounds, such sounds will inevitably enter our ears sometimes. Ear-consciousness is ungovernable, it arises of its own accord, depending on conditions. Similarly, although we like to enjoy fragrant odours, if they are not present, our wish cannot be fulfilled. Hence people provide themselves with perfumes and flowers. However

unwilling we may be to breathe in foul odours, when they exist, we have to endure them, and their side-effects, such as nausea or headaches. Olfactory-consciousness is not amenable to our will, as it arises dependent upon circumstances.

Although we wish to enjoy delicious tastes, they cannot arise in the absence of agreeable food. It arises only when one's favourite foods are available. Hence the relentless pursuit of one's desired food. When taken ill, one may have to seek relief by taking bitter medicine, which one dislikes. Gustatory-consciousness arises of its own accord, and is ungovernable.

Tactile-consciousness can be pleasant only when there are suitable objects such as fine clothing, soft bedding, comfortable seats, *etc.* Therefore a constant effort has to be made to acquire both inanimate and animate objects to stimulate delightful sensations. When it is extremely hot or cold, or when faced with adversity such as thorns, spikes, fires, or weapons, or when taken ill with a severe disease, one has to suffer, however reluctantly, from unpleasant tactile-consciousness, which is obviously uncontrollable, arising on its own, dependent on circumstances. Everyone wants to have a happy, joyous, and contented life. This can come about only when one has sufficient wealth. Hence the necessity to constantly strive to maintain such a way of life. While thus engaged in seeking the means of a comfortable living, thoughts about difficulties in everyday life, about beloved ones who have died, about financial and business problems, about old age and debility, may arise to make one unhappy. This is how mind-consciousness makes its own appearance, and is ungovernable.

### **Dependent on Circumstances**

I have used the expression, "Dependent on circumstances." It means circumstantial and conditional causes that produce a particular effect. Wholesome causes will give pleasing results, unwholesome causes will give undesirable results. No effects can be brought about merely by one's own desire. A certain effect will arise from a given set of causes, whether one like it or not. Results are produced from respective causes and they are ungovernable. It is obvious that they are not-self, not one's inner core. The Blessed One therefore stated that mind-consciousness is not-self, because it is not amenable to one's will. The Blessed One taught thus to enable one to get rid of the clinging

to self as the master, which holds that there is an inner self, which can be controlled and managed at one will. When this clinging is removed, the clinging to an abiding self or soul is banished at the same time.

When it is realised that consciousness is only a resultant of causes and that it disappears as soon as it has arisen, it becomes obvious that there is no such thing as an enduring self. For example, visual-consciousness arises only when there is the eye and a visible object. Likewise, auditory-consciousness can arise only when there is the ear and a sound; olfactory-consciousness can arise only when there is the nose and an odour; gustatory-consciousness can arise only when there is the tongue and a taste; tactile-consciousness can arise only when there is the body and a tactile object; and mind-consciousness can arise only when there is the mind-base and a mental object. When these conditional causes are known for the arising of respective results, the belief in a permanent self, or clinging to an abiding soul, will be discarded. The meditator who notes the mental and physical phenomena at the time of their occurrence will perceive clearly that depending on its conditions such as the eye and a visible object, visual-consciousness arises and vanishes recurrently. On perceiving thus, the meditator clearly understands that there is no self or living entity that brings about the act of seeing. He or she realises that there is only visual-consciousness, which arises when the right conditions prevail. In this way, the meditator gets rid of clinging to self as the doer, which believes that all physical, verbal, and mental actions are done by a self.

Those who cannot perceive the true nature of consciousness through noting mindfully, hold fast to notions of self as the master, abiding soul, or the doer. It seems that the aggregate of consciousness (*viññāṇakkhandhā*) is clung to more firmly than the other four aggregates. It is consciousness that is regarded as the soul or living entity. In everyday language, consciousness is more commonly referred to, whereas feelings, perceptions, and mental formations — although they are mental concomitants — are not generally mentioned. People talk as if it is the mind or consciousness that feels sensations, that recognises things, or that cause actions. At the time of the Blessed One there was a disciple named Sāti who mistook consciousness to be the self due to clinging to a wrong view. I will briefly relate his story.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Sutta 38 of the Majjhimanikāya, [Mahātanhāsankhaya Sutta](#) (M.i.256)

## The Story of Bhikkhu Sāti

Bhikkhu Sāti declared that the Buddha had taught: “It is the same consciousness that wanders about and transmigrates throughout the cycle of existences — not another consciousness. (*Tadevidam viññāṇam sandhāvati saṃsaratī anaññam*).” That was his understanding of the Buddha’s teaching. He based his views on the Jātaka stories of the Buddha’s previous lives as Vessantara, the Chaddanta elephant king, Bhūridatta Nāga king, *etc.* In his final existence as the Buddha, his material aggregates were not those of King Vessantara, nor those of the elephant king or the Nāga king. However, Sāti maintained that the consciousness of the Buddha was the same that had existed previously as King Vessantara, the elephant king, the Nāga king, *etc.*, and it had remained enduring throughout the cycles of existence. This was how he understood and how he explained the Buddha’s teaching. Sāti’s belief is nothing but clinging to consciousness as an abiding soul. Other learned disciples of the Buddha tried to explain to him that his view was wrong, but Sāti remained adamant, believing that he knew the Dhamma better than other monks.

It is not easy to point out the true Dhamma to those holding wrong views. They are apt to look down on their well-wishers as being out of touch with modern thinking (in the matter of interpreting the Dhamma) unlike those who innovate a new approach to teaching the Dhamma. Anyone who claims to be a Buddhist should consider carefully whether his views are in accordance with the teaching of the Buddha. If one holds on to views that are not in accord with the Buddha’s teaching, one is outside the dispensation of the Buddha.

Failing to persuade Sāti to abandon his wrong views, the other monks reported the matter to the Blessed One who sent for Bhikkhu Sāti. When questioned, Sāti repeated his views: “Based on the Jātaka stories as recounted by the Blessed One the present consciousness is the same as that which existed in previous lives. That consciousness has not reached destruction, but passed on from one existence to the next. This is how I understand the teaching.” The Buddha asked him what he meant by consciousness. He replied, ‘Venerable sir, consciousness is that which expresses, feels, and experiences the fruits of wholesome and unwholesome deeds in this or that existence.’”

“To whom, foolish man,” remonstrated the Blessed One, “have you heard me expounding the doctrine in this way? I have explained

consciousness as arising from conditions; that consciousness does not arise without conditions. You have misinterpreted my teaching and attributed that wrong view to me. You have caused the arising of many unwholesome deeds; holding this wrong interpretation of my teaching and committing the wrong deed of talking about it will cause distress and suffering to you for a long time to come.” However, Bhikkhu Sāti refused to give up the view that he took to be right.

Dogmatic views are terrifying. Bhikkhu Sāti was an ordained disciple of the Buddha. He followed the Buddha’s teaching and claimed to have understood it. Yet we find him obstinately refusing to give up his wrong views even when exhorted by the Buddha himself, which of course amounted to not having faith in the Buddha. Nowadays, there are some who teach that there is no need to keep the five precepts or practise meditation. It is enough to follow and understand their teaching. When learned people of good-will try to point out the true Dhamma to such false religious teachers who entertain misleading notions, they are said to have replied scornfully that they would not abandon their views even if the Buddha himself came to teach them. There are many instances where non-Dhamma is being disseminated as Dhamma. It is essential to scrutinize any teaching to weed out what is not the true teaching.

## A Summary of the True Dhamma

1. Abstain from all evil deeds (*sabba pāpassa akaraṇaṃ*). Physical misdeeds such as killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct should be avoided. Verbal misdeeds of lying, slandering, and offensive language should also be avoided. Evil thoughts should also be abandoned. Evil thoughts can be got rid of only by engaging in tranquillity and insight meditation. Avoidance of all evil deeds — physical, verbal, and mental — constitutes the first aspect of the Buddha’s teaching.

2. To cultivate meritorious deeds (*kusalassa upasampadā*) such as giving alms, keeping precepts, and practicing meditation. With regard to the keeping of precepts, it may be fulfilled to a certain extent by avoidance of evil deeds in pursuance of the first teaching. However, one does not become established in the morality that is a factor of the Noble Path (*ariyamagga sīla*), merely by abstaining from evil deeds. It can be accomplished only through the practice of insight



meditation until the Path is attained, or by the practice of tranquillity meditation or absorption. Some people talk disparagingly of tranquillity meditation. The Blessed One, however, recommended cultivating tranquillity meditation. When absorption is achieved, that concentration can be used as an ideal foundation for insight. Alternatively, if absorption cannot be attained, access concentration may be used as a foundation for insight. If even access concentration is not attained, one has to work for the momentary concentration of insight. Once it is attained, insights can be developed in their natural sequence until the Noble Path is attained.

In the Buddha's dispensation, the most essential task is to acquire merits of concentration and insight, since the Noble Path and its Fruition are not attainable without insight. Thus, to become equipped with the merits of the Noble Path and its Fruition, the wholesome deed of meditation must be developed. We cannot afford to ignore any kind of meritorious deed, as the second teaching of the Buddha enjoins fulfilment of all the three types of wholesome deeds. We hear about 'new teachings' that contradict these first and second aspects of the teachings of all the Buddhas. The propagandists of such 'new teachings' say, "Unwholesome defilements (*akusala kilesā*) do not exist permanently, so no effort is needed to dispel them. Nor is any effort needed to perform the wholesome deeds of keeping precepts and practicing tranquillity and insight meditation. All of these efforts are futile and produce only suffering. It must be definitely understood that all such teachings are diametrically opposed to the true teaching of the Buddha.

3. To purify one's mind (*sacittapariyadopanam*). The Path must be developed through the practice of insight meditation. With the Path developed and its Fruition attained, the mind is completely free from defilements and hence absolutely pure. According to the Commentary, the degree of purity to be attained is no less than that of an Arahant. This exposition by the Commentary is in full agreement with the teaching of the Buddha enshrined in the Pāli texts. Nevertheless, those who are causing harm to the dispensation are discouraging the practice of keeping precepts, developing concentration, and practising insight meditation, saying they are futile efforts that will only lead to suffering. They say, "Keep the mind at ease, do not engage in any activity. Place it in a blank spot in one's person where

no unwholesome activities are developing. In this way the mind will remain pure." This teaching is entirely devoid of reason, foundation, or support. To discourage the practice of morality, concentration, and wisdom is to corrupt the Buddha's dispensation. It is impossible to keep one's mind pure without the practice of concentration and insight. Consciousness is inherently insubstantial and ungovernable. To assert that the mind can be kept as one will without the help of meditation contradicts the teaching in the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, which states that it is not possible to say of consciousness, "Let consciousness be thus (all wholesome); let it not be thus (all unwholesome)." This is something to reflect on carefully.

The last phrase in this concise statement says: "This is the teaching of the Buddhas (*etaṃ buddhāna sāsanaṃ*)." These three — avoidance of evil deeds, cultivation of wholesome deeds, and keeping the mind pure — are the teaching or exhortation of all the Buddhas. The Buddha's dispensation thus constitutes concisely the three factors as stated above. For the dispensation to endure and prosper, one must avoid evil deeds as far as possible oneself, and others should be urged to avoid them. One must diligently perform meritorious deeds oneself, and teach others to do the same. If someone is found teaching non-Dhamma, "Don't avoid evil deeds and don't do wholesome deeds," one must do one's utmost to prevent the propagation of such wrong views. One should purify one's mind by practising meditation and exhort others to do likewise. To safeguard the dispensation and promote its prosperity we have to point out wrong teachings and explain how they have deviated from the true Dhamma.

I have digressed somewhat from Bhikkhu Sāti's story by taking some time to highlight the dangers to the dispensation from false teachings. Now I will continue with Bhikkhu Sāti's story.

When Bhikkhu Sāti adamantly maintained his wrong view, the Blessed One addressed the monks: "Have you ever heard me expound the Dhamma in the way that Bhikkhu Sāti expressed?" They replied, "No, Venerable Sir. We have heard only that consciousness arises out of conditions; and that there is no arising of consciousness without conditions."

Then the Blessed One explained further: "Each type of consciousness arises because of its own conditions. Consciousness is named according to the conditions through which it arises. Consciousness

that arises due to the eye and visible objects is called visual-consciousness. That due to the ear and sounds is called auditory-consciousness. That due to the nose and odours is called olfactory-consciousness. That due to the tongue and taste is called gustatory-consciousness. That due to the body and tactile objects is called tactile-consciousness. That due to the mind and mind objects is called mind-consciousness. A fire that burns due to wood is called a wood-fire. If it burns due to kindling, grass, dung, paddy husk, or rubbish, then it is called a kindling-fire, a grass-fire, a dung-fire, a husk-fire, or a rubbish-fire accordingly. Similarly, consciousness is named according to how it is conditioned."

In this Sutta about Bhikkhu Sāti's view, the Blessed One also gave a comprehensive treatment of the Law of Dependent Origination. I have no time to go into this here. I will confine myself to dealing more fully with the simile of fire. When there is a forest fire, it might originate from burning refuse or burning leaves. If there is a constant supply of fuel, and if there is no-one to extinguish the fire, it rages unchecked and spreads for miles. It might seem that it is the same fire that continues burning. However, careful observation will reveal that the fire burning the refuse does not burn the grass, and the grass fire does not burn the leaves. Also the fire that burns a particular leaf is not the same as that burning other leaves.

Likewise, visual-consciousness and auditory-consciousness, which appear to be one and the same consciousness to ordinary people, are seen by careful observers as distinct separate moments of consciousness depending on the conditions through which they arise. If we consider only visual-consciousness, we will find that different types of consciousness arising from different colours, white, black, *etc.* Narrowing down to just consciousness of white, the meditator who constantly notes and who has advanced to the knowledge of arising and passing away (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*) and knowledge of dissolution (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*), will see in the seemingly continuous stream of consciousness of white, that the preceding consciousness is distinct from the succeeding ones. The distinction is more pronounced in the case of hearing than in seeing. Similarly, in smelling and tasting, each consciousness is noted separately and distinctly. The most rapid noting is involved in the phenomenon of touching and the distinction of each consciousness is also most

pronounced here. When feeling pain, careful noting as “pain, pain,” enables one to see distinctly each conscious moment of pain, part by part, as it arises. Similarly, mind-consciousness of ideas can be noted as each consciousness arises separately. If any thought or idea intrudes while noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, these should be noted as they arise. Usually the intruding thought comes to cessation as soon as its arising is noted, but if thoughts arise persistently conditioned by the same mental objects, they should be observed making their appearance in sequence. When the thought moves on to another mental object, the arising of separate consciousness is very obvious. When the meditator can perceive the arising of each distinct consciousness with each separate noting, he or she comes to realise personally the impermanent nature of consciousness, its nature of suffering because of constant arising and vanishing, its insubstantial nature because it is happening according to conditions and is ungovernable. It is vital to gain such personal realisation. I have explained fully how the five aggregates are not-self. I will recapitulate by summarising the four kinds of clinging to self and on how consciousness is not-self.

1. Clinging to self as the master (*sāmi atta*), is the belief in a living entity that is controlling and directing as it wishes.
2. Clinging to self as an abiding soul (*nivāsī atta*) is the belief in a living entity permanently residing in one’s body.
3. Clinging to self as the doer (*kāraka atta*) is the belief in a living entity that is responsible for every physical, verbal, and mental action.
4. Clinging to self as the experiencer (*vedaka atta*) is the belief that all sensations, whether pleasant or unpleasant, are felt by a living entity, or self.

“Monks, consciousness is not-self. If consciousness were self, it would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to say of consciousness, ‘Let consciousness be thus (in the best of conditions); let consciousness not be thus (in the worst of conditions).’”

### The Pheṇapiṇḍūpama Sutta

Having explained fully how the five aggregates are not-self, I will give you further illustrations concerning the five aggregates, that are extracts from the Pheṇapiṇḍūpama Sutta.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Khandhavagga, Saṃyutta, S.iii.142.

*“Pheṇapiṇḍūpamaṃ rūpaṃ, vedanā bubbulūpamā.  
Marīcikūpamā saññā, saṅkhārā kadalūpamā.  
Māyūpamañca viññāṇaṃ, desitādiccabandhunā.”*

“Materiality is like a lump of foam; feeling is like a bubble;  
Perception is like a mirage; formations like a plantain trunk.”

## Materiality is Like Foam

Materiality is like the foam that can be seen floating in streams. It is composed of air bubbles, entrapped in droplets of water. These droplets, blown up by air bubbles, congregate to form frothy scum, the size of a human fist, a human head, the size of a man or even bigger. A mass of foam may appear to be of substance, but if carefully observed, it turns out to be insubstantial, useless for any purpose. Likewise, the human body complete with body, head, hands and feet, whether male or female, appears to be very substantial; it seems permanent, looks beautiful and good, seemingly a living entity.

However, when analysed, the body turns out to be just like a mass of foam, quite insubstantial — a conglomerate of thirty-two repulsive constituent parts: head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, muscle, bones, *etc.* On closer inspection, it is found to be just cells and molecules, invisible to the naked eye. It may be compared to a big pile of sand. Alternatively, we may take the example of a sack of flour consisting of individual particles. When soaked with the right amount of water, it becomes a substantial mass of dough, which can be big by using a large amount of flour. This huge ball of dough could be shaped into the figure of a man. However, it is not one solid mass, being composed of fine grains of flour.

Similarly, the body is not one solid mass, but is composed of small particles of matter amassed into a big pile, and just like the mass of foam, it is devoid of an inner core. There is no permanent essence, no beautiful substance, no living entity called a self. The visible material qualities form a part of the body. Remove those visible qualities and the body will become devoid of shape and form. The earth element (*paṭhavīdhātu*) forms that part of the body that manifests in the sense of touch as rough, smooth, hard, or soft. The fire element (*tejodhātu*) of temperature, and the wind element (*vāyodhātu*) of motion, form the other parts of the body. Remove these three elements and the human body that can be touched and felt will no longer exist.

The material quality of odour also forms a constituent part of the body. The human body can therefore be sensed by its odour; extract that too and nothing will remain by which a human body may be recognised or identified. We see things because we have the sensitive material quality of eye; without it the body cannot see anything, just like a blind man. We also have the sensitive material quality of the ear, which enables us to hear; the sensitive material quality of nose, which enables us to recognise odour; the sensitive material quality of the body with which we get the sensation of touch. All these small but useful constituent material qualities congregate to assume the form and shape of a human body, wholly contributing to its utility. Without them, the human body will have no utilitarian value. As a matter of fact, without these constituent parts the human form as such cannot come into existence.

As stated above, if these constituent parts are pulverized then the human body will no longer exist. Only fine particles of matter will remain. Furthermore, these sensitive material qualities such as the eye and visual objects do not exist permanently. They keep on arising and vanishing, the new coming into the replace the old. Thus this body is like a mass of foam, just a conglomeration of insubstantial material qualities. To examine and analyse this body carefully, one should start where a phenomenon manifests vividly. When walking, the material qualities of extension and motion become prominent. Therefore, in accordance with the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, "When going he knows 'I am going' (*gacchanto vā 'gacchāmi'ti pajānāti*)," the meditator should note, "Going, lifting, stepping, dropping," etc. While standing, the meditator should note, "Standing, standing;" while sitting, "Sitting, sitting, touching, touching, rising, falling," etc; when objects are seen, it should be noted as "Seeing, seeing," when body odours are smelt, as "Smelling smelling;" when the limbs are moved or stretched, "Stretching, stretching," "Moving, changing." When concentration gets strengthened by carefully noting as described, the meditator realises that an act of going consists of the desire to go and the elements of motion. Acts of standing and sitting are made up of the desire to stand or sit followed by a series of elements of motion and expansion. Likewise, with bending, stretching and changing postures. In an act of seeing, there is visual-consciousness and a visual object; in smelling, there is olfactory-

consciousness and an odour. Each phenomenon is seen to arise for a moment, only to pass away instantly. The limbs, the hands and feet, the head, the shape of the body are no longer felt and recognised as such. They appear merely as a recurrent physical process, rising and passing away incessantly. At that stage, meditator comes to understand directly how the body is like a mass of foam.

Perceiving thus, the meditator realises that materiality is impermanent, and terribly oppressive because of incessant arising and vanishing. It is also not-self because it is happening, not as one wishes, but according to conditions, so it is not one's own inner core, and not governable, not controllable. Materiality is likened to foam. It is unstable, constantly arising and vanishing, and not-self.

### **Feelings Are Like A Bubble**

Feelings are likened to air bubbles. When rain drops fall on the water surface, little pockets of air find themselves trapped in the surrounding wall of water, forming minute bubbles. Children produce similar bubbles to play with, by blowing softly into a blow pipe. Conglomeration of these minute bubbles form a mass of foam. These bubbles are formed whenever rain drops fall on the surface of water only to vanish instantly. Feeling, which experiences the sensations, is likened to bubbles, because of its nature of incessant perishing after arising. This is in conformity with what the meditators know through personal experience, but at variance with what ordinary people presume to be the case. Ordinary people's view, on looking for a long time at a beautiful object, is that the pleasant sight remains for quite a long time. When an unpleasant sight has been seen for some time, they think it will also last for a long time. Ordinary objects, which are neither pleasant nor unpleasant, are also thought to last for a long time, to remain permanently.

Similarly, whatever sound is pleasant or unpleasant to hear is believed to remain for a long time. Painful feelings especially are thought to remain for days, months, or years. Thus, ordinary people's view of feeling is not what really happens — it quickly vanishes like a bubble. To personally realise this truth, one must constantly observe the psycho-physical processes happening inside one's body. If thus engaged, at the stages of knowledge of arising and passing away, and knowledge of dissolution, the meditator will perceive that

whatever is pleasant or unpleasant to see, hear, or smell, vanishes instantly. The passing away of painful feeling is especially vivid. By observing the painful feeling as “Painful, painful,” with each act of noting the vanishing of each pain is realised. At the stage of knowledge of comprehension painful feelings becomes more intense and numerous. At each noting, the pain from each place of observation vanishes; thus the pain from one place vanishes when noted, and that from another place also vanishes when noted, and it continues to vanish in the same way. The pain vanishes whenever it is noted as if removed by one’s hand. Thus for the meditator whose concentration has become strengthened, the pleasant sight that is seen and noted vanishes quickly. However, since there is the eye and visual object, the sight is seen again. Every time it is seen, it is noted and it quickly vanishes again. The process thus continues. The same process occurs with unpleasant and neutral objects. The disappearance with each noting of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sound is more distinct. The three feelings regarding odours also disappear when noted. Taste sensations are especially vivid to the meditator who keeps noting the taste. The delicious taste while chewing the food keeps on rising and vanishing with each act of noting, The pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings of touch also arise and vanish when noted. Similarly, mental feelings of sorrow, and joy will vanish quickly when heedfully noted. Thus feelings are just like bubbles, rapidly disappearing, impermanent, unreliable and not-self.

### **Perception Is Like a Mirage**

Perception (*saññā*), which apprehends ordinary sense-objects (whatever is seen, heard, smelt, touched, or known) as reality is likened to a mirage. A mirage is an optical illusion caused by atmospheric conditions, often appearing as a sheet of water or pictures of houses in the hot air that rises from the earth in the midday sun of the last month of the summer.<sup>1</sup> Thus a mirage is an optical illusion. Wild animals such as deer roam about in the hot season in search of water. When they see a body of water in the distance, they hurry towards that place only to find a dry tract of land instead of a pond or a lake. They have been misled by a mirage and put to a great deal of trouble. Just as a mirage gives the illusion of a body of water

<sup>1</sup> Here only a shortened translation of the description of the mirage on page 119 of the original Burmese text, is given (tr.)



or houses where no such things exist, so too perceptions deceives people into thinking that whatever is seen, heard, touched, or known is a human being — a man or a woman. Having an illusory perception of whatever is seen, heard, touched, or known, people engage in multiple activities concerning them, just like the wild forest deer go after a distant mirage taking it to be a mass of water.

To realise that perception is illusory and thus save oneself the suffering of pursuing non-existent objects, one must heedfully note all material and mental phenomena as they occur. When concentration gets strengthened, it is seen that in every phenomenon there are only a material object to be known and the mind knowing it. Later it becomes clear that each phenomenon is a related event of cause and effect. Finally it is personally experienced that the knowing mind as well as the object to be known keep on perishing while they are being noted. Thus what was formerly held by perception to be an enduring individual, a living-being, a man, a woman, or a self, is now seen as a deception by perception, which creates optical illusions like a mirage. In reality, the meditator realises that it is merely a phenomenon of incessant arising and vanishing, of the nature of impermanence, suffering, and not-self.

### Formations Are Like a Plantain Trunk

Mental formations (*saṅkhārā*) are likened to plantain trunks. A plantain trunk looks like an ordinary tree trunk, which has a solid core. However, when a plantain trunk is cut up it will be found to be made up of layers of fibrous material with no solid core. Mental formations are like a plantain trunk, void of any core. They consist of fifty kinds of mental concomitants headed by volition (*cetanā*). The outstanding members of this group — contact (*phassa*), attention (*manasikāra*), one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*), initial application (*vitakka*), sustained application (*vicāra*), effort (*virīya*), greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), delusion (*moha*), conceit (*māna*), wrong-view (*ditṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*), non-delusion (*amoha*), confidence (*saddhā*), mindfulness (*sati*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic-joy (*muditā*) — are all mental concomitants. Volition is responsible for all intentional activities (physical, verbal, and mental) as it is the leading member. These numerous mental formations are very prominent in all activities.

They are mainly responsible for the clinging to a self that is doing all these activities. Mental formations appear to possess a solid core. In reality, however, mental formations are devoid of any solid core.

Meditators can see the truth of this by constantly noting all mental and physical phenomena. The meditator who constantly notes while going, as “Going, going,” “Lifting, moving, dropping,” also notices the arising of the desire to go when concentration becomes stronger. The desire to go is also seen to be arising and vanishing. Although desire to go is usually described as “intending to go,” it is actually mental formations under the guidance of volition. It is the activity led by volition that motivates the action of going. Urged on by volition, the act of going — which involves lifting, moving, dropping — is accomplished. Before such knowledge is gained, there was the notion, “I go because I want to go,” which is clinging to a self. Since the desire to go is now seen to vanish, the knowledge occurs that there is no self, only impermanent phenomena. The desires to bend, stretch, move, or change are also seen in this true light. Additionally, the effort to fulfil the desire to look, the desire to see are also mental formations making a momentary appearance only to vanish at once. It is therefore realised that they are devoid of any essence, that they are not-self, and are merely impermanent phenomena. Similarly, with regard to the desire to listen, an effort is made to hear to fulfil the desire to listen.

Furthermore, it is seen that thinking, investigating, and effort, when noted as they arise, also vanish instantly. Thus they are also devoid of essence, are not-self, and are merely impermanent phenomena. If greed or hatred appear, they are noted as “Wanting, liking,” or “Hating, disliking,” and they soon disappear, establishing the fact that they are also not-self, and have no solid core. When confidence, kindness, compassion, *etc.*, occur they also vanish instantly. They are therefore devoid of essence, and are not-self. This analytical knowledge brings home the fact that mental formations are like a plantain trunk, which has no solid core when cut open and examined. Mental formations are impermanent, suffering, and not-self.

### Consciousness Is like an Illusion

Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is like an illusion. When seeing an object, a person ordinarily assumes that he or she sees a man or a woman, and thinks, “I see. It is I who see it.” When hearing anything too, he

or she thinks, "I hear a man's voice," "I hear a woman's voice," "I hear. It is I who hears it." On smelling an odour he or she thinks, "This is the scent of such and such a person, and when eating thinks, "This food was prepared by such and such a person, I taste it." 'When touching he or she thinks, "I have touched so and so. It is I who touched them." In thinking too he or she considers, "I think. It is I who thinks." To know and become conscious of things in this way is not knowing things as they truly are, but is a misconception from the viewpoint of ultimate truth. Such wrong knowledge is not brought about by the five types of consciousness: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile-consciousness. These five cognise only what is ultimately true, namely sights, sounds, odours, tastes, and touches, not as the misperceived notions of a man, a woman, *etc.* However, at the end of a full process of cognition (*citta vīthi*) when reflection occurs with the arising of mind-consciousness (*mano-viññāṇa*), misconceptions of the known object as a man or a woman with regard to the sight previously seen are liable to occur.

### The Process of Eye-door Consciousness

For your general knowledge, I will briefly explain the process of cognition with respect to the process of seeing and the process of reflection. If the eye has caught sight of a visible form, the flow of subconsciousness ( <i>bhavaṅga</i> ) is interrupted to be followed immediately by five sense-door adverting consciousness ( <i>pañca-dvārāvajjana</i> ), which turns to and considers the object. Immediately after that arises the visual-consciousness ( <i>cakkhuvīññāṇa</i> ) that first cognises the sight, without any reflection about it in conventional terms as a man or a woman. As this ceases, it is followed by receiving-consciousness ( <i>sampañicchana</i> ), a moment of reception of the object so seen. After its cessation comes the investigating-consciousness ( <i>santīraṇa</i> ), the momentary examination of the object so received. After this comes the stage of determining-consciousness ( <i>voṭṭhabbana</i> ).	<b>Citta Vīthi</b> <i>Atītabhavaṅga</i> <i>Bhavaṅgacalana</i> <i>Bhavaṅgupaccheda</i> <i>Āvajjana</i> <i>Cakkhuvīññāṇa</i> <i>Sampañicchana</i> <i>Santīraṇa</i> <i>Voṭṭhabbana</i> <i>Javana</i> <i>Javana</i> <i>Javana</i> <i>Javana</i> <i>Javana</i> <i>Javana</i> <i>Javana</i> <i>Javana</i> <i>Javana</i> <i>Javana</i> <i>Tadārammaṇa</i> <i>Tadārammaṇa</i>
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When this consciousness ceases, seven times in rapid succession the impulsive or active-consciousness (*javana*) arises. With the cessation of the last impulsion, comes registering-consciousness (*tadārammaṇa*), which is repeated twice holding onto the same object that is still attracting attention. At the expiration of this registering-consciousness, the processes of cognition is complete and there follows a series of subconsciousness, a passive state of mind like that in deep sleep.

Thus every time a sight is seen, from the appearance of the sense-door consciousness to the disappearance of the last registering-consciousness, there are altogether fourteen thought moments that complete a process of cognition in a regular process. If the impression of the object is not very strong, it survives only until the stage of impulsion. If very feeble when at death's door, impulsive consciousness occurs only five or six times. When the impression of the object is very obscure, the process of cognition runs up to the stage of determining-consciousness, after two or three thought moments of which the process of cognition comes to an end. When insight knowledge is very strong, the process does not advance to the stage of impulsion. It ends abruptly after two or three thought moments of determining and sinks back to the subconscious level.

This is in accordance with the meditation instructions given to the Venerable Potṭhila by the young novice who instructed that the process of cognition with respect to five sense-door consciousness should not sink to the stage of impulsion. As stated above, in the process of cognition with respect to visual-consciousness, the object is only the ultimate visible sight, not the conceptual form of a man or a woman. After running the complete process, it sinks down to the subconsciousness, which runs its course for some time. Then the process of cognition with respect to the mind-door (*manodvāravīthi*), arises through reflection on whatever has been seen. Arising from subconsciousness, the mind-door apprehending consciousness (*manodvārāvajjana*), appears, followed by the impulsion process, which runs for seven moments and the registering-consciousness, which lasts for two moments. The whole course, therefore, runs for ten thought moments after which it sinks down to the subconscious level again. In this thought-process, the object is just the reflection on the sight that has been seen, not yet on any misperception of previous experiences. When the reflective process of cognition takes

place for the second time, it is the concept of form and appearance that have become its object — the form and appearance of a man or a woman. When the process is repeated for the third time, it is the concept of name (of man or woman) that has become the object. From then onwards, every time there is a reflection on what has been experienced previously the object is always misconceived as, “I see a man,” or “I see a woman.” This is how consciousness plays conjuring tricks and produces misconceptions in place of realities.

### Summary of the Process of Cognition

1. In the first process of cognition of sight, consciousness registers only the ultimate reality of the sight.
2. In the first round of reflection on what has been seen, there is still consciousness of what has actually been seen, namely, the sight. No misconception has appeared yet. If at this stage, noting is done heedfully, misconception cannot come in. Cognition will rest only on the ultimate object.
3. In the second round of reflection, concept of form and shape of a man or a woman begin to appear.
4. In the third round of reflection, the concept of name as man or woman has appeared.

Likewise in the process of cognition of sound, odour, taste, and touch, the same sequence of transition from consciousness of reality to consciousness of concept takes place. When consciousness of sound, odour, *etc.*, arises or when the first round of reflection on what has been heard, smelt, *etc.*, occurs, if careful noting is done instantly as ‘seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or touching, misconception cannot come in. Consciousness will rest on the reality of what is actually cognised. That is the reason for noting, “Seeing,” “Hearing,” “Touching,” at the instant of each arising so that consciousness will remain with the reality. If a mental note is made as “Seeing, seeing,” while an object is being seen, the object of cognition will cease just with the fact of seeing, and the process of cognition of concepts through reflection on what was seen cannot occur. In accordance with the teaching: “Just seeing at the time of seeing (*diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ bhavissati*),” and consciousness of seeing ends its course right there. Then there appears the analytical knowledge of the unknowing matter such as the eyes and the sight of the body, and the knowing mind,

which is consciousness of the objects. There is also knowledge that seeing and noting appear recurrently, arising and vanishing. Realisation arises that there is only impermanence, suffering, and not-self.

Likewise with what is heard, smelt, tasted, touched, or thought about. Constant noting of these phenomena will reveal the difference between mind and matter, and their three characteristics. The realisation comes to the meditator, “Previously, because I did not take careful note of these phenomena, the misconceptions were believed to be real; what were just conjuring tricks were accepted as reality. Now that the phenomena are noted as they occur at the moment of their occurrence, no such thing as a self can be found; there is only incessant arising and vanishing. When seeing an object, the visual-consciousness immediately vanishes after it has arisen; there is no such thing as seeing for a long time; there is only fresh arising of visual-consciousness with each act of seeing and its instant vanishing. It is the same with hearing. There is no hearing for a long time. With each act of hearing, auditory-consciousness arises and vanishes instantly. There is no touching for a long time. At each act of touching, the tactile-consciousness arises and vanishes instantly. There is no thinking for a long time. With each act of thinking, mind-consciousness arises and vanishes instantly. Everything is impermanent. Arising is always followed by instant perishing; there is nothing reliable and trustworthy; there is only terror and suffering. Everything happens not as one wishes, but as conditioned by their own causes and circumstances, just natural phenomena that are not-self. Consciousness is merely a conjuring trick. It is impermanent, suffering, and not-self.

From this *Phenapiṇḍūpama Sutta* it is obvious that the five aggregates are devoid of any permanent substance, any wholesome or pleasant inner core that is subservient to one’s will. They are not-self, but insubstantial. I have made these points very clear.

I will conclude my discourse here for today. By virtue of having given respectful attention to this discourse on the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* may you all soon realise *nibbāna*, by means of the Path and its Fruition as you wish.

## PART FIVE

Delivered on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1963<sup>1</sup>

The series of discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta was begun on the 8th waxing day of June (Nayun). Already four discourses have been given with full expositions of the teaching on the five aggregates being not-self. From today, I will go on to the second part of the Sutta, which describes the aggregates in terms of the characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*) and unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*). However, before I deal with them, I wish to explain the characteristic of not-self and how this characteristic is hard to comprehend.

### The Characteristic of Not-self

All the mental and physical components of the five aggregates are not-self. That they are not-self becomes evident through their characteristics or signs. The Commentary describes these characteristics as follows:

1. That it is not amenable to one's will is a characteristic of not-self. In this Sutta this characteristic is expressed in these terms: "It is not possible to say of materiality, 'Let materiality be thus (all wholesome)'."
2. Further in this Sutta we find the expression, "It tends to affliction." Affliction or oppressing should thus be taken as another characteristic of not-self.
3. Also there is a query in the Sutta, "Is it fitting to consider it a self that which is subject to change?" Thus constant change and alteration is a characteristic of not-self.

When these characteristics are observed by noting mental and physical phenomena as they occur, the insight developed that the aggregates are not-self, but mere phenomena, is called knowledge by contemplation on the characteristic of not-self (*anattānupassanā-ñāṇa*). The Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta is so called because it deals with the characteristics of not-self.

The Sammohavinodanī Commentary states: "The characteristics of impermanence and suffering are easy to understand, but the characteristic of not-self is hard to understand." According to the Commentary, utterances easily come to the mouth: "Oh well, it was impermanent, nothing lasts forever," when a pot is dropped acciden-

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<sup>1</sup> The 8th waxing day of Wāso 1325 M.E.

tally and gets broken. Again, if afflicted with boils or sores on the body, or by pain due to being pierced by thorns or pointed sticks, one usually grumbles: “Oh drat, what suffering.” In this way the nature of impermanence and unsatisfactoriness are obvious and easy to understand. However, the characteristic of not-self is not so easy to comprehend just like an object lying in the dark is hard to explain to others. The characteristics of impermanence and unsatisfactoriness are well known either inside the Buddha’s dispensation or outside it. However, the characteristic of not-self is known only within the dispensation, and does not exist outside of it. The wise hermits such as [Sarabhaṅga](#) who were outside of the dispensation could teach only about the nature of impermanence and suffering; the doctrine of not-self was beyond them. If only they could have taught this doctrine, their disciples would have attained the knowledge of the Path and its Fruition. However, since they could not teach it, the attainment of nibbāna was impossible. It is a unique virtue of the Exalted One to be able to teach and explain the doctrine of not-self. Teachers outside of the dispensation could not fathom this doctrine, which is so subtle and profound. The Commentary states that the not-self doctrine is so deep that even the Enlightened One had to employ the characteristics of either impermanence or unsatisfactoriness, or both, to explain not-self.

The Subcommentary explains further: “In the above statement of the Commentary, the impermanence or unsatisfactoriness known outside the Buddha’s dispensation are merely conventional terms by means of which the idea of not-self could not be known. Only the impermanence or unsatisfactoriness realised in the absolute sense could be useful in explaining the doctrine of not-self. Making use of this explanation of the Subcommentary, I described conventional and real aspects of impermanence or unsatisfactoriness in my [Discourse on the Silavanta Sutta](#), reference to which may be made for further information on them.

### **Not-self Explained by Means of Impermanence**

In the Chachakka Sutta<sup>1</sup> of the Majjhimanikāya we find not-self explained by means of impermanence. According to this Sutta, the meditator should know the following six classes of six kinds:

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<sup>1</sup> M.iii.280.



1. Six internal sense-bases.
2. Six external sense-bases.
3. Six kinds of consciousness.
4. Six kinds of contact.
5. Six kinds of feeling.
6. Six kinds of desire.

Here “should know” means, according to the Commentary, means through insight, by means of the knowledge of the Noble Path. Therefore, whenever anything is seen, it should be noted mindfully so that one is aware of the eye and the sight, the visual-consciousness, the contact, and the feeling that arises on seeing. If liking and craving for the object seen develops along with seeing, that arising desire should also be noted as “liking liking.” Likewise, while hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking the six classes of six kinds of objects should be known. To the meditator who is aware of these by noting each phenomenon of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking the knowledge is gained personally that the eye, the sight, visual-consciousness, contact, and feeling arise and vanish. The meditator realises, “Previously, it was thought that there is a permanent entity, an enduring self. Now it is perceived by actual observation that there are only natural phenomena incessantly rising and vanishing. Perceiving no self, no living entity, the meditator may even wonder for whom one engages in meditation. Realisation that there is no self is attained through fully understanding the nature of impermanence.

In corroboration of this practical experience, the Blessed One continued: “The sensitive material quality of the eye, which serves as the base for visual-consciousness, arises and vanishes on every occasion of seeing; it is therefore impermanent, not an enduring entity, not a self. If one says, “The eye is self,” it will amount to saying that one’s self is arising and passing away, not stable. Therefore, it must be concluded that the impermanent material quality of the eye is not-self.” Likewise, similar conclusions may be drawn with respect to the sight, visual-consciousness, contact, and the feeling resulting from eye contact. Liking and desiring the sight are also not-self. This is how the six phenomena, which become prominent at the moment of seeing, are to be regarded as not-self. Similarly, the six classes of the six kinds of phenomena that are apparent at the moment of hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking should also be regarded as not-self.

### **Not-self Through Seeing Unsatisfactoriness**

Not-self is explained in terms of unsatisfactoriness in the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, which states: “Materiality tends to affliction because it is not-self.” That which oppresses is terrible suffering, and it is plain that suffering cannot be one’s self, one’s inner core.

### **Not-self Is Both Impermanent and Unsatisfactory**

To explain not-self in terms of both impermanence and unsatisfactoriness, the Blessed One said, “Materiality is not permanent. What is not permanent is unsatisfactory. what is unsatisfactory is not-self. What is not-self should be regarded with proper wisdom according to reality thus: ‘This is not mine; I am this not; this is not my self.’”

In brief, materiality is subject to change and suffering, and is therefore, not-self. It is improper to regard with acquisitiveness as mine what is really not-self; it is improper to think vainly of oneself as “I am,” “I can,” and so forth; it is improper to regard it as my self. In this way, materiality should be regarded as it really is. Similarly, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness are also shown to be not-self by their nature of impermanence and suffering. In the latter parts of the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta we will find not-self being described in terms of impermanence and unsatisfactoriness. The concept of impermanence and unsatisfactoriness is known and accepted outside of the Buddhist teaching too. However, the doctrine of not-self, that denies the existence of a living entity, is unacceptable to those outside of the Buddha’s dispensation. At the time of the Buddha, a certain wandering recluse by the name of Saccaka came to the Blessed One and disputed with him on this subject of not-self.

### **The Wanderer Saccaka**

There was a wandering recluse by the name of Saccaka, who was a teacher of the prince of Vesālī. The wandering recluse asked of Assaji, the youngest of the group of five monks, “How does the recluse Gotama teach his disciples, what are his instructions?” Assaji replied, “Materiality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness are impermanent and not-self, that is how the master Gotama teaches us. These are his instructions.” Upon this, Saccaka, the wandering recluse said, “Friend, we hear an utterance that is evil, unpropitious. We hear that the recluse Gotama teaches this doctrine

of not-self, to hear which is evil and unpropitious for us. One of these days we may have an opportunity to meet the recluse Gotama and rid him of this pernicious doctrine, the wrong view of not-self."

This is an example of how believers in the self look down upon this doctrine of not-self. To hear what the Blessed One has taught about not-self is utterly evil and baneful for them. The wandering recluse even talked about ridding the Blessed One of his "wrong view." Dogmatists are always of this frame of mind; they denigrate others, holding fast to their own views. Even those who are teaching in accordance with the Pāḷi Canon are disparaged. Such people who revile others are usually found to be deficient in their knowledge of the texts and inexperienced in meditation. Saccaka had not yet studied the Buddha's teaching and had no practical knowledge of the Dhamma. Yet he held a poor opinion of it, feeling himself very much superior to it. Therefore, he planned to go to the Blessed One and debate with him. He was confident he would be the winner in the contest and he wanted people to witness his victory. He went to the Licchavīs of Vesālī and invited them to accompany him, making a vain boast that he would whirl the Blessed One around like a powerful man, catching hold of a goat by its fleece, whirls it around.

When they reached the presence of the Blessed One, the wanderer asked permission from the Blessed One to put questions to him. He then asked, "Venerable Gotama, how do you instruct your disciples? What are the main points in your instructions?" The Blessed One's reply was exactly the same as that given by the Venerable Assaji namely, "Materiality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness are impermanent and not-self. This is how I instruct my disciples. These are the main points of my teaching."

Saccaka then introduced doctrinal matters into the discussion by way of similes. "Venerable Gotama, the seed and the shoot rely on the earth, and depend on it to grow into plants and trees. Likewise, every action that is done with strength needs the earth for support; and a person having materiality as the self, depends on it for both wholesome and unwholesome activities. Likewise a person having feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness as the self, depends on them for wholesome and unwholesome activities."

What is meant by this assertion is that: seeds and trees have to depend on the support of the earth for their growth; so also all kinds

of activities require strength. They need the firm support of the earth. Similarly, the wholesome and unwholesome activities are performed by individuals having materiality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness as self; dependent on the self the activities are carried out. Also, it is the self that reaps the (good or bad) fruits of those actions. If materiality were not-self, where would be the support for the performance of wholesome and unwholesome deeds; and who would enjoy the fruits of these actions? The Commentary says that it is outside the intellectual scope of disciples to solve this doctrinal matter of self, which is likened to the earth. Only the Blessed One could handle the problem. Accordingly, the Blessed One intending to tackle the problem, asked the wanderer, “Saccaka of the Aggivessana clan. Do you maintain that materiality is self, that feeling is self, perception is self, mental formations are self, consciousness is self?”

“Yes, Venerable Gotama, I hold that view and these people here also hold the same view.”

The Blessed One urged him, “Saccaka of the Aggivessana clan, leave aside others’ views; let us hear what you hold as your own.”

It was Saccaka’s intention to share the blame, if his view of self happens to be blameworthy with the others present there. However, the Blessed One urged him to confine his reply only for himself. He was thus forced to admit that he held that materiality was his self, feeling was his self, perception was his self, mental formations were his self, consciousness was his self.

Then the Blessed One asked him, “Saccaka of the Aggivessana clan, Rulers like King Pasenadi or King Ajātasattu hold sovereign powers in their own kingdoms. They execute those who should be executed, flog those who should be flogged, and banish those who should be banished, ruling as they wish; is this not a fact, Saccaka?”

Saccaka replied, “Sovereign kings do indeed have such authority over their own kingdoms. Even the Licchavis, who are elected to rule, hold such powers to execute, flog, or banish in their own country,” thus going beyond the bounds of the question put to him, not foreseeing what repercussions it would have on his beliefs.

Thereupon, the Blessed One said, “Saccaka of the Aggivessana clan you said, materiality is your self. Can you exercise control over that self, saying, ‘Let this self of mine be thus; let this self not be thus?’”

The wanderer Saccaka found himself on the horns of a dilemma. The doctrine of self maintains that it can exercise control as it wills. The clinging to self as the master, which I mentioned before, believes that it can manage the self as it wills. Saccaka had just admitted that sovereign kings had complete control over their own kingdoms, so it appeared that he would have to admit that materiality, which he regarded as self, would be amenable to management. If he did that, there would come the further questions whether he could exercise control over his own materiality to keep it youthful like that of the Licchavī princes. If he replied that it could not be managed, then that would amount to the admission that it could not be his self.

Finding himself in this impossible dilemma, Saccaka kept silent without giving any reply. The Blessed One repeated the question for the second time, but Saccaka remained silent. Before asking him for the third time, the Blessed One gave him this warning: "Saccaka of the Aggivessana clan, you should answer my question. It is not the time to remain silent. When questioned by a Tathāgata for a third time, one has to come up with an answer or else his head will split into into seven pieces." At that time a celestial ogre was said to be hovering above Saccaka's head. Armed with a thunderbolt, the ogre was poised to split open his head with the thunderbolt. The ogre was visible only to the Blessed One and Saccaka. It is somewhat like ghost manifestations of present days, the ghost being visible to some, but invisible to others. Saccaka was greatly frightened by the sight of the ogre; but when he saw the rest of the audience undisturbed in any way, he realised that the ogre was not visible to them. He could not therefore, say that he had to answer the way he did, being in terror threatened by the ogre. He knew also that he had no other refuge other than the Blessed One, to whom, therefore, he submitted: "May it please the Blessed One to restate the question; I am ready to answer." Thereupon, the Blessed One asked; "Saccaka of the Aggivessana clan, what do you think? You said that materiality is self. Could you say of that self, "Let materiality be thus, let materiality not be thus, according to your wish?"

"No, Venerable sir, there is no control over it" Saccaka replied, thereby contradicting what he had said earlier that materiality was the self. If materiality were self; it should be amenable to one's control. Now he said that there was no control over materiality. This amounts

to admission that materiality is not-self, not one's inner core. When the Blessed One heard him contradicting himself, he cautioned him thus: 'Saccaka of the Aggivessana clan, be careful what you say in reply. What you said later is not in accordance with what you said earlier. What you said earlier is not in accordance with what you said later. Now, Saccaka of the Aggivessana clan, what do you think of that? You said feeling is self. Could you say of that self, 'Let feeling be thus, let feeling not be thus,' according to your wish?'

"No, Venerable sir, there is no control over it."

The Buddha asked similar questions concerning perception, mental formations, and consciousness prefaced by the same caution not to contradict himself. Saccaka provided similar answers admitting that there was no control over any of them. Then the Blessed One asked him whether materiality is permanent or impermanent. He answered, "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

"What is impermanent, is that suffering or happiness 'Suffering Venerable sir,'" answered Saccaka.

"Then, what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as 'This is mine, I am this, This is my self?'

"It is not fitting, Venerable sir," he replied.

The same questions were repeated with regard to feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, and similar replies were given by Saccaka.

Then the Buddha questioned him further: "Saccaka of the Aggivessana clan, what do you think? A certain person holds fast to these aggregates of suffering, clinging to them, he is attached to them, and grasping them firmly, believes, 'This is mine, I am this, this is my self.' Is there any possibility for this person to understand suffering truly, and to put an end to suffering?"

This question is subtle and profound. "If someone takes delight in the aggregates of mind and matter, which manifest at the six sense-doors at every moment of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or knowing, and who thinks regarding them, 'I am this, this is mine, this is my self,' would this person know that these mental and physical aggregates are suffering? Would it be possible for him to put an end to this suffering, to eradicate this suffering?"

Saccaka provided the answers according to the questions asked. "Venerable Gotama how could it be possible for him to know the truth

of suffering, to eradicate suffering? It would be impossible Venerable Gotama. In that case, the Blessed One asked, "Are you not a person who holds fast to these aggregates of suffering, clinging to them, who is attached to them, grasping them firmly? A person who believes: 'This is mine, I am this, this is my self'?"

Saccaka replied, "Venerable sir, I am such a person, Venerable sir. How could it be otherwise?"

The wanderer Saccaka had thought very highly of his own belief in self. He was very vain with regard to it, and boasted about it, but when examined by the Blessed One he was forced to admit the error of his views. His belief in self, his self-view, was thoroughly repudiated. To give a final blow to his bloated ego, the Blessed One taught thus by way of a simile: "Saccaka of the Aggivessana clan, suppose a person wanting heartwood went into the forest to look for it. Seeing a plantain and hoping to find heartwood inside it, felled the plantain, cutting it down from the root. He cut off the top part of the plantain, and began to peel off the outer skin of the trunk. To say nothing of heartwood, he would not even find the outer wood that surrounds the inner pith in the plantain trunk. Exactly as in that example, when I examine your doctrine of self, it is found to be void of essence.

"Did you not make this boast amidst the crowd in the city of Vesālī: 'There is no one who can withstand me in any debate without trembling, without sweating. I have not yet come across any recluse or Brahmin who can withstand me without trembling or sweating, nor anyone who claims to be an Arahant, a fully accomplished worthy one, who claims to be Fully Enlightened. Even a lifeless wooden post, not endowed with mind or mental concomitants, when challenged by me in the matter of doctrine, would tremble and fall down, to say nothing of a human being.' Did you not make such boasts, Saccaka of the Aggivessana clan? As it is, the sweat from your armpits has soaked through your upper robe and is dripping on the ground. As for me, I have no sweat on my body."

So saying the Blessed One exposed a portion of his body to let the audience see for themselves, that there was indeed no sweat on his body. The wanderer Saccaka, having nothing to say in reply, remained silent, embarrassed, and crest-fallen, with drooping shoulders and his head lowered. Then one of his followers, a Licchavī prince by the name of Dummukha rose and asked permission from

the Blessed One to make an illustration. On being permitted by the Blessed One, Dummukha, the Licchavī prince, said, “Venerable sir, there is a tank not far from this town, and there was a crab living in that tank. The young people of the town came out and arriving at the tank, caught hold of the crab and placed it on the land. That crab raised its claws and feet, waving them about. Every time the crab raised its claws or feet, the young people smashed them, with sticks or pieces of pottery. With its limbs thus crushed, the crab could not make its way back to the tank. Similarly, the Blessed One has destroyed all of Saccaka’s wriggling (*visūkāyitāni*), trickery (*visēvitāni*), and writhing (*vipphanditāni*). There is no possibility for Saccaka to approach the Blessed One again to dispute over doctrinal matters.”

While Dummukha, the Licchavī prince was thus addressing the Blessed One, the other Licchavī princes were awaiting their turn to denounce the wanderer Saccaka by more illustrations. Seeing the dangerous situation developing in which the Licchavīs would be heaping disgrace on him, one after another, Saccaka decided to stop Dummukha from making further remarks. “Hold on Dummukha, we are discussing with the Venerable Gotama, not with you.” Then he addressed the Blessed One, “Venerable Gotama, let be what I said and what others have said. I wish to bring them to a close. They were just random talks.” Then he asked the Blessed One how one had to practise in the Buddha’s teaching to reach the stage where sceptical doubts were overcome and the courage of conviction was attained. The Blessed One taught him that one has to engage in the practice of meditation until attaining the stage where one can see, with insight and knowledge of the Path, that the five aggregates of materiality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, which are liable to be misconceived as, “This is mine, I am this, this is my self” as they really are, “This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.” Saccaka also wanted to know how to practise to become an Arahant. The Buddha told him that, after realisation that the aggregates are not-self, one has to continue practicing until one is free of all clinging and attachment.

What comes out of this dispute of Saccaka with the Blessed One is that there is a type of wrong-view that holds all the five aggregates to be self and that those who cling to self always think disparagingly of those who believe in the doctrine of not-self. There is another type of



wrong-view that holds only one of the aggregates to be not-self. This is evident from the self clinging of Bhikkhu Sāti, which I described in Part Four, and also from clinging to self as the experiencer or as the doer.

### **Refuting A Self Apart From the Five Aggregates**

There appears in modern times, still another type of self-view. As described in a book on Indian Philosophy. This new type of self clinging has no reference to the five aggregates; it lies apart from them. This must be rejected as just an opinion, for in the absence of the five aggregates, there can be no self clinging. Consider for a moment: if that self has no materiality, it cannot be experienced in any form or substance. If mentality still exists, there can be self clinging to be similar to the attachment of the ordinary person to the formless realm. However, if that mentality is not existent, then there is nothing to be attached to as one's self. If there is no feeling either, there can be no clinging to feelings, pleasant or unpleasant. In the absence of perception, no attachment can arise to recognising or remembering. Having no consciousness, nothing can be known, and since there are no mental formations such as volition, that self cannot do anything. Therefore that type of a self will exist only in name, it will be of no practical use, and no description of it can be given. Thus, although they assert that their self is apart from the five aggregates, it is obvious that their self clinging is on one of the five aggregates or on many of the five aggregates, or on all of the five aggregates. It is an impossibility to have any clinging to self apart from or outside of the five aggregates. Thus in the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, we find the words, "Materiality is not-self, feeling is not-self, perception is not-self, mental formations are not-self, consciousness is not-self," which refute all types of clinging, doing away with the possibility of self clinging that is said to exist apart from the five aggregates, and self clinging for two kinds of aggregates, three kinds, four kinds, or all five kinds of aggregates. If materiality is clung to as self, then the remaining four aggregates such as feeling, form part of that self, its attribute, its support and are also clung to as such. If one of the other aggregates such as feeling is clung to as self then the remaining four are also clung to as part of that self as its attribute and its support. All these types of self clinging are refuted by the statements, "Materiality is not-self," *etc.*

Now the Blessed One had talked fully about not-self, but to explain it further in terms of the characteristics of impermanence and unsatisfactoriness he continued:

*“Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, bhikkhave, rūpaṃ niccaṃ vā aniccaṃ vā”ti?*  
*“Aniccaṃ, bhante.”*

*“Yaṃ panāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vā taṃ sukhaṃ vā”ti?*  
*“Dukkhaṃ, bhante.”*

*“Yaṃ panāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vipariṇāmadhammaṃ, kallaṃ nu taṃ samanupassitum — ‘Etaṃ mama, esohamasmi, eso me attā’”ti?*  
*“No hetuṃ, bhante.”*

“What do you think, monks? Is materiality permanent or impermanent?”

“It is impermanent, Venerable sir.”

The Blessed One asked them whether materiality is permanent or impermanent. The group of five monks replied that it was impermanent, an answer that could have been given from ordinary knowledge gained by hearsay. However, what the Blessed One wanted was an answer based on their own knowledge. The group of five monks, having all become Stream-winners, had seen the truth and their answers were based on their own knowledge in accordance with the Blessed One’s wishes. The meditators at this centre, who have been practicing meditation, can also answer with their own knowledge. When the meditator notes the actions of rising and falling, he or she perceives the phenomenon of extension, pressure, or motion in the abdomen quite vividly. This phenomenon of extension, which was previously non-existent, manifests just as the abdomen begins to rise. This is then the arising of the phenomenon — its becoming. The beginning of the phenomenon is thus the rising of the abdomen, which comes under observation, and is duly noted. When the rising comes to an end, there is no more extension, pressure, or motion in the abdomen. They are said to terminate, disappear, cease, and pass away. Thus while the rising of the abdomen is being noted, the meditator also perceives this rising movement to pass away, to disappear. This dissolution immediately following its arising is the sure characteristic of impermanence. Realising this nature of imper-

manence in the course of noting the rising and falling of the abdomen is true insight into the nature of impermanence (*aniccānupassanā-ñāṇa*). This knowledge of the impermanence that accrues from noting the beginning and end of each arising phenomenon constitutes knowledge by comprehension (*sammasana-ñāṇa*), the first in a series of ten stages of insight knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*), developed through insight meditation. This knowledge by comprehension sees through only the beginning and the end of phenomenon of the same types of mental and physical phenomena — the details of what happens in between cannot be perceived yet. It is just the knowledge of impermanence that accrues from perceiving the coming into existence and dissolution of the presently occurring processes.

When noting the phenomenon of the rising movement, the beginning of the rising is perceived as well as its end. To know the beginning of the rising is to know its coming into existence, and to know the end of the rising is to know its dissolution, so there can be no misconception of it as being permanent. It is definitely impermanent. When noting the phenomenon of the falling movement, the contracting motion of the abdomen is distinctly seen. It is the element of motion. In seeing the beginning of the falling motion of the abdomen and its end, the phenomenon of the element of motion is being seen. The falling materiality was non-existent at the time of extension, it is only when the rising motion comes to an end, that the falling movement comes into being. Then the falling materiality vanishes, disappears instantly. So this falling materiality is also definitely impermanent.

### Why It Is Called Impermanent

It is impermanent because of its nature of coming to an end (*aniccam khayathena*). In accordance with this definition, the falling of abdomen, manifested by the contracting motion, comes to an end and ceases. Hence, it is impermanent. According to another Commentary's definition: "Having previously been non-existent, it comes into being and then dissolves and perishes, therefore it is impermanent (*huvā abhāvato aniccā*)."

While noting "Falling, falling," the beginning and end of the phenomenon of falling is perceived, and the meditator realises its impermanent nature. This is true knowledge of impermanence, which

understands the nature of impermanence, at the stage of knowledge by comprehension, by seeing the becoming and dissolution of the presently occurring processes." At the stage of knowledge of arising and passing away (*udayabbaya-ñāna*) during the interval of one cycle of rising and falling, three, four, or five distinct moments of the beginning and ending of the phenomenon can be noted. When the meditator comes to the stage of knowledge of dissolution (*bhaviṅga-ñāna*), during the interval of one cycle of rising and falling, numerous moments of dissolution will be seen to flit by. The materiality of rising and falling, being subjected to incessant dissolution is indeed impermanent.

When the bending or stretching of the limbs are mindfully noted, as "Bending, bending," "Stretching, stretching," the beginning and end of each bending or stretching is distinctly seen. It is seen thus because the respective movements are being carefully noted. A person who is not engaged in noting may not be aware of the bending or stretching of the limbs, and will not perceive the beginning of the motions separately from their ends. He or she will be under the impression that the hand that was there before bending or stretching remains there after the motion. When bending or stretching, it will be seen that there is a slow motion of the limbs gradually passing from one moment to another moment. At every occasion of bending or stretching, the beginning of the extending and moving is the coming into existence (becoming) of the material quality of the element of motion, and the end of the extending and moving is the dissolution of the element of motion. When noting the bending, to know the beginning and end of each bending is to know the arising and dissolution of the element of motion. Similarly, when noting the stretching, to know the beginning and end of each stretching is to know the arising and dissolution of the element of motion. During the time taken by a single act of bending and stretching, knowing the separate slow motions of the limbs gradually passing from one moment to another is also knowing the arising and dissolution of the element of motion whose characteristics are extension and movement. The gradual slow motion of the limb definitely brings out the nature of impermanence, which cannot be realised without heedfully noting each action.

While going, the meditator who is noting, "Right step, left step," knows the beginning and end of each step. This is knowing the arising and dissolution of the element of motion, which is responsible for

the extension and movement of the legs. Similarly the meditator who notes the movements of the legs in raising, moving, and dropping, knows separately the beginning and end of the movements. This is also knowing the arising and dissolution of the element of motion. Knowing the separate slow motions of the legs involved in each act of moving is also knowing the coming into being and dissolution of the element of motion. Thus the element of motion, responsible for the movement of each step, is arising and passing away with each step and is therefore impermanent.

When noting the feeling of touch that may be felt anywhere on the body, knowing the arising of the sensation and its disappearance is knowing the arising and dissolution of the material quality involved in touch. The meditator knows the arising and passing of the sensitive material quality of his or her own body as well as that of the tactile object. He or she realises that freshly arising material bodies are not stable, but impermanent because he or she has seen their incessant arising and passing away by actual noting.

When hearing and noting as "Hearing, hearing," the meditator notices the sound to be freshly arising and disappearing. This is knowing the arising and dissolution of sound. Thus the sound that arises every time a sound is heard is impermanent. Along with this material quality of the sound, the material quality of the ear on which sound makes its impression also arises afresh and disappears with the sound. So it may be said that once the arising and dissolution of sound is perceived, the arising and dissolution of the material quality of the ear is also known. Thus the meditator who notes the sound as "Hearing, hearing," every time a sound is heard, and knows the impermanent nature of the sound, also knows at the same time the impermanent nature of the material quality of the ear. The whistle from the rice-mill or the howling of dogs are generally regarded to be heard as one continuous sound, but to the meditator whose insight has grown strong, those sounds appear in minute portions, section by section, one after another. The meditator therefore realises that the material quality of sound also is arising and perishing very rapidly.

Likewise the meditator who notes, "Seeing, seeing" at the time of seeing an object knows, when insight gets highly developed, that visual-consciousness and seeing are rapidly appearing and disappearing. Then the visible form that arises afresh and perishes instantly

are impermanent. The material quality of the eye that arises and perishes simultaneously with the visible form is also impermanent.

While eating, the meditator who notes the taste as “Tasting, tasting” knows when the taste that appeared, immediately disappears. The taste that appears afresh and disappears is therefore impermanent. The impermanent nature of the taste is very prominent. However pleasant the taste is, it remains only for a short while on the tongue before it disappears. Just like the taste, the material quality of the tongue on which the taste manifests disappears simultaneously. Thus when the taste is seen to be impermanent, the material quality of the tongue is also seen at the same time to be impermanent.

The meditator who notes an odour knows that the odour keeps on appearing and disappearing, constantly renewing itself. Odour, which comes into being and gets dissolved instantly, is therefore impermanent, and the material quality of the nose that arises and vanishes simultaneously with the odour is also impermanent.

When thinking occurs while noting the rise and fall of abdomen, it has to be carefully noted. It will be observed that the thinking disappears even while it is being noted. Every time thinking disappears, the material quality on which thinking is based disappears too. This material base that arises and vanishes with every act of thinking is not enduring, it is impermanent.

What I have stated above is concerned with material qualities that can be stated to be impermanent by the meditator who has realised the knowledge personally by constantly noting the phenomena of the five aggregates. These material qualities relate to the whole of one’s body; they arise and dissolve, renewing themselves at every moment of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. Just like these material qualities from inside one’s body, the material qualities from the bodies of others are also simultaneously arising and vanishing. For instance, while noting the sound as “Hearing, hearing” the material quality of sound is perishing, so too are other material qualities in one’s body as well as those in the external world, which are also disappearing simultaneously. Thus the Blessed One asked regarding these material forms, which are impermanent because they are constantly dissolving, “Is materiality permanent or impermanent?” The group of five monks who had personal knowledge of their impermanence, replied, “Impermanent, Venerable sir.” I would also ask this audience:

Q: "Is materiality in your body permanent or impermanent?"

A: "Impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is materiality in other people's body, permanent or impermanent?"

A: "Impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is materiality in the whole world, permanent or impermanent?"

A: "Impermanent, Venerable sir."

### **The Characteristics of Impermanence**

These are questions concerning the characteristic of impermanence. When one knows the characteristic of impermanence thoroughly, one understands easily the characteristics of unsatisfactoriness and not-self. The characteristic of impermanence is that it does not endure. The Commentary defines it as: "Having previously been non-existent, it comes into being and then dissolves and perishes, therefore it is impermanent (*hutvā abhāvato aniccā*)." This is the characteristic of impermanence. Everyone knows that the streak of lightening did not exist before, then it came into being, signified by a flash. However, it did not last, but disappears instantly. The phenomenon of lightening shows all the characteristics of impermanence. Whatever arises afresh to disappear soon is said to have the characteristics of impermanence. "Having arisen, things cease to exist. This is the sign of impermanence."

### **Insight into the Nature of Impermanence**

The meditator who keeps on noting when seeing, hearing, *etc.*, sees things arising and ceasing. Only when one has acquired this personal knowledge of the characteristics of impermanent, is the true knowledge of impermanence developed. Seeing dissolution while noting, the meditator knows that it is impermanent. This knowledge is insight into the nature of impermanence (*aniccānupassanā-ñāṇa*). To help develop this knowledge the Blessed One asked, "Is materiality permanent or impermanent?" I have dealt fairly comprehensively with this question of impermanence. I will now go on with the question dealing with the characteristics of unsatisfactoriness.

"That which is impermanent, is it unsatisfactory or satisfactory?" asked the Blessed One.

The five monks replied, It is unsatisfactory, Venerable sir."

## Two Kinds of Suffering

There are two kinds of suffering. The first relates to unbearable pain or suffering, the second is unsatisfactory because it is terrible, objectionable, disgusting, and repulsive. The impermanence because of incessant arising and vanishing is not the painful kind of suffering. It belongs to the second kind in accordance with the Commentarial definition: "It is suffering because it is terrible, the phenomenon of incessant arising and perishing is terrible; fearsome, or synonymous with the Burmese idiom, 'It is not good'." The question, "That which is impermanent, is it suffering (*dukkha*) or happiness (*sukha*)," is the same as, "Is it bad or good?" The group of five monks replied, "It is suffering," or in Burmese idiom, "It is not good."

It is suffering, it is not good, because it is ever arising and perishing. It is impermanent, so it is terrible. People imagine it to be happy and good because it appears to be stable. When they realise that it does not endure even a second, and is constantly dissolving, they can no longer see any happiness or goodness in it. We depend for our existence on the five aggregates, which are constantly dissolving. If at any moment, the aggregates are not renewed, then we die, which is a terrible thing to know. It is just like living in an old dilapidated building liable to collapse at any time. In the case of such a building, there is the possibility that it may last for days, months, or even years before coming down; whereas the mental and physical aggregates do not endure even for a second. They are undergoing dissolution constantly, and are therefore terrible. Hence it is suffering, objectionable, undependable, and not good at all.

## Characteristics of Suffering

What are the characteristics of suffering? According to the Commentary: "Incessant, unceasing oppression is the characteristic mark of suffering (*abhiñha sampatīpilanākāro dukkha lakkhaṇaṃ*)."  
Here, ceaseless oppression means the incessant arising and passing away of mental and physical aggregates, which are therefore suffering, or 'not good.' Oppression by incessant origination and dissolution is the characteristic mark of suffering.

## Insight into the Nature of Suffering

Seeing the sign of suffering by personal experience and realising them to be terrible suffering, 'not good,' objectionable, not dependa-



ble is true insight into suffering (*dukkhānupassanā-ñāṇa*). While constantly noting the mental and physical phenomena starting from the rising and falling of the abdomen, the bending and stretching of the limbs, and the lifting, moving, and dropping of the feet, the meditator sees that origination and dissolution occur incessantly. Similarly, in noting every instance of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, the origination and dissolution is seen. The meditator begins to see that the mental and physical aggregates are oppressed by origination and dissolution. There is the possibility of death at any moment, hence the oppression is seen as terrible suffering. This is true insight into suffering.

To help develop this insight knowledge, the Blessed One asked, “That which is impermanent, is it suffering or happiness,” in other words “is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory?”

In the paragraph starting, “Materiality is not-self,” it is specifically mentioned. “Since materiality is not-self, it tends to affliction.” Therefore it is plain that materiality is terrible suffering, so the five monks gave the answer, “It is suffering, Venerable sir.” Having thus shown that materiality is impermanent and suffering, the Blessed One went on to urge the monks not to regard materiality as: “This is mine, I am this, this is my self,” by saying, “That which is impermanent, suffering, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as: ‘This is mine, I am this, this is my self?’”

The five monks replied, “It is not fitting, Venerable sir.”

### **Clinging to Things as Mine**

Of the above three forms of grasping, “This is mine” is clinging with craving; “I am this” is clinging with conceit; “This is my self” is clinging with wrong-view. When one has taken delight in an object with craving, even if the object does not belong to oneself, it is grasped with craving as if it were one’s own. On seeing delightful objects in the shops, one takes delight in them as if one already owned them. One imagines putting on jackets and longyis<sup>1</sup> that one likes. One also imagines trying on shoes, as if they were already one’s own. One grasps everything, animate or inanimate, as if it were one’s own if one likes them. Therefore, the Blessed One asked, whether it was wise to grasp and take delight as, “This is mine,” regarding things that are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, whether

<sup>1</sup> A longyi is long skirt worn by both men and women (ed.)

it is fitting to delight in terrible suffering. The matter in one's own body is constantly originating and dissolving. If one sees this arising and dissolution as it really is, one would be fearful just like having to live in a dilapidated building. Even though one might feel well and happy at the present moment, a change for the worse may occur depending on circumstances. Once it is realised that it is not enduring even for a moment, always changing, and therefore terrible suffering, how could one take delight in it? Would anyone choose with great pleasure as one's life partner, someone who is going to become an invalid within hours or days or who is going to die soon. No one would take delight in such a course of action if they really know what is about to happen. Likewise the meditator who sees the unceasing process of origination and dissolution of the aggregates finds only terrible suffering in them. Finding them as such, the meditator has no desire to grasp materiality as "This is mine." The group of five monks therefore answered that it is not fitting to regard materiality as mine. This is an account of the questions and answers on how, having seen the characteristics of suffering, it is unfitting to take delight in it as happiness, as something that is satisfactory.

### **Clinging With Conceit**

To consider materiality as "I am this," is to cling to it with conceit. When one has good sense-faculties and can see or hear well, one takes pride in them: "I have good eyes and ears," "I look beautiful," "I have a pleasing voice," "I am healthy," "I am strong." Is it fitting to cling to materiality in this way with conceit?

Conceit is developed regarding one's possessions when there is a misconception that they are permanent. The material qualities of eyes, ears, visible forms, *etc.*, are wrongly regarded as permanent, and consequently, vanity develops about them. Take for instance the case of a person who has a cache of gold or silver hidden in a certain place. The owner is full of pride over this wealth. However, if he or she learns that the cache has been robbed and he or she no longer owns any treasure, the bubble of conceit is burst. Likewise, clinging to the material qualities of eyes, *etc.*, which become manifest at the moment of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, and thinking they are still in existence, conceit is developed about them. The meditator who notes constantly knows that they all vanish after they have arisen and finds no reason

to be proud as “I have good eyes,” or “I am beautiful.” Therefore when the monks were asked, “Is it fitting, to regard materiality as ‘I am this,’” their reply was, “It is not fitting, Venerable sir.” The Blessed One let it be known by means of this dialogue that there is conceit when things are conceived as permanent; there is no conceit when they are known to be impermanent.

### **Clinging With Wrong View**

Holding on to the belief “This is my self” is clinging with wrong-view. This wrong view is held fast when there is belief that the materiality in one’s person is everlasting, and amenable to one’s control. When knowledge arises that it is unstable, constantly arising and vanishing, and unsatisfactory because it is unstable and subject to dissolution, there is no more reason to cling to materiality as a self, as a living entity. When the meditator knows that materiality cannot be controlled by wishing, “Let everything be pleasant and wholesome, let nothing unpleasant or bad happen, let all pleasant materiality remain permanently,” there is nothing to cling to as a self. Thus to the question, “Is it fitting to regard materiality as ‘This is my self,’” the five monks replied. “No, Venerable sir.”

With this question the Blessed One made it clear that when it is known that materiality is changing at every instant, there is no more clinging. According to this question, changing at every instant should also be taken as a characteristic mark of not-self. To recapitulate, I will ask the audience here, who should reply as they think fit.

**Q:** “Is materiality permanent or impermanent?”

**A:** “It is impermanent, Venerable sir.”

**Q:** “That which is impermanent, is it suffering or happiness?”

**A:** “It is suffering, Venerable sir.”

**Q:** “Is impermanence good or bad?”

**A:** “It is bad, Venerable sir.”

**Q:** “Is it fitting to regard that which is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change as, ‘This is mine’ and take delight in it?”

**A:** “No, Venerable sir.”

**Q:** “Is it fitting to get conceited, believing that ‘I am this.’”

**A:** “No, Venerable sir.”

Q: "Is it fitting to cling to it thinking, 'This is my self'?"

A: "No, Venerable sir."

We should also recite the questions asked by the Blessed One and the answers provided by the group of five monks.

Q: "Monks, what do you think? Is materiality permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "That which is impermanent, is it terrible suffering or delightful happiness?"

A: "It is terrible suffering, Venerable sir."

Q: "That which is impermanent, unsatisfactory, suffering, and subject to change, is it fitting to regard that as 'This is mine, I am this, This is my self'?"

A: "Indeed not, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is feeling permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir." ...

Q: "Is perception permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir." ...

Q: "Are mental formations permanent or impermanent?"

A: "They are impermanent, Venerable sir." ...

Q: "Is consciousness permanent or impermanent?"

A: Impermanent Venerable sir." ...

A: "Indeed not, Venerable sir."

I dealt with the characteristics of impermanence in the first part of today's discourse; in the latter part, I have gone over all three characteristics stated in the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta in the form of a dialogue. My exposition on the aggregate of materiality is almost complete. I will deal with the dialogue concerning the aggregates of feeling, *etc.*, in my next discourse, so I will stop here for today.

May you all, by virtue of having given respectful attention to this discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, soon attain nibbāna, by means of the Path and its Fruition as you wish.

## PART SIX

Delivered on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> July 1963<sup>1</sup>

I have already delivered five discourses on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta. So far I have explained the teaching on how the five aggregates are not-self and have dealt with the three characteristics concerning materiality. I will go on to the questions and answers on whether feeling is permanent or impermanent.

### Feeling Is Impermanent

*“Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, bhikkhave, vedanā niccā vā aniccā vā”ti. “Aniccā, bhante.” “Yaṃ pana’ niccaṃ dukkhaṃ vā taṃ sukhaṃ vā”ti. “Dukkhaṃ bhante.” “Yaṃ panā’ niccaṃ dukkhaṃ viparināma-dhammaṃ, kāllaṃ nu taṃ samanupassituṃ ‘Etaṃ mama, eso ‘hamasmi eso me atta’ti,” “No hetāṃ bhante.”*

The Blessed One asked: “Is feeling permanent or impermanent?” The group of the five monks replied, “It is impermanent, Venerable sir.”

I have spoken about feeling to a certain extent in the previous sections, but as it is the turn of feeling to be considered according to the Sutta, I will explain a little more about it. Feeling is of three kinds — pleasant feeling or happiness, unpleasant feeling or unhappiness, and neutral feelings that are neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Ordinary people regard all these three types of feeling as being a self, a living being, enduring, and permanent. This form of clinging is called clinging to an abiding self and clinging to an experiencer. The former is a belief in a permanent entity or self in one’s person. Ordinary people believe that there exists a living entity or self in their body from the time of conception to the time of death. Some believe that it continues to exist even after death. This same permanent entity in the body is the one that feels pleasant or unpleasant feelings. This self feels happy in body and mind; the same self feels unhappy or uncomfortable on certain occasions. Thus they believe that the feelings last forever. Actually, when feeling happy, there is no unpleasant or neutral feeling. When feeling unhappy, there is no pleasant or neutral feeling. Similarly when feeling equanimous, there is no pleasant or unpleasant feeling. There is no feeling that is

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<sup>1</sup> The new moon day of Wāso and the 8th waxing day of Wāgaun, 1325 M.E.

everlasting. Whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, it arises depending on its conditions, lasts for only a moment, and then disappears. The non-meditator who is unable to follow the feelings as they arise is liable to have the impression that all three feelings are co-existent. Thus while one is feeling a painful physical sensation one may hear some glad news and feels happy about it. Or one may be enjoying a pleasant physical sensation when one happens to think about an unhappy event and feels unhappy. On these occasions, it is usually believed that both pleasant and unpleasant sensations are felt simultaneously. It is believed to be so, because one lacks the ability to distinguish between two minds or two feelings, the preceding one as distinct from the following one. In reality, the feelings arise only one at a time, and one after another.

Therefore when the meditator who is constantly engaged in noting phenomena arising and vanishing, notices the appearance of a painful physical feeling, he or she should pay careful attention to it and note it continuously as “painful, painful.” If the concentration is strong enough, the unbearable pain decreases in intensity as it is noted, and will finally disappear. For some meditators, the pain will vanish completely in a short time as if removed by the hand. When there is no painful or pleasant feeling to note, the meditator reverts to noting the usual phenomena of the abdominal movements. This amounts to contemplating neutral feeling. While thus engaged in contemplating neutral feelings, if pleasant feeling arises, attention should be switched to it. Similarly, attention should be given to an unpleasant feeling if it happens to arise. Noting the pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings in this way as they occur, the meditator learns from personal experience that they are not everlasting. This is analytical knowledge of each kind of feeling as it occurs in the continuity of the present.

The meditator who has advanced to the stage of knowledge of arising and passing away and knowledge of dissolution while noting the pleasant feeling finds that such pleasant feelings vanish and cease bit by bit, the ordinary phenomenon of rise and fall is also found to be passing away bit by bit. When pleasant feeling and neutral feeling appear in their turn, they are noted separately and not as one continuous phenomenon or process. Similarly with unpleasant feeling appearing along with neutral feeling, they are noted as two

distinct feelings. The meditator observing in this way perceives that each feeling arises and disappears instantly, which drives home the fact that feeling is not everlasting. This is knowing the phenomena bit by bit in the present moment. The meditators who are watching the phenomena of rising, falling, feeling painful, *etc.*, are doing so to see each phenomenon, bit by bit, in its momentary present. The meditator who is observing phenomena as they arise at the six sense-doors while noting, "Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or thinking," perceives clearly how the pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral sensual feelings vanish immediately after they have arisen. Thus the meditator realises from personal experience that all feelings have are impermanent. The group of five monks, having reached the stage of Stream-winning through contemplating in a similar way, in reply to the question, "Is feeling permanent or impermanent?" from their own personal experience replied, "It is impermanent, Venerable sir." I will also ask the audience similar questions, which they may answer as they see fit.

Q: "Is the unbearable pain in the body, permanent or impermanent?"

A: "Impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "It is impermanent because the pain was not here before. It arose just at that moment. Did it not?"

A: "Yes it did, Venerable sir."

Q: "While noting that pain as 'painful, painful,' did it vanish, or did it not?"

A: "It vanished, Venerable sir." "

Q: "For the meditator whose concentration is getting quite strong, each sensation of pain disappears with each noting as 'painful.' As one sensation disappears, a fresh one arises only to vanish instantly. Is it not perceived thus?"

A: "Yes, it is perceived in this way, Venerable sir."

Q: "When noting with very good concentration, some pleasant feelings may be observed appearing in the body. When these feelings are noted as 'Pleasant, pleasant,' they disappeared quickly, didn't they?"

A: "Yes, they did, Venerable sir."

Q: “Disappearing thus, are these pleasant feelings permanent or impermanent?”

A: “They are impermanent, Venerable sir.”

Q: “Sometimes unhappiness or worries make their appearance. When these were noted as ‘Unhappy’ or ‘Worry,’ they disappeared, didn’t they? So are they permanent or impermanent?”

A: “They are impermanent, Venerable sir.”

Q: “Sometimes, happiness will arise; when noted as ‘Gladness, happiness,’ it will disappear. Is it permanent or impermanent?”

A: “It is impermanent, Venerable sir.”

Q: “When seeing a pleasant sight, there arises an agreeable feeling, which also disappears when noted. Is it permanent or impermanent?”

A: “It is impermanent, Venerable sir.”

Q: “In a similar way, an unpleasant sight, which causes a disagreeable feeling, disappears when noted. Pleasant or unpleasant feelings, which arise from hearing, smelling, or tasting also disappear when noted. Are these feelings permanent or impermanent?”

A: “They are impermanent, Venerable sir.”

Q: “When noting, neither pleasant nor unpleasant, but just ordinary objects of contemplation such as the rising and falling of the abdomen, the feeling observed is a neutral one, which also disappears with every noting. Is that permanent or impermanent?”

A: “It is impermanent, Venerable sir.”

Q: “All the three feelings pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral, are they permanent or impermanent?”

A: “They are impermanent, Venerable sir.”

When these three feelings — pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral — are perceived to be impermanent, it is also realised that they are unsatisfactory and not-self; that they are just phenomena. Perceiving them to be suffering and not-self, the Blessed One continued to ask:

Q: “That which is impermanent, is that suffering or happiness?”

A: “It is suffering, Venerable sir.”



We have dealt with this fully before so it doesn't need much more elaboration. People like pleasant feelings or so-called happiness, thinking that they are enduring. On seeing that they rapidly dissolve every moment, not lasting even for a tenth of a second, they lose their passion for them. Just for the sake of enjoying so-called happiness, they have to pursue it, not just for one hour, one day, or one year, but for their entire life. While in pursuit of happiness, people meet their death. There is nothing that anyone can rely upon. Even if the happiness one is seeking is not obtained, one has to find means of avoiding unhappiness, that is, of maintaining oneself in a neutral condition of neither happiness nor unhappiness. Even as the neutral feeling of neither happiness nor unhappiness is being sought out, physical pain and mental anguish may arise, causing suffering. They can appear because the happy and neutral feelings are impermanent. Thus happy and neutral feelings are also not dependable. To seek them is suffering. When they disappear it is also suffering because unhappy feelings take their place. Especially after the disappearance of a happy feeling, one may be plunged into the depths of despair. Take for instance the plight of parents who have taken delight in the presence of their children, when suddenly deprived of them through death or separation. Similarly, someone who has enjoyed wealth and affluence, may despair if deprived of them. They will all become victims of intense unhappiness, which may even lead to suicide. Feeling is terrible due to its nature of impermanence. Coming to the next paragraph of the Pāḷi text:

“That which is impermanent, suffering and subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as, “This is mine, I am this, this is my self.”

“It is not fitting, Venerable sir.”

This is the same method that was employed when explaining materiality. The difference is that in the case of materiality, the term involves not only the material qualities inside one's person, but also all those external animate and inanimate objects too. In the case of feeling, the main thing is the internal one, which one grasps as one's own. One takes delight with craving in feelings of happiness: “This is mine.” The neutral feeling, being devoid of unpleasantness, has the same nature as a happy feeling. Although attachment is not as

strong as with a happy feeling, there is still delight to some extent in the very fact of being neither pleasant nor unpleasant, but just neutral. The unpleasant feeling is, no doubt, undesirable, but thinking, "It is I who is suffering," there is still grasping to it as affecting a self. Attachment to the feeling in this way is brought about by ignorance of the true nature of impermanence, suffering, and changeability. The meditator who notes the feeling as it occurs knows its oppressive nature at once. What is the difference between the meditator and the ordinary person with regard to their knowledge about feeling? There is indeed a very great difference. The ordinary person perceives feeling in terms of self: "I suffer," "I feel happy," "I feel pain while delighting in happiness," "If this pain goes away, I will feel happy."

So an ordinary person views all feelings in terms of a self, whereas the meditator knows from the very outset, there is just continuous phenomena of the aggregates arising and perishing incessantly. When unhappy feeling appears, the meditator perceives it as an undesirable intrusion occurring in the continuous mental and physical process, which constantly renews itself. The meditator perceives it as another process of arising and perishing superimposed on the first that was being observed. From its very first appearance, the meditator recognises its oppressive nature just like a thorn that comes to be embedded in the flesh. The happy feeling appears to be pleasant while it is happening, but the effort that has to be made to seek out pleasant feelings, is suffering. If an unwholesome act is done in the pursuit of pleasant feelings, suffering has to be faced in the states of loss to which one will be doomed by the unwholesome deeds. Taking delight in the pleasant sensations that arise will keep on renewing the cycle of existences, resulting in the suffering of aging and death. When that happy feeling disappears, the attachment to it will give rise to intense unhappiness, so happy feeling should be regarded as suffering. I have already explained this, as well as how neutral feeling is also regarded as suffering due to its impermanence.

The Daṭṭhabba Sutta<sup>1</sup> in the Vedanā Saṃyutta of the Saḷāyatana-vaggo describes how these three types of feelings should be regarded:

*"Yo sukhaṃ dukkhato adda, dukkhamaddakkhi sallato.  
Adukkhamasukhaṃ santaṃ, addakkhi naṃ aniccato."*

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<sup>1</sup> S.iv.207.

“The monk has seen pleasant feeling as suffering, the unpleasant feeling as a thorn, and the neutral feeling as suffering too because of its impermanence.”

That is, the monk has seen feelings rightly and thoroughly (so notions of permanence, happiness, and self do not arise) knowing comprehensively what should be known.

The meditator who is constantly engaged in noting sees the unpleasant feeling as oppressive like a thorn in the flesh; the pleasant feeling as frightful suffering due to having to pursue it and because of the pain it causes when it is unattainable or lost. The neutral feeling is seen as suffering because of its impermanence and the effort or volitional activities required to maintain it. Thus when asked whether it is fitting to regard feeling as “This is mine, I am this, this is my self,” the group of five monks replied, “No indeed, Venerable sir.”

I will also ask questions in accordance with the Pāli text. The audience may reply as they see fit:

Q: “Is pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling, permanent or Impermanent?”

A: “It is impermanent, Venerable sir.”

Q: “That which is impermanent, is it suffering, or happiness?”

A: “Suffering, Venerable sir.”

Q: “That which is impermanent, suffering, subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as ‘This is mine, and take delight in it?’”

A: “No, Venerable sir.”

Q: “Is it fitting to get conceited by regarding it as ‘I am this,’ or to be attached to it as, ‘This is my self?’”

A: “No, Venerable sir.”

Feeling, is impermanent because of incessant arising and vanishing, so it is suffering. It is thus taught not to regard it as, “This is mine, I am this, this is my self,” to avoid the arising of craving and conceit, and, for the ordinary person, not to arouse the wrong view, “This is my self.” That feeling is not-self is explained in terms of its characteristics of impermanence and unsatisfactoriness. That it is not-self is very clear from its nature of oppressing, the characteristic mark of terrible suffering.

I have dealt sufficiently with feeling. I will now go on to consider perception starting with the Pāli Text:

### Perception Is Impermanent

*“Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, bhikkhave, saññā niccā vā aniccā vā”ti. “Aniccā, bhante.” “Yaṃ pana’ niccaṃ dukkhaṃ vā taṃ sukhaṃ vā”ti. “Dukkhaṃ bhante.” “Yaṃ panā’ niccaṃ dukkhaṃ viparināma-dhammaṃ, kāllaṃ nu taṃ samanupassituṃ ‘Etaṃ mama, eso ‘hamasmi eso me atta’ṭī,” “No hetāṃ bhante.”*

The Blessed One asked: “What do you think, monks? Is perception permanent or impermanent?” The group of the five monks replied, “It is impermanent, Venerable sir.”

Perception (*saññā*) is of six kinds: recognizing and remembering visible objects, sounds, odours, tastes, touches, and ideas. It is perception that remembers objects that one has seen before. It is essential to learn and remember what one is studying. Clear perception can remember for a long time anything seen or heard only once. This retentiveness is wrongly taken to be everlasting, to be good, and to be self. However, having recognised what it has seen, perception vanishes. Whatever is recognised later is the function of the perception that arises later. The same applies to hearing, *etc.* What is heard and remembered first vanishes, followed by what is heard and recognised later. The meditator who is noting everything seen or heard perceives that the two processes of seeing and recognising, hearing and recognising, vanish together. Knowing this, he or she concludes that perception is also impermanent. The group of five monks, knowing the same fact, when asked whether perception is permanent or impermanent, replied, “It is impermanent, Venerable sir.” Because they found the words of the Blessed One, even while being heard and recognised, vanished immediately:

Q: “That which is impermanent, is that suffering or happiness?”

A: “Suffering, Venerable sir.”

Q: “Is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory?”

A: “It is unsatisfactory, Venerable sir.”

Q: “That which is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as, “This is mine, I am this, this is my self?”

A: “It is not fitting, Venerable sir.”

These are the same types of questions and answers that we have discussed before. It is necessary to know only how perception is attached to with craving, conceit, and wrong view. Generally people who cannot contemplate the mental phenomenon of perception are pleased with it, clinging to it as, "This is mine." One thinks that one has a more retentive memory than others and is proud of it: This is clinging by conceit, "I am this." One thinks too that every act of seeing or hearing is recognised and remembered by oneself, which is clinging to perception as, "This is my self." Actually, the perception that retains every object is impermanent since it arises and vanishes instantly. The meditator who is ever watchful knows perception to be impermanent because it is seen to be arising and vanishing instantly. It is unpleasant and suffering because of its impermanence. Perception may retain memories of abominable, terrible things and is therefore, oppressive and unsatisfactory. It does not exist in one form, but keeps on changing. Therefore perception is, after all, not desirable as something pleasant, there is nothing to take pride in as everlasting, and nothing to cling to as a self, a living entity.

Therefore, the group of five monks replied that it was not fitting to regard perception as "This is mine, I am this, this is my self."

I will now ask questions pertaining to perception; you may answer in any way that you see fit.

Q: "Is perception permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "That which is impermanent, is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory?"

A: "It is unsatisfactory, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is it good or bad?"

A: "It is bad, Venerable sir."

Q: "That which is impermanent, suffering, subject to change, is it fitting to delight in it taking it as, 'This is mine'?"

A: "It is not fitting, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is it fitting to take pride in it, thinking, 'I am this'?"

A: "It is not fitting, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is it fitting to cling to it with wrong-view as, 'This is my self'?"

A: "It is not fitting, Venerable sir."

These questions are asked so that you won't cling with craving and pride to impermanent, suffering, and changing perceptions as "This is mine, I am this." Also so that ordinary people won't cling to it with wrong-view. I have dealt sufficiently with perception. I will go on to explain the teaching with regard to mental formations.

## Mental Formations Are Impermanent

*"Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, bhikkhave, saṅkhārā niccā vā aniccā vā"ti. "Aniccā, bhante." "Yaṃ pana' niccaṃ dukkhaṃ vā taṃ sukhaṃ vā"ti. "Dukkhaṃ bhante." "Yaṃ panā' niccaṃ dukkhaṃ viparināma-dhammaṃ, kāllaṃ nu taṃ samanupassituṃ 'Etaṃ mama, eso 'hamasmi eso me atta'tī," "No hetuṃ bhante."*

The Blessed One asked: "What do you think, monks? Are mental formations permanent or impermanent?" The group of five monks replied, "They are impermanent, Venerable sir."

Mental formations (*saṅkhārā*) are the volitional motivation responsible for physical, verbal, and mental actions. In the abstract sense, they are the fifty kinds of mental concomitants headed by volition (*cetanā*), which I talked about earlier. Mental formations or volitional activities cover an extensive field. The motivating power behind all physical actions such as going, standing, sitting, lying down, bending, stretching, moving is mental formations. Verbal actions are also caused by the same mental formations. I am now talking as urged on by mental formations. While thus talking and reciting, every word uttered has been primed by mental formations. It is mental formations too that are behind all thoughts and imaginations. Ordinary people think that the aforesaid actions are being done by a self and that this self or doer is believed to be enduring. However, the meditator who is ever watchful of the rising and falling of the abdomen notes any mental activity as soon as it occurs. Volition accompanied by desire is perceived by the meditator to arouse the desire to want something, and urges a person to pursue the desired object. The meditator notes these mental activities as, "Liking," "Wanting." When associated with hatred (*dosa*), volition appears as anger or rage that must be noted as "Angry, raging." When lead by delusion (*moha*), wrong actions are thought about; these thoughts have to be noted. When associated with conceit, or ego, one becomes

bloated with pride and one has to get rid of it by noting, "Conceit, pride." When accompanied by envy, jealousy, or avariciousness, it should be noted as such. When volition associated with faith and confidence appears, devotion and piety develop towards the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, urging one to pay homage and show respect. These thoughts are to be noted as they arise as "Devotion," "Piety," *etc.* Demerit leads to unpleasant results. Volition may manifest, discouraging one from it, hindering it. Merit leads to pleasant results. Volition may arise, encouraging one to practice it.

Volition may manifest in many ways and should be noted as it occurs. It may appear accompanied by mindfulness, heedful that a wholesome act will be done at such and such a time. It may arise in various ways and the mental attitudes of those moments should also be noted. When loving-kindness arises with volition, feelings of benevolence appear, thinking of ways to make others happy. With compassion, volition arises having pity on others and thinking of how to help them escape from suffering. All these mental attitudes should be carefully noted.

While noting the rise and fall of the abdomen, if feelings of stiffness or heat appear, they should be noted. As these are being noted, thoughts urging one to bend, stretch, and change posture may occur. These have to be noted too. Then there is the urge to lower or raise the head, to move forward or backward, *etc.*, to get up and walk. These are physical activities conditioned and willed by volition, which should all be noted. Then there is volition concerning verbal activities, urging and directing what to say and how to say it, just as now when I am saying things as willed by volition.

The meditator who keeps constant track of all these volitional activities knows from personal experience that they appear and vanish instantly and are therefore, impermanent. The group of five monks became Stream-winners through their personal knowledge of the nature of impermanence. While listening to this discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, they saw again the nature of impermanence by perceiving the constant rising and falling of the mental formations such as contact, volition, attention, confidence, and mindfulness. Thus to the question:

**Q:** "Are mental formations permanent or impermanent?" they replied,

**A:** "They are impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "That which is impermanent, is it suffering or happiness?"

A: "It is suffering, Venerable sir."

Q: "That which is impermanent, suffering and subject to change, is it fitting to regard that as "This is mine, I am this, this is my self"?"

A: "It is not fitting, Venerable sir."

These are the same types of the questions and answers that we have dealt before. We have only to know here how mental formations could be clung to with craving, conceit, and wrong-view and how to become free of this clinging. Ordinary persons who cannot heedfully note mental and physical phenomena as they occur believe that mental formations headed by volition are good and pleasant, and so take delight in them. This is clinging with craving.

To think that these activities are performed by oneself, that one can perform them better than others, is clinging with conceit. Thinking that activities such as going, stopping, sitting, bending, stretching, moving, *etc.*, are being done by me, "I did it, it is I who does this action; I talk, it is I who talk; I think, it is I who thinks; I see, hear, look, listen; it is I who sees, hears, looks, listens," *etc.*, is clinging with wrong view. As the clinging is in the person of the doer, it is known as clinging to self as the doer (*kāraṇa attā*). Believing that all physical, verbal, and mental actions are being done by a self is clinging to self as the doer. Believing that this self resides permanently in one's person is clinging to an abiding self (*nivāsī attā*).

This self, which is said to reside permanently in one's person, goes when it wants to go; stands, sits, bends, stretches, talks, or thinks, when it wants, whenever it wishes, and is subject to one's control. Believing thus is clinging to self as the master (*sāmi attā*). The meditator who is ever watchful of mental and physical phenomena perceives that arising activity such as the desire to think, see, hear, bend, stretch, change posture, get up, go, or talk, vanishes instantly after it has been noted. Therefore, all of these activities, which are arising and vanishing incessantly, are impermanent. They are therefore not delightful or dependable, but are merely suffering. This is concluded through personal knowledge. Therefore, the meditator realises that there is nothing to cling to as, "This is mine;" nothing to take pride in, as "I am this;" and nothing to regard as, "This is my self." The group of five monks realised in a similar way and become Stream-winners. While



listening to this discourse, they perceived the volitional activities arising and perishing. Therefore they replied to the Blessed One that it was not fitting to regard that which is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change as, "This is mine, I am this, This is my self."

I will now ask questions regarding the mental formations. The audience may reply as they see fit.

Q: "Is the effort to do permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is the thought of doing permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is the desire to bend, stretch, change position, get up, to go, raise the legs, step forward, drop down, permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is the desire to turn back, to stand, or sit down, permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is the desire to see, talk, eat, chew, permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "That which is impermanent, is it pleasant or unpleasant? Is it good or not good?"

A: "It is not good, Venerable sir."

Q: "That which is impermanent, suffering, subject to change, is it fitting to delight in it regarding it as, 'This is mine'?"

A: "It is not fitting, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is it fitting to get conceited regarding it as 'I am this'?"

A: "It is not fitting, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is it fitting to cling to it as 'This is my self'?"

A: "It is not fitting, Venerable sir."

These questions are asked to prevent clinging to mental formations with craving and conceit as, "This is my idea," "I can work it out," and for ordinary people to avoid clinging to mental formations with self-view. This should be enough explanation on mental formations. I will now go on to consider consciousness.

## Consciousness is Impermanent

*“Taṃ kiṃ maññātha, bhikkhave, viññāṇaṃ niccā vā aniccā vā”ti. “Aniccā, bhante.” “Yaṃ pana’ niccaṃ dukkhaṃ vā taṃ sukhaṃ vā”ti. “Dukkhaṃ bhante.” “Yaṃ panā’ niccaṃ dukkhaṃ viparināma-dhammaṃ, kāllaṃ nu taṃ samanupassituṃ ‘Etaṃ mama, eso ‘hamasmi eso me attā’ī,” “No hetāṃ bhante.”*

The Blessed One asked: “What do you think, monks? Is consciousness permanent or impermanent?” The group of five monks replied, “They are impermanent, Venerable sir.”

The term consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is not commonly employed as mind. Even mental concomitants such as volition, greed, and hatred are referred to as mind, because mind plays a leading role. Here, I will also generally use the term ‘mind’ instead of ‘consciousness.’

Those who cannot watch and note the mind as it is arising, imagine that the mind is enduring and permanent, thinking that the same mind that is conscious of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or thinking is the same mind that sees, hears, smells, *etc.*, for a long time. The same mind that existed when one was young, still exists, and will continue to exist until death. Throughout one entire existence, it is the same mind that has been functioning. Some even hold the belief that it will be the same mind that will move on to future existences. This is how mind is regarded as enduring and permanent. When the meditator, who is ever watchful of mental and physical phenomena while noting the rise and fall of the abdomen, notices the arising of an idea or a thought, he or she at once notes it as an idea or thought. When noted thus, the idea or thought vanishes. Thus the meditator realises, “The thought did not exist before, it made its appearance only just now, and disappeared at once. I previously regarded thought as permanent because I have not carefully observed it before. Now that I have watched it, I have seen it rapidly disappearing. I now know it as it truly is — impermanent by nature.” When hearing is noted as, “Hearing, hearing,” it keeps on arising and vanishing instantly. The same applies to consciousness of smelling and tasting. Tactile-consciousness that appears inside the body is noted to be arising and vanishing quickly, here and there, all over the body. When concentration is very strong, the act of seeing is observed to be appearing and disappearing in a series of separate,

but continuous, events one after another. Thus it is realised that consciousness of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or thinking arise separately and disappear one by one — all are impermanent and unstable. The mind that wants to bend, change posture, get up, or go, renews itself afresh and gets dissolved instantly. The mind that notes each phenomenon also vanishes with each noting. Thus, the mind that is conscious of various kinds of objects is arising and vanishing incessantly and is therefore impermanent. The group of five monks realised the same thing and became Stream-winners. While listening to this discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, they saw again the nature of impermanence by perceiving the constant arising and vanishing of consciousness: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mind-consciousness. Therefore, to the Blessed One's questions, "Is consciousness, permanent or impermanent," they had replied, "It is impermanent, Venerable sir." To the meditator who is ever watchful, this is of course very clear.

**Q:** The Blessed One asked further, "That which is impermanent, is it suffering or happiness?"

**A:** "It is suffering, Venerable sir."

**Q:** "That which is impermanent, suffering and subject to change, is it fitting to regard that as 'This is mine, I am this, this is my self'?"

**A:** "It is not fitting, Venerable sir."

These are the same types of the questions and answers as those that I have dealt with before. We have only to know how the thinking, knowing mind may be wrongly clung to with craving, conceit, and wrong-view, and how to become free from this clinging. Ordinary people who cannot note the mind as it appears at the six sense-doors at every instance of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or knowing, take delight in it as "This is mine, I am this." They are pleased with the mind that is manifesting in the present moment. They are delighted with the mind that had arisen before and they wish to enjoy such delightful minds in future. This is clinging with craving. The meditator who notes every phenomenon, perceives that consciousness with respect to good sights or sounds associated with gladness and happiness, all disappear even while being noted. The meditator therefore does not take delight in them, and does not yearn for them. This is how one keeps free of craving and clinging.

Ordinary people who cannot note the mind cannot distinguish the preceding mind from the following mind. They think that the mind of their younger days persists as one continuous mind. The mind that was there before keeps on seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. Believing it to be permanent and having special qualities, conceit is developed, "I know in this way, I won't stand any nonsense, I have a courageous mind." This is clinging with conceit. However, the ever watchful meditator knows that all these consciousness moments keep disappearing as they are being noted. He or she knows their impermanent nature. In the same way, no conceit arises in a person who knows he or she is about to die. No conceit is developed by the meditator with regard to the mind. This is how to become free from clinging with conceit. Ordinary people believe "It is I who sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, or thinks. I can know various kinds of objects. I want to bend, stretch, go, or speak. All of the thinking, all of the actions are undertaken by my mind, by my self." This is clinging to self as the doer.

Clinging in the form of activities may be classed under mental formations, but is also concerned with mind. The desires to bend, stretch, go, or talk are usually described as mind. Therefore desire to do an act is classed under mind or consciousness. Believing, "This mind as self exists permanently in oneself, it is this self that becomes conscious of seeing, hearing, *etc.*" Believing like this is clinging to self as an abiding soul. In modern times too some religions mention a consciousness or soul permanently residing in one's body. According to some of them, when a person dies, the soul leaves the perishing body and goes to reside in a new body. At the time of the Buddha, a monk by the name of Sāti, took consciousness to be self. has been told in Part Four of these discourses. This is the wrong view that takes consciousness to be self. Then there is the belief that one can think if one wishes; one controls one's mind at one's will. This is clinging to self as the master.

For a meditator engaged in constant noting, even while noting, "Thinking, thinking," the thinking mind disappears; noting "Hearing, hearing," the consciousness of hearing disappears; noting "Touching, touching," the consciousness of touching disappears; noting "Seeing seeing," the consciousness of seeing disappears. Thus perceiving the disappearance of consciousness even while noting, the realisation

arises that “These various types of sense-consciousness are mere phenomena coming into being conditioned by their own causes and then dissolving. They are not-self, not a living entity.”

Realisation occurs in this way. Visual-consciousness arises because there are the eyes and visible forms (*cakkhuñca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati viññānaṃ*); auditory-consciousness arises because there are the ears and sounds (*sotañca paṭicca sadde ca uppajjati viññānaṃ*); tactile-consciousness arises because there are the body and the tactile-objects (*kāyañca paṭicca phoṭṭhabbe ca uppajjati viññānaṃ*); mind-consciousness arises because there is the mind-base (*manañca paṭicca dhamme ca uppajjati viññānaṃ*) and mental objects;<sup>1</sup> the consciousness of noting arises because there is the intention (to note) and the object to note. They all arise because of causes and conditions. They occur when there are these causes and conditions, and pass away when the causes cease, whether we wish it to happen or not. In the absence of these causes and conditions, no amount of wishful thinking will produce them. The pleasant mind, which we wish to be enduring, does not last — it passes away quickly.

Thus the meditator can decide from own personal knowledge that consciousness is not a self that engages in activities, that it is not permanent, and not subject to one’s control and will. It comes into being in accordance with its own causes and conditions, and vanishes as a mere phenomenon. The group of five monks’ knowledge of these phenomena was not ordinary knowledge, it was insight resulting from the Path Knowledge of Stream-winning, entirely free from clinging to self. Thus when asked, “That consciousness which is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as ‘This is mine, I am this, This is my self’,” by the Blessed One, they replied, “It is not fitting, Venerable sir.”

I will also ask you similar questions which you may answer as you see fit:

Q: “Is mind or consciousness permanent or impermanent?”

A: “It is impermanent, Venerable sir.”

Q: “While observing the rise and fall of the abdomen, if a thought arises, is that thought permanent or impermanent?”

A: “It is impermanent, Venerable sir.”

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<sup>1</sup> See Sutta 38 of the Majjhimanikāya, [Mahātanhāsankhaya Sutta](#), M.i.256 (ed.)

Q: "When sitting for a long time, a sensation of heat may manifest. While noting it as 'Hot, hot,' the wish occurs to change posture. When this wish is noted, it disappears, does it not?"

A: "Yes, it disappears, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is it permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "When feeling stiff, you note it as 'stiff, stiff,' then the wish occurs to change posture. When this wish is noted, it disappears, does it not?"

A: "Yes, it disappears, Venerable sir."

Q: "When you wish to bend, you note it as 'Wishing to bend, wishing to bend,' and the wish disappears. Is it permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "There is the desire to stretch, when it is noted, it disappears. Is it permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "Again the desire to get up, to go; when it is noted, it disappears. Is it then permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "Whatever is being noted, the noting mind disappears even while noting. Is this noting mind then permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "The consciousness of hearing when noted as 'hearing, hearing,' disappears; is that consciousness of hearing permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "The consciousness of touch when noted as 'Touching, touching,' disappears. Is that consciousness of touch permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is visual-consciousness permanent or impermanent?"

A: "It is impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "Are olfactory-consciousness and gustatory-consciousness permanent or impermanent?"

A: "They are impermanent, Venerable sir."

Q: "That which is impermanent, is it suffering or happiness?"

A: "It is suffering, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is Impermanence good or bad?"

A: "It is bad, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is it fitting to regard consciousness, which is impermanent, suffering and subject to change, as 'This is mine' and take delight in it?"

A: "It is not fitting, Venerable sir."

Q: "Is it fitting to regard consciousness, which is impermanent, suffering and subject to change, as 'I am this' and take pride in it or as 'This is my self' clinging to it with self-view?"

A: "It is not fitting, Venerable sir."

These questions are asked to prevent clinging with craving and conceit to consciousness, which cognises objects, regarding them as "This is my mind," "I know," "The thinker and doer is my self," and for ordinary people not to cling to the mind with wrong view.

I have fully explained the questions in the teaching dealing with clinging with craving, conceit, and wrong-view concerning the five aggregates of materiality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. Now I will go on to the teaching on how to contemplate to get free from these three types of clinging.

### Third Part of the Sutta Contemplation of Materiality

*"Tasmātiha, bhikkhave, yaṃ kiñci rūpaṃ atītānāgatapaccuppannaṃ ajjhataṃ vā bahiddhā vā oḷārikaṃ vā sukhumāṃ vā hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā, sabbāṃ rūpaṃ — Netāṃ mama, nesohamasmi, na meso attā'ti evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya datṭhabbaṃ."*

"Monks, since it is not fitting to regard materiality as, 'This is mine, I am this, This is my self,' all forms of materiality--whether past, future, or present, internal or external, coarse

or fine, inferior or superior, far or near -- all materiality should be regarded with right understanding, according to reality, 'This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self'."

All materiality must be contemplated to realise the truth with personal knowledge that, "This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self." In the above statement, materiality is described and enumerated in eleven ways such as past, future, present. Materiality is described in terms of past, future, or present. The past refers to what has arisen and ceased in previous existences or earlier in the present existence. The future has not yet occurred, but is going to happen at some time in the future. The present means whatever is actually happening now. Sequentially it amounts to what had happened before, what is happening now, and what will happen in the future. When materiality is enumerated in this way, all the materiality in oneself, in others, animate, inanimate, are covered.

However, for the purpose of insight meditation, disciples are mainly concerned with contemplating what is happening in their own body, as definitely stated in the Commentary and Subcommentary of the Anupada Sutta.<sup>1</sup> Phenomena happening elsewhere need be known only by inference. Thus the meditator only needs to understand the mental and physical phenomena occurring inside his or her own body and see it as it really is with insight. Even in connection with internal phenomena, one can infer when trying to understand phenomena of the future because they are not yet in existence. Those that occurred before cannot be known as they really were — it would be mere conjecture. Even for those phenomena that occurred during one's life time, it is not easy to remember what really happened years or months ago, nor even a few days ago. It is hard even to know the absolute truth of what happened a few hours ago because, for ordinary people, once an object is known attachment for it would have arisen immediately in conventional terms as "I," "He," "She," "A man," or "A woman."

### Only the Present Moment Should Be Noted

Therefore, as stated in the Bhaddekaratta Sutta,<sup>2</sup> "Only the present should be contemplated for insight meditation (*Paccuppannañca yo dhammaṃ, tattha tattha vipassati*)," that is, as the phenomenon is being seen, heard, etc. In the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta too it is stated that the

<sup>1</sup> Majjhimanikāya Sutta 111, M.iii.24.

<sup>2</sup> M.iii.187.



present phenomenon actually occurring while going, standing, sitting, lying down, should be noted initially. I have provided a searching analysis of this paragraph, because it mentions past materiality, which comes first in the sequential order of past, present, future, and doubt may arise whether one should start meditating with what occurred in the past. This analysis should remove that doubt. Therefore, only those mental and physical phenomena that manifest at the six doors every time an object is seen, heard, smelt, tasted, touched, or cognised should be constantly noted, just as our meditators are noting "Rising, falling, sitting, touching," *etc.* Engaged in this way, as the concentration gets strengthened, the meditator comes to differentiate between the phenomenon of falling and the phenomenon of noting it. The extension or pressure and the rising moment do not last until the moment of falling, they disappear at the moment of their occurrence. The distension and motion at the moment of falling do not last until the next moment of rising, they disappear and cease there and then.

While walking too, the extension and motion involved in the right step do not remain until the left step. Similarly, the materiality of the left step do not remain until the right step. Each phenomenon vanishes at the moment of its occurrence. The materiality of the moment of lifting do not last till the moment of moving the foot forwards, the materiality of the moving do not remain until the moment of dropping the foot. They all vanish at the moment of occurrence. Similarly, in bending and stretching, each phenomenon disappears at the moment of occurrence. When concentration gets particularly strong, during one act of bending or stretching the meditator will observe the process of dissolution in very quick succession occurring in the same place. The meditator therefore realises that the true nature of phenomena was unknown before because they were not noted mindfully. Now that they are noted, he or she perceives that the aggregates do not pass on from one moment to the next, but perish at the very moment of their appearance. Thus the materiality that occurred before does not last until the present moment — it has all perished. The materiality that is now manifesting in rising, falling, bending, stretching, lifting, moving, dropping, will not reach a future moment. It will all vanish in the present. The materiality of future phenomena will also cease at the moment of their arising. Therefore all kinds of materiality are impermanent,

incessantly arising and disappearing. They are suffering and not-self, mere phenomena that are not amenable to one's control, arising and vanishing in accordance with their own causes. The meditator comes to realise them through personal knowledge. To enable such realisation, the Blessed One exhorted that efforts should be made to contemplate phenomena until they are realised as, "This is not mine."

### Contemplation of Impermanence and Not-self

One may ask whether contemplation should be done by reciting the formula: "This is not mine (*netam mama*)."<sup>1</sup> This should not be done. Contemplation should be done to know the true nature of phenomena. To realise impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self is to know the meaning of "*Netam mama*," which is an ancient Pāli idiom. In the Channa Sutta<sup>1</sup> there is a passage where Venerable Sāriputta asked Venerable Channa, "Do you perceive thus, 'This is mine, I am this, this is my self'?" and Channa replied, "I perceive thus, 'This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self'." The Commentary explained that it meant that Channa had perceived it merely as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

Here, seeing phenomena as, "This is not mine," is the same as perceiving that they incessantly arise and pass away, that there is nothing delightful, nothing dependable, just suffering. Seeing, "I am not this," is the same as perceiving that it is not permanent. Conceit arises believing in permanence. When the truth is known about its impermanence, there is nothing to take pride in. Seeing "This is not my self," is exactly the same as seeing that it is not-self. Failing to note every mental and physical phenomenon as it arises at the six sense-doors and then believing it to be permanent, conceit makes its appearance, and assumes, "I am this." However, when it is perceived that phenomena do not last even for the blink of an eye, that everything is impermanent, then conceit cannot arise. When not-self is unknown, clinging to phenomena as belonging to a self arises. This is obvious and needs no elaboration.

Ordinary people who cannot observe phenomena at the moment of their arising believe that the materiality at the moment of seeing lingers on to become materiality at the moment of hearing, or vice versa, lasting from one moment to the next. They believe too that it is

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<sup>1</sup> S.iv.55.

the same person who sees, who also hears, smells, tastes, touches, or thinks. They believe that the materiality of the past have arrived at the present, and that the present phenomena will continue into the future. This is clinging to the belief in permanence. However, the meditator who is ever watchful of these phenomena knows that the materiality at the moment of seeing perishes there and then — it does not reach the moment of hearing. The materiality at the moment of hearing perishes there and then — it does not reach the moment of seeing. Every act of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or knowing is a new arising. This is knowing the truth of impermanence as it really is. Knowing this, the meditator realises that the materiality of the past ceased in the past, and has not come forward to the present. The present materiality perishes even while being noted and will not reach the future. He or she infers too that materiality of the future will also perish at the moment of it arising. He or she realises that materiality does not endure even as long as a flicker of an eyelid. Realising thus, there is no opportunity for craving to arise, clinging to materiality as, “This is mine.” There is no chance for conceit to arise, taking pride in materiality as “I am this,” nor clinging by wrong view as “This is my self.”

The Blessed One exhorted the group of five monks to contemplate like this to get rid of clinging with craving and conceit. Ordinary people should also contemplate to get rid of clinging by wrong view.

### **Stream-winners Instructed to Contemplate Not-self**

Why were the five monks who had already become Stream-winners instructed to get rid of self by contemplating, “This is not my self?” This is something to ponder. According to the Visuddhimagga, Stream-winners are free from illusions of wrong view of self clinging as well as illusions of perception (*saññā vipallāsa*) and illusions of thought (*citta vipallāsa*). Since they were already free from all three kinds of self clinging, to get rid of what clinging was this exhortation to contemplate not-self given to them? In the first part of this book, it was explained how this Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta was taught to remove self-pride (*asmi māna*), which is akin to self-clinging. However, here, as separate instructions were given to get rid of self-pride in the words, “I am not this (*nesohamasmi*),” the instruction to contemplate, “This is not my self (*na meso atta*),” cannot be said to be given to remove self-pride. Then to remove what kind of clinging

has it been asked to contemplate not-self? This is the point to consider. It is not easy to give definitive solution to this problem. I will attempt to solve it in three ways.

1. In the *Sīlavanta Sutta* it is mentioned that the Arahants also contemplate the nature of not-self. Reference may be made to [the résumé](#) of my discourse on the *Sīlavanta Sutta*. Although Stream-winners have no self clinging to get rid of, they nevertheless contemplate not-self like Arahants for the attainment of higher knowledge. If this answer is unsatisfactory, here is my second answer.

2. This is in accordance with what is provided in my résumé of the *Sīlavanta Sutta*. There is no doubt that a Stream-winner is free from the wrong view that believes in a permanent self. As to the illusions of perception, it should be taken that a Stream-winner is free from it only when reflecting intentionally or when engaged in contemplation. Only on such occasions the Stream-winning may be taken as free from wrong perceptions of permanence, wrong perception of self. If regarded as free from these illusions when no particular attention is being given to them, it will amount to putting Stream-winners on the same level as Arahants. He or she will know all acts of sense-cognition as mere impermanent phenomena; and will have no conceit, and no lustful desires regarding men or women. However, in inattentive moments, Stream-winners can have misperceptions. To enable the groups of five monks to get rid of misperceptions, the Buddha exhorted them to contemplate not-self.

3. This is based on explanation offered by the Venerable Khemaka who had already reached the stage of Non-returning. Khemaka said that he did not cling to materiality as “I am” nor to each of the other aggregates — feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. However, with regard to the five aggregates as a whole, he was still not free from the notion “I am.” Just as in this explanation, for a Stream-winner, there is no clinging as self towards any of the aggregates, but with regard to the five aggregates as a whole, a Stream-winner is not free from misperception, so the sensual passions still arise to the extent of settling down in a married life. Therefore, it should be regarded that the group of five monks were exhorted to contemplate not-self to become free from such ordinary perceptions.

This is an attempt to reconcile the Pāli text with the Commentary, which says that Stream-winners are free from perceptions of self.

## Contemplating Materiality In Eleven Ways

I will go on to discuss how the materiality of the past, present, and future are contemplated as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. I have already described how a meditator who observes materiality at the moment of their arising, and perishing as soon as they occur, comes to know impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. The meditator who knows thus can infer from personal knowledge that materiality of the past has not reached the present, that the presently occurring materiality will not reach the future, that they perish at the moment of coming into existence, and are therefore impermanent. Consequently, they are not-self, but mere phenomenon.

Let's now recite how such decisions and considerations are arrived at as described in the Visuddhimagga. While reciting you should make an effort to reflect on them.

1. Past material phenomena have ceased to exist; they have not reached the present. Since they have ceased, they are impermanent. Because they disappear and perish instantly, they are terrible, and nothing but suffering. Not being a master (*sāmi*), an abiding entity (*nivāsī*), a doer (*kāraka*), or an experiencer (*vedaka*), they are not-self and without any essence.
2. Present material phenomena will perish and cease right now. They will not reach the future. As they are ceasing and vanishing, they are impermanent. Because they are perishing incessantly, they are terrible, and nothing but suffering. Not being a master, an abiding entity, a doer, or an experiencer, it is not-self and without any essence.
3. Future material phenomena will cease to exist then and there. They will not continue to any further future existences. Because they will cease, they are impermanent. As they are perishing incessantly, they are terrible, nothing but suffering. Not being a self with any essence, they are just impersonal phenomenon.

This is how material phenomena, *etc.*, are generally considered with respect to their true nature. Now let's recite how we reflect while contemplating on them.

1. The past material phenomenon at the last moment of the rising of the abdomen did not reach the stage of falling; the last material phenomenon at the moment of falling did not reach the stage of rising. It perished at the moment of rising and is, therefore,

impermanent. Because it is impermanent, it is unsatisfactory. Because it is ungovernable, it is not-self. The last material phenomenon at the time of seeing and hearing did not reach the present moment of seeing and hearing; it perished at the moment of coming into being. It is, therefore, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

2. The present material phenomenon of rising of the abdomen does not reach the stage of falling; the presently material phenomenon of the falling of the abdomen does not reach the stage of the next rising. It perishes even while rising and falling. It is, therefore, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. The material phenomenon at the present moment of seeing or hearing do not reach the next moment of seeing or hearing. They perish even while seeing or hearing. They are, therefore, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.
3. The material phenomenon at the moment of future rising and falling will not reach the next future moments of rising and falling. They will perish at the moment of coming into being. They are, therefore, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

This is how the material phenomena of the past, present, and future are considered while presently noting the phenomena of rising and falling. There is also this method of reflecting on the materiality of the past and future by contemplating the materiality of the present. I will recite about this method of reflection.

4. Just as there are impermanent material phenomena with respect to rising, falling, bending, stretching, lifting, moving, dropping, seeing, hearing, *etc.*, which perish even while they are being noted, so too there have been similar material phenomena with respect to rising, falling, stretching, bending, *etc.*, in the past perishing at their respective moments of coming into being. They are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. Having perceived by oneself how the material phenomena within oneself perish, there remains the tasks of reflecting on the material phenomena of others, and those of the whole world. Just as the material phenomena within oneself are perishing even while being noted, the materiality in others, and the materiality of the whole world, will also be perishing. They are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

I have dealt in sufficient detail with respect to the behaviour of material phenomena of the past, present, and future. I will go on to consider internal and external materiality.

### **Contemplating Internal and External Materiality**

People imagine that when they spit, defecate, or excrete, the materiality from inside the body gets expelled outside the body. When food is eaten or air is breathed in, the external materiality are believed to have come into the body. Actually, it is not like this at all. Materiality undergoes dissolution at the moment and place of its coming into being; the new materiality arises afresh and manifests at the new place. The meditator who is noting mindfully perceives such dissolution and cessation taking place at each place of origination. This is how it is perceived when mindfulness and concentration get strong, while noting the rise and fall, the out-breath is seen to break into small sections in the chest, throat, and nose before it finally exits from the body. The in-breath is also seen to be entering, pushing in, in a succession of small sections. The meditator who smokes knows the smoke, going out and pushing its way in, in a series of small portions. Similar phenomenon is seen while drinking water when it pushes into the throat. Therefore, the internal materiality does not get outside; the external materiality does not get inside. It ceases and vanishes at the place where it comes into being. Therefore, it is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. Please recite this:

“Internal materiality does not get outside; the external materiality does not get inside. It ceases and vanishes inside or outside, wherever it arises and comes into being. Therefore, they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.”

### **Contemplating Coarse and Fine Materiality**

Ordinarily, people believe that it is the tender materiality of their young days which has become their coarse materiality as adults. They believe that the healthy, light, fine materiality becomes the unhealthy, heavy, coarse materiality; or the unhealthy, heavy, coarse materiality becomes the healthy, light, fine, materiality.

The meditator who is constantly watching tactile objects, perceives materiality breaking up into tiny bits while it is being observed. Thus perceiving, he or she knows that coarse materiality does not

become fine materiality, neither does not the fine materiality become the coarse materiality. The coarse, hot, or cold materiality does not become fine, cold, or hot materiality; fine, cold, or hot materiality does not become coarse, hot, or cold materiality. The coarse, stiff, extending, moving materiality does not become fine, stable, still materiality. They all vanish at the moment of their arising; they are, therefore, impermanent and not-self. Please recite thus:

“Coarse materiality does not become fine materiality; fine materiality does not become coarse materiality. They perish at the moment of arising and are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.”

### **Contemplating Inferior and Superior Materiality**

Ordinarily, it is believed that the unhealthy, inferior materiality becomes the healthy, superior materiality. That youthful materiality becomes the materiality of the old man. However, the meditator who keeps observing materiality at the moment of its arising, perceives that any materiality that manifests, ceases and vanishes as it is being noted and therefore knows that the inferior materiality has not become the superior materiality; neither does the superior materiality become inferior materiality. They all disappear at the moment of arising; they are impermanent and are therefore unsatisfactory and not-self. Please recite this:

“Inferior materiality does not become superior materiality; superior materiality does not become inferior materiality. They perish at the moment of arising, they are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.”

### **Contemplating Far and Near Materiality**

Ordinarily, it is believed that when a man comes from afar, he has arrived with his materiality brought from that distant place. When a man departs to a distant place, he carries away the materiality from the near place. However, the meditator who is always noting the mental and physical phenomenon knows, for example, when stretching the limbs, that materiality vanishes in a series of blurring fade outs without reaching any distance. When bending, the materiality vanishes in a series of blurring fade outs without reaching any distance. Perceiving thus, the meditator is convinced that the



materiality that is near, has not gone afar; the materiality from afar has not come near. They vanish at the moment of becoming and are, therefore, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

While observing someone approaching from a distance, and noting as, "Seeing, seeing," the person disappears in a series of blurring fade outs. While looking at someone leaving from nearby and noting as, "Seeing, seeing," the man disappears in a series of blurring fade outs. Thus the materiality from afar has not come near. The materiality from nearby has not gone to a distance. The old materiality keeps on vanishing and new materiality keeps on arising, making them appear as if someone is coming from afar and someone is going away. Only the meditator who has reached the knowledge of dissolution and whose intelligence is sharp can perceive phenomena as they really are like this. Others with less sharp intellects may not perceive this so clearly.

Again, while walking to and fro, and noting, "Lifting, moving, dropping," lifting appears as one part, moving as one part, and dropping as another. When insight is well developed, the movements of the body and limbs are seen as a series of blurring fade outs. Perceiving thus, the conclusion is reached that materiality do not go from one place to another; they cease and vanish wherever they occur. This is knowing in accordance with the statement of the Subcommentary, "Absolute realities do not move to another place; they cease and vanish wherever they come into existence."

Materiality from afar does not come near; materiality that is near does not go afar. They perish wherever they come into existence. They are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

This, then, is how materiality described in eleven ways is contemplated as, "This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self." To recapitulate. "All materiality whether past, future, or present; internal or external; coarse or fine; inferior or superior; far or near: all materiality should be seen with personal knowledge as they truly are: "This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self."

Let us stop here for today. By virtue of having given respectful attention to this discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, may you all soon attain nibbāna, by means of the Path and its Fruition as you wish.

## PART SEVEN

Delivered on 4<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and 26<sup>th</sup> August 1963.<sup>1</sup>

Over the past weeks, I have explained that part of the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta that deals analytically with the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self of materiality in eleven aspects. We have now come to the part that deals with the eleven aspects of feeling.

### Contemplating Feeling In Eleven Ways

*“Yā kāci vedanā atītānāgatapaccuppannā ajjhattā vā bahiddhā vā oḷārikaṃ vā sukhumāṃ vā hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā, sabbā vedanā, ‘Netāṃ mama, nesohamasmi, na meso attā’ti evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya datṭhabbaṃ.”*

“Whatever feeling, whether past, future, or present; internal or external; coarse or fine; inferior or superior; far or near; should be seen with right understanding, according to reality, ‘This is not mine, I am not this not, this is not my self’.”

This is the exhortation to contemplate feeling analytically under eleven headings to make plain the true characteristics of feeling. Here past feeling means the feelings experienced in previous existences as well as those experienced days, months, or years ago in this life time. There are also those experienced earlier today. It is obvious that the feelings of past existences have all ceased to exist, but to those with strong attachment to self, it would not be so obvious because they hold the view that the self that experienced the feelings in previous existence keeps on experiencing the feelings now. In their view, they do not think all the feelings felt earlier in the present existence have ceased. They believe that the same self that enjoyed these feelings before is still enjoying them now.

### Contemplating Feeling with Regard to Time

While the meditator who is ever watchful is contemplating the rising and falling, if unpleasant feelings such as stiffness, hotness, pain *etc.*, appears, he or she notes them. When thus noted, the unbearable feelings gets less and less painful and then vanishes. When the concentration is especially strong, it will be seen that each pain passes away with each noting. Perceiving thus, it is realised

<sup>1</sup> The full-moon day of Wāgaun, the 8th waxing day of Wāgaun, and the 8th waxing day of Tawthalin 1325 M.E.

with one's own personal knowledge that feeling, which experiences sensations, is not everlasting, and does not endure even for a second, incessantly arising and vanishing. To say nothing about the feelings of previous existences, even feelings of the present existence are non-existent now. The feeling that manifested only a moment ago is also no longer in existence now. All these are realised by the watchful meditator who sees too that the pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feelings that are being experienced at this very moment are also constantly arising and vanishing. Hence the meditator can infer that feelings that will occur in the future will also arise and vanish at the moment of arising. I will recapitulate by reciting:

1. The feeling of the past has ceased in the past; it does not come to the present. As it has ceased and terminated now, it is impermanent. Being impermanent, it is not pleasant, not dependable. It is merely terrible, nothing but suffering. The unbearable painful feeling is terrible too because it is oppressive. Not being a master, an abiding entity, or an experiencer, it is not-self.
2. The feeling of the present will perish and cease now. It will not reach the future. As it is ceasing and vanishing, it is impermanent. As it is impermanent, it is terrible suffering. It is nothing but suffering also because it is unbearable. Not being a master, an abiding entity, or an experiencer, it is not-self.
3. The feeling the will occur in the future will cease to exist then and there. It will not be carried over to any further future existence. Because it will perish and cease, it is impermanent. As it is impermanent, it is terrible suffering. Not being a master, an abiding entity, or an experiencer, it is not-self.

This is how feeling is contemplated with regard to the three aspects of time. Now I will recite how to reflect while contemplating.

1. The feeling of stiffness, heat, pain, or discomfort that was experienced a moment ago did not reach the present moment of comfortable feeling. It passed away at that moment. As it passed away, it is impermanent. Because it is impermanent and unbearable, it is terrible suffering. The comfortable feeling of a moment ago did not reach the present moment of intense discomfort. It passed away at that very moment of feeling comfortable and is, therefore, impermanent. Since it is impermanent, it is terrible suffering. All feelings, pleasant or unpleasant, are not-self.

2. The pleasant or unpleasant feelings of the present cease and vanish while they are being noted and are, therefore, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.
3. The pleasant or unpleasant feelings of the future too will cease and vanish at the moment of their arising. They are, therefore, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

This is how feelings of the past, present, and future are considered as they manifest themselves at the moment of noting them. There is also this method of reflecting on the feelings of the past and the future by contemplating on the feelings of the present. I will recite:

“Just as there are now impermanent pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings that perish even while they are being noted, there have been similar feelings before, perishing at the moment of their arising. They were therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. The feelings that occur in the future will also pass away at the moment they arise. They will also be impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.”

Having perceived by oneself how the feelings in our person perish, there remains the task of considering by inference the feelings in others, and the feelings in the whole world. I will recite thus:

“Just like the feelings in oneself, which vanish even while they are being noted, the feelings in others, and the feelings in the whole world will also vanish. They too are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.”

I have dealt sufficiently with how feeling is contemplated with regard to the three aspects of time. I will go on to consider the contemplation of internal and external feelings.

### **Contemplating Internal and External Feelings**

The Visuddhimagga states, “Just as materiality is considered in two aspects — internal and external, the internal materiality not becoming external materiality and vice versa — so too, feeling should be considered in two aspects, internal and external.”

The feeling from inside does not reach outside; the feeling from outside does not reach inside. In this way, it should be contemplated. The question arises here: Does it mean feeling from inside one’s person

not reaching the body of an external person; and other people's feeling not reaching one's own person. However, nobody believes that one's feeling gets to other persons and other person's feeling gets to oneself. So this way of contemplation is not meant here. It should be regarded that what is meant here is change of object, internal to external and vice versa. When a feeling that has arisen dependent on an internal object is replaced by a feeling that has arisen dependent on an external object, people think that the internal feeling has become an external one. Conversely when pleasant or unpleasant feelings conditioned by an external object get replaced by pleasant or unpleasant feelings dependent on an internal object, people think that the external feeling has become an internal feeling.

Similarly, the feeling arising from an object far away changes to one dependent on a near object, people think that feeling has moved from a far distance to one closely, and vice versa. What is meant here, therefore, is change of objects external and internal, far and near, dependent on which feelings arise. The meditator engaged in noting mental and physical phenomena as they occur, notes the pain when an unpleasant feeling arises in the body. While doing so, if the mind passes on to an external object and feelings of happiness or sorrow with regard to that external object, these feelings should be noted as happiness or sorrow. Thus during this period of careful noting, the original feeling of unpleasantness does not reach outside. It ceases and perishes internally. Then attention is switched to an external object, which causes the arising of new feeling. The meditator thus understands these phenomena. He or she fully understands also when the reverse process takes place; that is, the original feeling of happiness arising from an external object ceases and a new feeling of pain is experienced internally. The internal feeling does not reach outside; the external feeling also does not reach inside. Respective feelings arise and cease at the respective moments of becoming and are thus impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

### **Contemplating Coarse and Fine Feelings**

While experiencing coarse feelings of pain, *etc.*, if they begin to feel subtle ones, ordinary people believe that the coarse feelings have changed into subtle ones. From experiencing subtle pains, when the feeling becomes very severe, the belief is that the subtle pains have grown into severe pains. The watchful meditator, however, sees with

every note taken that painful feelings perish, part by part and, therefore, knows that the subtle pains have not changed into coarse ones; nor do coarse pains ever change into subtle ones. The old feelings perish and get replaced by new ones arising in their place, which is the nature of impermanence. The meditation realises all this by personal knowledge.

Coarse pains do not become subtle pains, and vice versa. They perish at the respective moments of arising. Thus feeling is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

### **Contemplating Inferior and Superior Feelings**

The painful feeling in the body is regarded as an inferior form of feeling, whereas fine, pleasant feelings are regarded as superior. Likewise, unhappiness, sorrow, dejection, and despair are regarded as inferior feelings, while happiness, joy, elation, or ecstasy are regarded as superior. In other words, feeling unhappy is inferior feeling; feeling happy is superior feeling. Moreover, spiritual happiness delighting in objects of reverence such as the Buddha is superior to sensual happiness. As the feelings change from one type to another, ordinary people think that the inferior feeling has become a superior one, or that the superior feeling has changed into an inferior one. However, the meditator perceives that feelings perish even while they are being noted, and therefore knows that superior feeling does not become an inferior one; nor does the inferior feeling become a superior one. They perish at the moment of their arising and are, therefore, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

The painful or inferior feeling does not become the happy or superior feeling. Neither does the superior spiritual feeling become the inferior sensual feeling. They perish at the moment of their arising and are all impermanent, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self.

### **Contemplating Far and Near Feelings**

I have already dealt with far and near feelings. Feelings arising from far away objects do not become feelings dependent on near objects; feelings with regard to near objects do not become feelings concerned with distant objects. They perish at the moment of arising and are hence impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

I have considered the classifications of feelings under eleven headings. I will go on to a similar exposition about perception.

## Contemplating Perception in Eleven Ways

*“Yā kāci saññā atītānāgatapaccuppannā ajjhattā vā bahiddhā vā olārikaṃ vā sukhumāṃ vā hīnaṃ vā pañītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā, sabbā saññā, ‘Netāṃ mama, nesohamasmi, na meso attā’ ti evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ.”*

“Whatever perception, whether past, future, or present; internal or external; coarse or fine; inferior or superior; far or near; should be seen with right understanding, as it really is, ‘This is not mine, I am not this not, this is not my self’.”

This is the exhortation to contemplate perception analytically under eleven headings such as past, present, or future, to reveal the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self characteristics of perception.

Here, past perception means the perceptions experienced in the previous existences as well as those perceptions of a few months ago, and those experienced only recently. Of these past perceptions, it is obvious that perceptions of previous existences had long ceased to exist. However, to those with strong attachment to self, it would not be so obvious because they hold the view that the same self that recognised and remembered things in the previous existences is still recognising and remembering things now. All acts of recognising have been done and are being done by the same self. In this lifetime too, what was recognised in younger days or very recently is the work of the same self throughout.

The meditator who is ever watchful of the phenomena arising and passing away at the moment of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or thinking, finds that the perception of sound disappears immediately when noted as, “Hearing, hearing,” the perception of sight vanishes when noted as, “Seeing, seeing.” So too the perception of ideas disappears as soon as they are noted. Observing thus, the realisation comes through personal knowledge that perception is not everlasting; it does not last even for one second and ceases incessantly. Not to mention the perceptions of previous existences, even perceptions experienced before in the present life no longer exist now. They have all ceased and vanished. The meditator can know this directly. Even the perception that occurred only a moment ago has passed away now. The perceptions that are presently manifest in the acts of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting touching, or thinking, occur only

at the present moment. They incessantly arise and vanish. Thus it can be concluded that perceptions occurring in the future will also disappear at each moment of their becoming.

1. The perception of the past ceased in the past; it does not come over to the present. As it has ceased and vanished, it is impermanent. Being impermanent, it is terrible suffering. Not being a master, an abiding entity, or an experiencer, it is not-self.
  2. The perception of the present will perish and cease now. It will not reach the future existence. As it is ceasing and vanishing, it is impermanent. As it is impermanent, it is terrible suffering. Not being a master, an abiding entity, or an experiencer, it is not-self.
  3. The perception that will occur in future will cease to exist then and there. It will not be carried over to any further existence. Not being a master, an abiding entity, or an experiencer, it is not-self.
- This is how perception is considered with regard to three aspects of time. I will recite how to consider while contemplating them.

1. The perception that recognised the form or sound, a moment ago, does not reach the present. It disappeared even while recognising. Therefore, it is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.
2. The perception that is recognising things now also perishes while recognising. Therefore, it is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.
3. The perception that will recognise things in the future will also vanish at the time of recognising and is, therefore, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

Based on the knowledge of the perception that manifests at the time of noting, perceptions of the past and future, and of the whole world can be considered by inference. Just like the impermanent perceptions that are perishing even while being noted, so too the perceptions of the past also vanished at the time of their occurrence and are, therefore, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. Likewise the perceptions occurring in the future will also disappear at the moment of their occurrence, and they are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

The perceptions within oneself, in others, in the whole world also perish at the moment of arising and are all impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. That the perception, which recognises and remembers things, is impermanent is obvious if we reflect on how easily



we forget what we have studied or learnt by heart. I will now recite how to reflect on the internal and external aspect of perception.

1. The perception with regard to oneself does not reach the moment of perceiving external objects. The perceptions of external objects also do not last until internal objects are perceived. They perish at the respective moments of their arising and are, therefore, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.
2. The perceptions with regard to desire and craving, with regard to anger and transgression, with regard to conceit, wrong-view, doubts and misgivings — all of these unwholesome perceptions are coarse and inferior. Perceptions with regard to devotional piety towards the Blessed One, perceptions with regard to Dhamma discourses, with regard to good advice and instructions from teachers and parents — all these wholesome perceptions are subtle and superior. Coarse perceptions are inferior. In other words, recognition of coarse objects is coarse perceptions, while recognition of fine objects is subtle perception.
3. Coarse perceptions do not reach the moment that fine perceptions occur. Fine perceptions do not reach the moment that coarse perceptions occur. They vanish at the respective moment of occurrence and are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.
4. The inferior perception does not reach the moment that a superior perception occurs; so too the superior perception does not reach the moment that an inferior perception occurs. They vanish at the respective moments of occurrence and are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.
5. Thinking about far objects, and recognising or remembering them is perception of far objects. Recognizing near objects, objects within oneself, is perception of near objects. The perception of far objects does not reach the moment that perception of near objects occur; the perception of near objects does not reach the moment that perception of distant objects occur. They vanish at the moment of their arising and are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

I have finished enumerating perception under eleven heads. I will now go on to consider the aggregates of mental formations.

## Contemplating Mental Formations in Eleven Ways

*“Ye keci saṅkhārā atītānāgatapaccuppannā ajjhattā vā bahiddhā vā olārikaṃ vā sukhumāṃ vā hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā, sabbā saṅkhārā, ‘Netāṃ mama, nesohamaṃsi, na meso attā’ti evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ.”*

“Whatever mental formation, whether past, future, or present; internal or external; coarse or fine; inferior or superior; far or near; should be seen with right understanding, as it really is, ‘This is not mine, I am not this not, this is not my self’.”

This is the exhortation to contemplate analytically mental formations under eleven headings such as past, present, or future to reveal the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self characteristics of mental formations. Here it should be noted there are many phenomena classified under the aggregate of mental formations. I have stated before that apart from feeling and perception, the remaining fifty kinds of mental concomitants come under the classification of mental formations. In brief, these are the motivating factors producing physical, verbal, and mental activities. They are responsible for the four postures of going, standing, sitting, and lying down. It is as if they are giving commands, “Go, stand, sit, lie down.” They also bring about actions of bending, stretching, moving, smiling, *etc.*, as if they are issuing orders to bend, stretch, smile, laugh, or cry. It is also these mental formations that cause verbal actions as if they are ordering, “Now say this.” They are also responsible for acts of thinking, seeing, hearing, *etc.*

Thus the mental formations of the past existences, the wish to go, stand or speak, could not possibly come over to the present existence, could they? Didn’t they all perish and pass away, then and there. It is obvious, of course, that the desire to do, speak, or think, in previous existences, have all ceased and vanished now. However, those who cling firmly to the belief, “It is I who do all actions; all actions are being done by me,” are attached to the idea of a self, “It is I who did all the actions in the previous existence; the doer in the present existence is also me.” For them, clinging to this notion of self, the doer of actions is eternal. To the meditator who is ever watchful of arising and passing away, if an itchy feeling is felt, he or she notes “Itching, itching,” and while noting thus, if the desire to scratch arises,

he or she notes at once, "Wanting to scratch, wanting to scratch." Then the mental formation, namely the desire to scratch, is seen to disappear each time it is noted. Also while noting, "Stiff, stiff," because of the feeling of stiffness, if the desire to bend or stretch the limbs appears, it has to be noted. Thus the mental formations, which are the desire to bend, stretch, or change posture, vanish whenever they are noted. Thus, mental formations of wishing to move, talk, or think are seen to be ceasing and perishing.

### **Contemplating Past, Present, and Future Mental Formations**

For one who meditates continuously, the presently arising mental formations are seen to perish incessantly, to say nothing of the mental formations of past existences. Perceiving thus, the meditator knows that mental formations of past existences have not come over to the present, the present mental formations will also not continue to the future; the future mental formations will also not continue to a later time. They vanish at the moment of their arising. The meditator realises, therefore, with direct personal knowledge that mental formations are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

I will recite how mental formations are considered with regard to the three aspects of time:

1. The mental formations of the past such as desiring to do ceased to exist in the past. They did not reach the present moment. Consequently, they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.
2. The mental formations of the present moment will not extend to the future. As they are perishing and vanishing now, they are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.
3. The mental formations that will arise in the future will not continue to a later time. They will perish and decay at the moment of their arising. They are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

This is how mental formations manifesting as the desire to go, do, speak, *etc.*, are considered with regard to three aspects of time. I will recite how they are to be regarded while being contemplated.

1. The desire of a moment ago to lift the right foot does not reach the moment of desiring to lift the left foot. The desire of a moment ago to lift the left foot does not reach the moment of desiring to lift the right foot. It perishes and vanishes at the moment of

arising and is, therefore, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. Similarly, the mental formations of the past do not reach the present moment. They perished at the moment of their arising and are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

2. The presently arising mental formations of desiring to do or of careful noting do not reach the next moment. They perish incessantly as they are arising and are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.
3. The mental formations that will arise in the future concerning the desire to do and careful noting, will also perish and decay without reaching the future of a later moment. They are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

Based on the knowledge of the mental formations that occur at the time of noting, the mental formations of the past and future, and of the whole world, can be considered by inference in this way. Just like the impermanent mental formations of wishing to do and of knowing the noting, which are perishing even while being noted now, so too the mental formations of the past vanished at the time of their occurrence and are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

Likewise, the mental formations of the future such as wishing to do, will also disappear at the moment of occurrence and are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. The mental formations within oneself or in others and the whole world also vanish just like the mental formations that are being noted at the present moment. They are all impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

### **Contemplating Internal and External Mental Formations**

The method of differentiation between the internal and external mental formations is the same as the one we have described regarding feelings and perceptions. The mental formation of thinking on an internal object is the internal mental formation. The one developed concerning an external object is the external mental formation, that is, thinking of acquiring external animate or inanimate things or bringing destruction to them are external mental formations.

The mental formations concerning intention to do an internal action terminate and perish before reaching the moment of thinking of an external action. Therefore they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. Similarly with respect to mental formations concerning

an external action. Thinking of doing a rough action is mental formation of coarse type; contemplating doing gentle actions is mental formation of fine type. Coarse mental formations do not become fine mental formations, and vice versa. They perish at the moment of arising and are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

### **Contemplating Inferior and Superior Mental Formations**

All kinds of thinking about and doing evil deeds are inferior mental formations. Thinking of and doing meritorious deeds are superior mental formations. Of the meritorious deeds, the act of keeping precepts is superior to acts of giving charity; tranquillity meditation is superior to keeping precepts; and insight meditation is superior to tranquillity meditation.

Inferior mental formations do not reach the moment of arising of superior mental formations; neither do superior mental formations reach the moment of arising of inferior mental formations. They perish at the moment of their arising and are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. The mental formations of charitable deeds do not reach the moment of arising of the mental formations of keeping precepts, and vice versa. The mental formations of keeping precepts do not reach the moment of arising of mental formations of tranquillity meditation, and vice versa. The mental formations of developing tranquillity meditation do not reach the moment of arising of mental formations of insight meditation, and vice versa. They all vanish at the moment of their arising and are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

Contemplating mental formations of unwholesome and wholesome deeds is very subtle. However, the mindful meditator can know by personal knowledge how these mental formations keep on vanishing at the moment of their arising. For instance, while noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, if thinking about desire arises, the meditator notes that as "Wanting, desiring." When noted thus, the unwholesome deed of thinking about desiring vanishes before reaching the moment of the wholesome deed of noting.

The meditator who has advanced to the stage of the knowledge of dissolution knows this phenomenon rightly and well. When a meditator feels glad, having an act of charity as the object, he or she should note, "Glad, glad." When noted in this way, the meditator

who has reached the knowledge of dissolution sees clearly that the mental formation of the wholesome deed of contemplating on charity vanishes before reaching the moment of noting. In addition, while noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, when a random thought arises, it should be noted. When noted thus, the mental formation of noting the rising and falling vanishes without reaching the moment of arising of the random thought; the mental formation of the random thought also vanishes without reaching the moment of noting it as a random thought. In this way, the meditator perceives each and every mental formation perishing before it reaches the moment of arising of another mental formation. If the meditator does not perceive the phenomena in the way described, it must be said that he or she has not yet reached the knowledge of dissolution.

Mental formations of thoughts arising from distant objects do not reach the moment of thoughts on near objects, and vice versa. They all vanish at the moment of their arising and are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

I have completed the enumeration of mental formations under eleven headings. I will go on to consider the exposition on mind or consciousness.

### **Contemplating Mind in Eleven Ways**

*“Yaṃ kiñci viññāṇaṃ atītānāgatapaccuppannaṃ ajjhattaṃ vā bahiddhā vā oḷārikaṃ vā sukhumāṃ vā hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā, sabbaṃ viññāṇaṃ — ‘Netāṃ mama, nesohamasmi, na meso attā’ti evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya datṭhabbaṃ.”*

“Whatever consciousness, whether past, future, or present; internal or external; coarse or fine; inferior or superior; far or near; should be seen with right understanding, as it really is, ‘This is not mine, I am not this not, this is not my self’.”

This is the exhortation to contemplate mind analytically under eleven headings, such as past, present, or future, to reveal the true characteristics of consciousness. I have already explained in Part Six that contemplating impermanence is the same as contemplating, “I am not this,” contemplating unsatisfactoriness is the same as contemplating, “This is not mine,” and contemplating not-self is the

same as contemplating, “This is not my self.” Of the four mental aggregates, it must be said that consciousness is the most prominent. Mental concomitants like desire or hatred are described as mind in everyday language; desiring mind, liking mind, or hating mind.

In the Commentaries, expositions are given first on mind, then on mental formations as their concomitants. Here too I propose to elaborate on mind to a considerable extent. The past mind may be the mind that existed in previous lives, the mind that occurred during our younger days, or the mind that occurred during the intervening days, months, or years. Even if we take only today, there was the mind that arose prior to the present moment. Amongst all these possible types of past minds, it should be obvious to those who take an interest in spiritual matters that the mind of past existences has not come over to the present life, that it ceased in those existences. However, for those with strong attachment to self, it is not easy for such understanding to arise in them. These people with attachment to self hold the view that consciousness is a soul, self, or a living entity. When the old body of past existences broke up, the mind of those past existences left the old body and transmigrated to the new body of the present life. It has remained there since conception in the mother’s womb until the present, and will reside there until the time of death, when it will pass on to a new body in the next existence. This belief has been fully described in the [The Story of Bhikkhu Sāti](#) in Part Four.

## How Mind Arises In Successive Existences

As the meditators know by their own personal knowledge, mind is something that does not last even for a second — it is incessantly arising and vanishing. How it arises and vanishes has been described in the processes of eye-door consciousness on [page 71](#). For each existence, as death approaches, the death-proximate thought-process arises, taking as its object either kamma, a sign of kamma (*kamma-nimitta*), or a sign of destiny (*gati-nimitta*). This is how it arises (please refer to [page 71](#)):

From subconsciousness (*bhavaṅga*) arises the sense-door advertent consciousness (*āvajjana citta*), which apprehends the sensation. This reflects on a wholesome or unwholesome action performed during one’s lifetime; or on an object associated with that action, or on a sign of the place in which one is about to be reborn. After this

consciousness has ceased holding on to the said object, the impulsive or active-consciousness (*javana*) arises five times in succession. On the cessation of impulsive consciousness, the registering consciousness (*tadārammaṇa*) (still taking the same object) occurs for two thought moments, at the end of which subconsciousness appears lasting for one or two thought moments. After that, consciousness ceases for that existence. The last subconsciousness is known as decease-consciousness (*cuti citta*). As soon as the decease consciousness ceases, depending on the wholesome or unwholesome kamma that manifested at death's door, and holding on to the objects that appeared just prior to death, consciousness arises in a new existence. This consciousness is called the relinking-consciousness (*paṭisandhi citta*), which forms a link with the past existence. As this relinking-consciousness ceases, a series of subconsciousness arises. When sense-objects present themselves as objects at the sense-bases, subconsciousness ceases and sense-door adverting consciousness followed by sense-consciousness arise continuously. This is what is happening when you see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or cognise.

According to this process of consciousness, mind appears one by one in a continuous series, each fresh mind arising then vanishing. The decease-consciousness of the previous existence ceased then and there. The consciousness of the present life arises afresh, conditioned by previous kamma. Every mind is a fresh arising, not a renewal of the old one. Therefore, the meditator who watches phenomena arise and vanish, notes a thought when it appears. When thus noted the thinking mind disappears at once. Perceiving this, the meditator concludes that death means the termination of the continuity of mind after the last decease-consciousness has ceased. New becoming means — just like the present mind arising afresh all the time — the first arising of a fresh series of mind in a new place and a new existence. Subconsciousness is the continuous arising, depending on its kammic force, of similar fresh minds starting with the very first mind at the moment of conception. The mind that knows the phenomena of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or thinking is the mind that arises afresh from the subconsciousness. In this way, the meditator knows how mind arises and perishes, and from this personal experiences can make inferences about the death consciousness and relinking-consciousness.



## **Knowing Cause and Its Result**

Here, knowing that fresh minds arise conditioned by kamma amounts to knowing the Law of Dependent Origination through the knowledge of round of kamma and round of kamma result. Therefore we find in the Visuddhimagga (Vism.603):

“When he has discerned the conditions of mentality-materiality in this way by means of the round of kamma and the round of kamma-result, and has abandoned uncertainty about the three periods of time, then all past, future and present states are understood by him in accordance with death and rebirth-linking. This is his full-understanding of the known (see XX.3).

He understands thus: “Aggregates produced in the past with kamma as condition ceased there too. However, other aggregates are produced in this becoming with past kamma as their condition, although there is no single thing that has come over from the past existence to this one. Aggregates produced in this existence with kamma as their condition will cease, and in the future existence other aggregates will be produced, although no single thing will go over from this existence to a future one.” (Path of Purification, BPS)

Therefore, the Visuddhimagga has said, as quoted above, that all past, future and present phenomena are understood by him.

## **Contemplating Past, Present, and Future Mind**

As the meditator knows in this way that starting from rebirth-consciousness, a continuous series of mind arises and vanishes, it is clear that the mind of previous existences ceased then and there and does not reach this existence. It is clear also that the minds of the present existence cease at the respective moments of their arising. Thus the meditator is able to discern all past, present, and future minds with personal knowledge. I will recite how we discern them:

1. The past mind did not reach the present; it ceased then and there. It is therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.
2. The mind of the present life does not continue to the next existence. It ceases and vanishes in the present and is therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

3. The mind of the future life will not reach a later existence. It will cease and perish at the moment of its arising and is therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

This is roughly how mind or consciousness is considered with respect to the three periods of time. To the meditator who constantly notes the rising and falling of the abdomen, if thoughts arise while thus noting, he or she notes, "Thinking, thinking." Then the thoughts vanish. On hearing a sound, he or she notes, "Hearing, hearing," and the auditory-consciousness disappears instantly. He or she does not think like an ordinary person that hearing continues for a long time. He or she finds that hearing is intermittent: hearing, disappearing, hearing, disappearing, the auditory-consciousness vanishes in successive sections. Likewise, when noting tactile-consciousness, it is seen to be disappearing rapidly. When concentration is especially strong, the visual-consciousness rises and vanishes in quick succession. Olfactory-consciousness and gustatory-consciousness should be considered in a similar way. The noting mind is also perceived to be alternately arising and vanishing. In short, with every noting, the object noted as well as the noting mind incessantly arise and vanish in pairs. To the meditator who is perceiving phenomena very clearly, the visual-consciousness does not reach the moment of noting, thinking, or hearing; it vanishes at the instant of seeing. Hence he or she realises that it is impermanent. Similarly, the noting mind, the thinking mind, and the hearing mind do not reach moments of noting, thinking, and hearing. Hence, the meditator realises they are impermanent. I will recite how they are to be contemplated.

1. The visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mind-consciousness that appeared a moment ago do not reach the present moment. They perished and ceased and are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.
2. The visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mind-consciousness that are presently arising do not reach the next moment. They perish and cease and are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.
3. The visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mind-consciousness that will arise in future will not reach further future moments. They will perish and cease then, and are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

Knowing in this way by personal experience how the mind arises and vanishes, it can be inferred that all the minds that remain to be noted, those in others, in the whole world, all types of mind are arising and vanishing. It can be concluded by inference that just as those minds that have been noted and are found to be impermanent, those in others will also be constantly ceasing and perishing. Those in the whole world will be ceasing and perishing. Therefore, all types of mind are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

### **Contemplating Internal and External Mind**

The mind that has an internal object does not reach an external object; the mind that has an external object does not reach an internal object. While fixed on its respective objects, the mind ceases and perishes, and is therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

### **Contemplating Coarse and Fine Mind**

An angry mind is coarse; other types of mind are fine compared to it. Among angry minds, that which is violent enough to commit murder, to torture others, to cause destruction to other's property, to speak abusive, threatening language is coarse; the ordinary irritated mind is fine. Greedy mind is soft compared to angry mind; but the greedy mind that is intense enough to steal the property of others, to commit wrong acts, to use low, vulgar language is coarse. Ordinary desire is fine. Deluded mind (ignorant mind) compared to greedy mind and angry mind is fine; but the ignorant mind that finds fault with and shows disrespect to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha is coarse. The ordinary perplexed mind is fine. More subtle than these unwholesome minds are wholesome minds. Among the wholesome minds, joy and happiness are coarse; the mind that is calm and tranquil is fine. While noting the arising and vanishing of coarse and fine minds, the meditator who is engaged in constant noting perceives that the coarse mind does not reach the moment of arising of the fine mind, and the fine mind does not reach the moment of arising of the coarse mind. They vanish at the respective moments of their arising.

### **Contemplation of Mind (Cittānupassanā)**

While the meditator is contemplating the rise and fall of the abdomen, if the mind arises with lust, he or she notes it as a mind

with lust. This is knowing the mind with lust as it truly is in accordance with the instructions in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (*sarāgaṃ vā cittaṃ 'Sarāgaṃ citta'nti pajānāti*). When noted thus, the mind with lust ceases and is followed by a continuous stream of wholesome noting minds, the functional mind (*kiriyā citta*), resultant mind (*vipāka citta*), and wholesome impulsion minds (*kusala javana citta*) that are concerned with the ordinary acts of sense-cognition. These wholesome minds are noted as they arise, as "Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting touching, or knowing." This is knowing the mind without lust as it really is in accordance with the instructions in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (*vītarāgaṃ vā cittaṃ 'Vītarāgaṃ citta'nti pajānāti*). Noting and knowing the mind with lust as well as the mind without lust in this way is contemplation of the mind with mindfulness.

For your general knowledge, I wish to touch upon the exposition given in the Commentary. The Commentary defines the mind with lust as eight kinds of consciousness accompanied by greed. This is the enumeration of lustful minds. Thus if the mind is lustful, it must be one of the eight types of consciousness rooted in attachment. However, here, just considering that eight kinds of consciousness rooted in attachment are known as minds with lust does not amount to the contemplation of mind with mindfulness. Further, minds without lust are defined as mundane wholesome and functional minds. The Commentary also states that because it is the object for consideration by insight knowledge, the supramundane mind is not classified as a mind without lust, or a mind without ill-will, *etc.* The two kinds of consciousness rooted in ill-will, and the two rooted in delusion are also not classified as minds without lust.

At one time when I had no knowledge of meditation, I was assailed by doubt why the consciousness rooted in ill-will and that rooted in delusion were not classified as mind without lust. Only when I had acquired knowledge through the practice of meditation did I understand how correct and natural the Commentary's exposition was. Because, when the mind with lust is contemplated and noted, it ceases at once and in its place arise only wholesome mind (*kusala citta*), functional mind (*kiriyā citta*), resultant mind (*vipāka citta*), or indeterminate mind (*abyākata citta*); it is not usual for ill-will and delusion to arise then. Therefore at that time only the wholesome mind involved in noting, or the indeterminate resultant consciousness

(*vipāka abyākata*), or the indeterminate adverting consciousness (*āvajjana abyākata citta*) involved in acts of seeing, *etc.*, and the wholesome impulsion consciousness (*kusala javana citta*) are contemplated. Thus the definition of mind without lust as wholesome indeterminate consciousness (*kusala abyākata citta*) is very natural and is in keeping with what meditators find through personal experience. When ill-will arises in the course of noting the rise and fall of the abdomen, that has to be noted. The ill-will vanishes at once and in its place there arises the wholesome mind noting the seeing, *etc.*

The meditator knows this mind without ill-will by noting it too. When the mind with delusion — doubtful or distracted minds appear — it is noted as usual, and disappears. In its place there arise the wholesome mind of noting, the indeterminate and wholesome impulsion consciousness of seeing, *etc.* The meditator knows this mind without delusion by noting. Further, when sloth and torpor make their appearance while noting the rise and fall of the abdomen, this has to be noted as “Sloth, sleepy.” These vanish at once and mindfulness arise in their place. This is noted by the meditator before reverting to noting the abdominal movements. Again, while engaged in noting the abdominal movements, if distraction and restlessness appear, it is to be noted as “Distracted, restless, thinking,” *etc.* When noted thus, restlessness disappears, and the mind remains tranquil. This tranquil mind must also be noted. When the concentration is good and the mind rests on the object of contemplation, this tranquil mind is known automatically. When restlessness appears, it is noted, and the mind again becomes tranquil. These changes in the state of mind are mindfully noted; the mind that is noted and contemplated is free of defilements (*vimuttaṃ cittaṃ*). The mind that is not noted and contemplated is not free of defilements (*avimuttaṃ cittaṃ*).

The meditator notes all these states of mind. This is how mind is contemplated as taught by the Blessed One in the Satipatṭhāna Sutta. According to this practice of contemplation of mind, the mind with lust or desire, with ill-will, and the distracted or restless mind, are all coarse. When the coarse mind becomes free of those defilements, wholesome and indeterminate minds, which are fine minds, arise in their place. Therefore, the meditator engaged in watching the phenomena taking place in the present moment perceives that the coarse mind does not reach the moment of the fine mind.

The coarse mind does not reach the moment of the arising of the fine mind; the fine mind does not reach the moment of arising of the coarse mind. They cease and vanish at the respective moments of their arising and are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. Classification of mind according to inferior and superior status is similar to the classification of inferior and superior mental formations. I will recite thus:

1. The inferior wholesome mind does not reach the moment of the arising of the superior indeterminate mind; the superior wholesome mind also does not reach the moment of the arising of the inferior wholesome mind. They cease and vanish at the moments of their respective arising and are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.
2. The wholesome mind of generosity does not reach the moment of the arising of the wholesome mind of morality or meditation. The wholesome mind of morality or meditation does not reach the moment of arising of the wholesome mind of generosity.
3. The wholesome mind of morality does not reach the moment of the arising of the wholesome mind of meditation; and vice versa.
4. The wholesome mind of tranquillity meditation does not reach the moment of insight meditation; the mind of insight meditation also does not reach the moment of tranquillity meditation. They all cease and pass away at the respective moments of their arising.

The ordinary person who is unaccustomed to noting phenomena, thinks, when looking at a near object after looking at a distant object, that the mind that sees the distant object comes closer; when looking at a distant object after seeing a near object, that the mind that sees the near object has gone away to a distance. Similarly when a sound is heard from nearby while a distant sound is being heard, it is presumed that the mind that hears the distant sound has moved nearer; when a sound is heard from a distance while a nearby sound is being heard, it is presumed that the mind that hears the nearby sound has moved away to a distance.

From smelling an external odour, when an internal odour is smelt, it is thought that the mind from outside has come inside. While a feeling is being felt at a distance, for instance, on the feet, when another feeling is felt on one's chest, the distant feeling appears to have moved closer; and vice versa. While thinking of a distant object,

one thinks of a nearby object and it appears that the distant mind has come nearer; and vice versa. In short, it is the general belief that there is only one permanent mind; the same mind is believed to know everything near and far.

The meditator who notes every phenomenon of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking, knows from direct personal knowledge that the mind from afar does not come nearer; the nearby mind also does not go far away. They all pass away at the moment of their arising. I will recite thus:

The mind that knows seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or thinking of distant objects does not come nearer; the mind that cognises nearby objects does not go away to distant objects. The objects all vanish at the respective moments of their arising, and are therefore impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

I have finished the consideration of consciousness under eleven headings. I will recapitulate how these are contemplated and bring my discourse to a close.

‘All consciousness, whether past, present, or future; internal or external; coarse or fine; inferior or superior; far or near; should be seen with right understanding as they really are, ‘This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.’

By virtue of having given respectful attention to this discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, may you all attain and soon realise nibbāna, by means of the Path and Fruition, as you wish.

## PART EIGHT

Delivered on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1963.<sup>1</sup>

I have already delivered ten discourses on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta and covered seven parts of it. This eighth part will mark the conclusion of this series of discourses. The original Sutta is divided into four sections. The first section deals with the teaching that the five aggregates of materiality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness tend to affliction and are, therefore, not-self, not an inner essence; being unmanageable and not subject to control they are not-self, not an inner essence. The second section deals with the question, “Are the five aggregates permanent or impermanent? Suffering or happiness?” and explains that it is not fitting to regard that which is not permanent, suffering, and subject to change as, “This is mine, I am this, this is my self.” In the third section, the five aggregates are classified and enumerated under eleven headings and it is taught how to contemplate them as, “This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.” In the fourth section, which we will deal with today, the Blessed One taught how, for the meditator who perceives impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, insight knowledge is progressively developed to the stage of knowledge of disgust (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*) leading to the attainment of the knowledge of the Path and Fruition and final liberation as an Arahant.

### How Insight Knowledge Is Developed

*“Evaṃ passaṃ, bhikkhave, sutavā ariyasāvako rūpasmimpi nibbindati, vedanāyapi nibbindati, saññāyapi nibbindati, saṅkhāresupi nibbindati, viññāṇasmimpi nibbindati.”*

“Monks, the well-informed noble disciple, seeing thus, gets weary of materiality, gets weary of feelings, gets weary of perceptions, gets weary of mental formations, gets weary of consciousness.”

The Blessed One thus taught how knowledge of disgust is developed, “Seeing thus,” in the above passage means seeing impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self as instructed. One becomes a well-informed noble disciple fully equipped with learning, or knowledge from hearing, as well as knowledge from personal

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<sup>1</sup> The full-moon day and the 8th waxing day of Tawthalin, 1325 M.E.



experience. One has learnt that to perceive impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self in the five aggregates, one has to note every act of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. One has also learnt that one has to contemplate the five aggregates of attachment as just mind and matter, and that knowing by noting is mind. One has also learnt from hearing about cause and effect, about the nature of incessant arising and vanishing, impermanence, and not-self. All of this constitutes learning, or knowledge acquired by hearing. Meditators are accomplished in this form of knowledge even before they begin the practice of meditation. While noting rising, falling, bending, stretching, moving, extending, pressing, feeling hard, coarse, soft, smooth, hot, cold, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, the meditator realises that the objects being noted are materiality and that knowing these objects is mentality; that there are only mind and matter. When one notes consciousness it is mentality, and the location of this consciousness is materiality. The meditator knows that there are only these two things.

Our audience here knows this too. This is the knowledge acquired through personal experience. Further, when one wants to bend, one bends; when wanting to stretch, one stretches; when one wants to go, one goes. Noting all of these, one comes to realise that one bends because one wants to, one stretches because one wants to, one goes because one wants to; there is no living entity making one bend, stretch, or go. There are only the respective causes for each of the results produced. This is also knowledge from personal experience. When one fails to note the phenomena, one cannot see them as they really are; one develops a liking for them; from liking comes craving. Because one craves for them, one has to make efforts to get them, thereby producing wholesome and unwholesome kamma. In consequence of these kammās, there are new existences.

The meditator comes to understand the Law of Dependent Origination concerning the cause and effects of phenomena. Again, both the objects of materiality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, and the knowing mind keep on arising afresh and perishing. One, therefore, knows rightly, as the Blessed One instructed, that they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. As stated above, various kinds of knowledge beginning with that of analytical knowledge of body and mind, right up to knowledge of impermanence, unsatisfac-

toriness, and not-self are all gained by personal experience, not merely from hearing or learning. I dare say that the present audience includes some who are equipped with such personal knowledge. Thus we say that the person who can perceive the true nature of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self through personal experience is one who is well-informed, equipped with both the knowledge of hearing and the knowledge derived from personal experience. It goes without saying that the group of five monks, present at the time of discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, all being Stream-winners, were fully equipped with both types of knowledge and were, therefore, well-informed. The disciple of the Blessed One who is thus well-informed can perceive, with direct knowledge, the five aggregates of materiality as they manifest at every moment of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or thinking to be impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. The meditator who can perceive in this way soon reaches the stage of knowledge of arising and passing away (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*), which discerns the rapid arising and dissolution of mind and matter.

According to the Visuddhimagga (Vism.633), when that stage is reached, the meditator witnesses strange lights; experiences unprecedented happiness, intense joy, and tranquillity, and experiences lightness in the body and mind, softness and gentleness, vigour and uprightiness. The meditator feels indescribably pleasant and fine in body and mind. This mindfulness is so perfect that it may be said that there is nothing of which the meditator is not mindful. The intellect is so sharp that it seems there is nothing that cannot be comprehended. Religious fervour increases and devotion to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha grows, becoming clearer and brighter than it ever was before. However, all these unusual developments have to be noted and rejected. When they are noted and rejected, this stage of knowledge is transcended and the next stage is reached with the appearance of the knowledge of dissolution (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*).

At the time, the meditation object and the noting mind are perceived to be disintegrating and vanishing in pairs. For instance, when the rising of the abdomen is noted, the rising vanishes as well as the noting mind. Each act of rising is discerned to be vanishing in successive separate disappearances. This is discerned at every moment of noting. It even appears that the meditation object perishes first, and noting it seems to occur later. This is of course, what actually

happens. When an arising thought is contemplated, the noting mind arises only after the thought has disappeared. The same thing happens while noting other objects. The noting takes place only after the noted object has disappeared. However, when the knowledge is not yet mature, the object to be noted seems to disappear simultaneously with the knowing mind. This is in accordance with the Sutta teaching that only the present moment is contemplated.

Perceiving the continuous process of dissolution occurring rapidly, one come to know that death may occur at any time and this is a dangerous and terrifying state of affairs. This is knowledge of fearfulness (*bhayatupattihāna-ñāṇa*). When it is seen as dangerous the understanding arises (of fearful things) as baneful and blameworthy, which is knowledge of misery (*ādīnava-ñāṇa*). The meditator no longer finds delight in these baneful aggregates of mind and matter. He finds them detestable, disgusting, which is knowledge of disgust (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*). The Blessed One was referring to this state of mind when he said, “*Rūpasmimpi nibbindati .. he gets weary of materiality ...*’ Before the knowledge is developed to this stage of disgust, a person feels quite satisfied and happy with the physical form of the present existence; satisfied and happy with the expectation of human physical form or celestial physical form in a future existence. He or she craves for and expects great happiness in human existences and celestial existences, with a beautiful, healthy body. With the arising of this knowledge, one does not feel happy any more. The so-called happiness of human life consists of incessantly arising and perishing mind and matter. One also infers that the so-called happiness in a celestial realm is similarly constituted of instantly perishing mind and matter, for which one has developed disgust. It is like a fisherman holding a dangerous snake, thinking it to be a fish that he has caught. As soon as he realises that he has in his hand a dangerous snake instead of a fish, he becomes alarmed and disgusted with it, badly wanting to get rid of it, to release his hold on it.

This illustration was described fully in my discourse on the Silavanta Sutta. Furthermore, before the advent of the knowledge of disgust, one takes delight in all the feelings one is enjoying now. One yearns for the pleasant feelings of the human or celestial realms in future existences. One takes delight in pleasant perceptions that one is blessed with now, one longs for and delights in the thought of

having pleasant perceptions in future existences. One takes delight in thoughts and actions of the present life and delights in thoughts and actions in future existences. Some even pray how they would like to be reborn as a human being and what they would like to do when reborn as such. Some indulge and rejoice in day-dreaming and look forward to doing similarly in coming existences. However, when the knowledge of disgust is mature, one sees the five aggregates as they really are and feels disgust for them. Just as they are rapidly vanishing now, whether reborn as a human or celestial being, the feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness will always be disintegrating rapidly. Considering thus, one feels dispassionate towards all these formations, and is dissatisfied with them.

### Knowledge of Disgust Arises if Impermanence is Seen

It is essential that one becomes genuinely dissatisfied and disgusted with them. Only when genuine disgust and dissatisfaction is developed towards them, that the knowledge of desire for deliverance (*muñcitu-kamyatā-ñāṇa*) will arise and then one will really strive to get rid of them. It is only then that the knowledge of equanimity about formations (*sañkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*) will appear, and when that knowledge is fully developed, nibbāna can be realised through the attainment of the Noble Path and its Fruition, to become a genuine Stream-winner, Once-returner, Non-returner, or Arahant. It is essential to really strive hard for the development of genuine knowledge of disgust. This is why the Blessed One taught:

*“Sabbe sañkhārā aniccā’ti, yadā paññāya passati.*

*Atha nibbindati dukkhe, esa maggo visuddhiyā.”* (Dhp v 277)

“All compounded things (conditioned by kamma, mind, climate, and food) are impermanent. When one understands this truth by insight knowledge, then one gets disgusted with suffering.”

Dissatisfaction and disgust is the true and right path to purity, to realise nibbāna, free from all defilements and suffering. The meditator who notes every act of sense-cognition as it arises perceives only the phenomenon that is rapidly rising and vanishing. He or she therefore knows things as they truly are — as impermanent. With this knowledge of impermanence, comes the realisation that there is

nothing delightful or pleasant in the present mind and body, and any future mind and body, having the same nature of impermanence, will also not be delightful or pleasant. He or she therefore develops distaste and disgust for all materiality and mentality from which he or she wants to be free, and so strives for liberation by continuing to meditate. Thereby the knowledge of equanimity appears in due course and nibbāna is realised through the Noble Path. The Blessed One therefore taught that the insight that sees dissatisfaction and disgust is the true path to nibbāna.

### **Knowledge of Disgust Arises If Unsatisfactoriness Is Seen**

*“Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā”ti, yadā paññāya passati.*

*Atha nibbindati dukkhe, esa maggo visuddhiyā.”* (Dhp v 278)

“All compounded things (conditioned by kamma, mind, climate, and food) are unsatisfactory. When one understands this truth by insight knowledge, then one get dissatisfied and disgusted with suffering.”

A certain person has interpreted the word ‘*saṅkhārā*’ in this verse to mean the mental concomitant of volition (*cetanā*), which produces wholesome and unwholesome actions. Thus according to him, “The wholesome acts of charity, keeping precepts, *etc.*, are all mental formations and hence suffering. Tranquillity meditation or insight meditation are also mental formation. All types of action are thus productive of suffering. So to attain the peace of nibbāna, do not engage in any activity. Keep the mind as it is.” Thus he misrepresents (and misinterprets) the teaching to suit his purpose. He has disciples who, accepting his views, are spreading his wrong teaching.

In fact, the ‘*saṅkhārā*’ of this verse is not intended to convey the meaning of wholesome or unwholesome mental formations, which arise out of ignorance. Here, mental formations means simply the mentality and materiality that arise conditioned by kamma, mind, climate, and food. Again, the mental and physical phenomena do not include the supramundane path and fruition consciousness, and mental concomitants that form the objects of insight meditation. Only the mundane materiality and mentality, which come under the three classes of spheres (sense sphere, form sphere, and formless sphere) is meant here, the same as the ‘*saṅkhārā*’ of the previous verse. Thus

all mental and physical phenomena that manifest at every moment of sense-cognition are incessantly arising and vanishing, and are therefore transient. Because of impermanence, they are unsatisfactory. This is what is meant here.

The meditator perceives that all the mental and physical phenomena manifesting at the moment of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, undergo instant dissolution and are, therefore, transient. Because they are liable to disintegrate at any moment, the meditator perceives them as terrible suffering. For some, unpleasant sensations such as feeling stiff, hot, painful, itchy, *etc.*, keep manifesting at various parts of the body. At every manifestation, these sensations are noted, thereby enabling the meditator to perceive the whole body as a mass of suffering. This is in accordance with the teaching, "*Dukkhamaḍḍakkhi sallato,*" which says that insight knowledge perceives the body as a mass of suffering caused by piercing thorns or spikes.

It may be asked, "What difference is there between the unbearable pain experienced by an ordinary person and that experienced by the meditator?" The difference lies in the fact that the ordinary person feels the pain, and thinks, "I feel unbearable pain. I am suffering." However, the meditator knows this unpleasant feeling without any self-clinging, perceiving it as just unpleasant phenomena, arising afresh repeatedly, and perishing instantly. This is insight knowledge without any self-clinging. When perceived either as terrible suffering because of impermanence or as a mass of unbearable suffering, there is no delight in the compounded things, the heap of suffering, but disgust with them. There is dissatisfaction and weariness with regard to the present mentality and materiality as well as with those of the future — a total distaste and disgust for all mental and physical phenomena. This is the development of the knowledge of disgust. When this knowledge is developed there arises the wish to discard the mental and physical phenomena to get free from them. He or she continues the work of meditation to achieve freedom. In time, while endeavouring thus, the knowledge of equanimity about formations arises and nibbāna is realised, by means of the knowledge of the Noble Path. Therefore, the Blessed One described the insight that considers all mental formations as suffering and is disgusted with them as the path to nibbāna. Similarly, he taught how they are perceived as not-self and therefore, regarded with disgust and dislike.

## Knowledge of Disgust Arises if Not-self is Seen

*“Sabbe dhammā anattā’ti, yadā paññāya passati.  
Atha nibbindati dukkhe, esa maggo visuddhiyā.”*

The word ‘*dhammā*’ in this verse has the same purpose as ‘*sañkhārā*’ in the previous two verses, and means mundane mind and matter as perceived by insight knowledge. Not-self is *dhammā*, and phenomena (*dhammā*), thus means not-self (*anatta*). To bring out more clearly the meaning of mental formations that are not-self, the word ‘*dhammā*’ is employed here. This is the explanation given in the Commentary and I believe it is quite appropriate and acceptable. However, there are other views, which hold that the Dhamma is purposely used here to include the supramundane Path, its Fruition and the unconditioned nibbāna too. I believe that this interpretation is not quite tenable. The ordinary person perceives the mental formations such as seeing, hearing, *etc.*, as permanent and pleasant, whereas the meditator sees these mental formations as transient and suffering. Likewise, what the ordinary person regards as self, namely, mundane materiality and mentality, the meditator sees as not-self. The meditator need not and cannot perceive supramundane things, which could not have been objects of contemplation and for which he or she could have no attachment. Thus it must be taken that *dhammā* here just means mundane mental formations, mentality and materiality that form the objects of contemplation for insight.

*“All mundane mental and physical phenomena such as seeing or hearing, are not-self, not a living entity. When one understands this truth by insight knowledge on reaching the knowledge of dissolution, then one gets dissatisfied and disgusted with all this suffering. This dissatisfaction and disgust is the true and right path to purity, to nibbāna, free from all defilements and sufferings.”*

Because ordinary people believe the mind and matter represented by seeing, hearing, *etc.*, to be a self, a living entity, they take delight in them and feel happy about them. However, the meditator sees in them only incessant arising and vanishing, and therefore realises that they are not a self, but are mere phenomena. As explained in this Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, because they tend to afflict, they are seen

to be not-self, and being not subject to one's control, they are not-self. Thus the meditator no longer takes delight or finds pleasure in these mental and physical phenomena. There arises the wish to discard them, to get free from them. He or she continues the work of meditation to achieve that freedom. In time, while continuing to strive, the knowledge of equanimity about formations arises and nibbāna is realised by means of the knowledge of the Noble Path.

That is why the Blessed One described the insight that regards all phenomena as not-self and is disgusted with them, as the Path to nibbāna. The three stanzas, where it is taught that knowledge of disgust appears when dislike and distaste for mental formations are developed, and the fact that this is the true and right path to nibbāna, should be carefully noted. Unless the mental formations represented by mind and matter are seen by one's own experience as incessantly arising and disintegrating instantly, the insight that perceives them as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self is not properly developed, and without genuine insight, the knowledge of disgust, which has distaste for and dislikes the suffering of mental formations, will not arise. In the absence of this knowledge, it is impossible to realise nibbāna. Only with personal knowledge of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, will weariness develop regarding the mental formations, and knowledge of disgust will arise. It is only after the appearance of this knowledge that the knowledge of the Path and Fruition can occur, followed by the realisation of nibbāna. This must be definitively understood and remembered.

This is why the Blessed One stated in this sutta. *“Evaṃ passaṃ, bhikkhave, sutavā ariyasāvako rūpasmimpi nibbindati ...”* There are many Suttas in which similar teachings were given by the Buddha. Let us recapitulate on this point:

“Monks, the instructed noble disciple seeing thus gets weary of matter, gets weary of feelings, gets weary of perceptions, gets weary of consciousness.”

### Definition of the Knowledge of Disgust

In the above Pāli text, “Seeing thus” is a summarised statement of the development of insight knowledge up to the stage of the knowledge of dissolution, and with the words “gets weary of ..” the development of insight from knowledge of disgust right up to the



insight leading to emergence (*vuṭṭhānagāminī-vipassanā-ñāṇa*), is very concisely described. Thus in the Commentary to the Mūlapaṇṇāsa, we find this exposition on **Nibbindatī'ti**. "*Ettha ca nibbidātī vuṭṭhānagāminī vipassanā adhippetā.*"<sup>1</sup>

"**Nibbindati**" means to feel weariness, bored, displeased, and unhappy. To explain further, the words "*nibbindatī'ti*" should be taken to mean the insight that reaches right up to the Noble Path known as insight leading to emergence. In the Paṭisambhidāmagga and the Visuddhimagga, knowledge of disgust is enumerated under seven headings of successive stages of development, namely, knowledge of dissolution (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*), knowledge of misery (*ādīnava-ñāṇa*), knowledge of disgust (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*), knowledge of desire for deliverance (*muñcitu-kamyatā-ñāṇa*), knowledge of re-observation (*paṭisaṅkhānupassana-ñāṇa*), knowledge of equanimity about formations (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*), and insight leading to emergence (*vuṭṭhānagāminī-vipassanā-ñāṇa*). I have so far explained up to the stage of knowledge of disgust. I will now continue with the rest.

### Genuine Desire for Nibbāna

When the meditator finds only rapid dissolution and disintegration, at every instance of contemplation, he or she becomes weary of and displeased with the aggregates of mind and matter manifested in the acts of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, then does not wish to hold on to them, but wants to abandon them. He or she realises only in the absence of these incessantly rising and perishing mind and matter will there be peace. This is the development (arising) of the wish for the genuine nibbāna. Formerly, imagining nibbāna to be something like a great metropolis, the wish to reach there arose then with a hope of permanent enjoyment of all that the heart desires. This is not desire for genuine nibbāna, but only for mundane happiness. Those who have not really seen the dangers and faults of mind and matter only wish for enjoyment of a mundane type of bliss. They cannot even conceive the complete cessation of all mind and matter, including every form of enjoyment.

### The Bliss of Nibbāna

At one time, the Venerable Sāriputta uttered, "This nibbāna is indeed blissful." Then a certain young monk by the name of Lāḷudāyī

<sup>1</sup> MA.ii.114, Commentary on the Simile of the Snake, Sutta 22 of the Majjhimanikāya.

asked him, “Venerable sir, there is no feeling in nibbāna, so then what is blissful in nibbāna where there is no feeling?” He raised this point, not understanding fully that nibbāna is devoid of all mentality and materiality and therefore devoid of feeling too. The Venerable Sāriputta’s reply to this was, “The fact that there is no feeling to experience is itself blissful.” It is true that peace is more blissful than any feeling that is felt to be pleasant or delightful. This is true bliss. A feeling is regarded as delightful because of liking it, and craving it. Without a liking for it, no feeling can be regarded as delightful.

A moment’s consideration will prove this point. A tasty food appears delightful and delicious whilst there is a liking for it, and craving for it. When one is feeling unwell, with no appetite, or when one has eaten well and is already full, the same tasty food will no longer be appealing. If forced to eat it, there can be no enjoyment in eating it; it will not be regarded as something good and delicious, but rather as terrible suffering. Take another example such as a beautiful sight or a pleasant sound. How long can one keep on looking at a beautiful sight, listening to a pleasant sound. How many hours, days, months, or years? The interest in them cannot last continuously even for 24 hours, after which dislike for them will appear. To have to continue looking at that sight or listening to that sound will then become terrible suffering. It is clear, therefore, that to be without any liking or craving, to be without feeling is blissful. A detailed account of this a subject has been given in my [discourse on the nature of nibbāna](#).

### Looking Forward To Nibbāna

The meditator who is developing the knowledge of disgust truly perceives the baneful aspects of mind and matter, and has become weary of and disgusted with them. He or she knows that in nibbāna, where there is no mind and matter, no feeling, lies real peace and he or she therefore longs for it. This is like scanning the distance from a lookout post, looking forward to nibbāna by means of knowledge for deliverance (*muñcitu-kamyatā-ñāṇa*). As the will to attain the real nibbāna and liberate oneself from the ills of mind and matter develop, one strives harder. With this redoubling of effort, one gains knowledge of re-observation (*paṭisaṅkhānupassana-ñāṇa*), which comprehends the nature of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness,

and not-self more deeply than before. Especially more pronounced and distinct is the understanding of the characteristics of unsatisfactoriness and suffering. When the knowledge of re-observation gains strength and maturity, one gains the knowledge of equanimity about formations (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*). This is a general description of how, starting from knowledge by comprehension (*sammasana-ñāṇa*), the series of insights gradually develop in a trainable individual. With the noble persons such as Stream-winners, within a few moments after the start of meditation, they may attain to the stage of equanimity. There is no doubt that the five monks listening to the discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta reached this stage instantly.

## The Six Characteristics of Equanimity

### 1. Freedom from Fear and Delight

The knowledge of equanimity about formations (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*) is distinguished by six characteristics. The first is the maintenance of equanimity, abandoning fear and delight (*bhayañca nandiñca vippahāya sabba saṅkhāresu udasīno*) as stated in the Visuddhimagga. How has this equanimity come about? At the stage of knowledge of fearfulness the meditator has contemplated the fearsome danger and the knowledge developed thereby is characterised by fear. At this stage of equanimity, all signs of fear have disappeared. At the stage of knowledge of misery, the meditator regards all things as baneful, and at the stage of disgust, all things are distasteful and disgusting. The meditator develops the desire to discard all of the aggregates and to escape from them at the stage of desire for deliverance. On reaching the stage of equanimity, all these characteristics of the lower insights, namely, banefulness, distaste and disgust, desire to escape and making extraordinary efforts have disappeared. The expression “abandoning fear (*bhayañca vippahāya*),” is referring to the progress in knowledge that is free from fear. In accordance with this, it must be regarded that with the disappearance of fear, the other characteristics such as banefulness, disgust, desire to escape, extraordinary efforts, *etc.*, have also disappeared. Furthermore, at the stage of knowledge of arising and passing away the meditator has developed intense rapture and thrill, feeling highly exultant. The knowledge of equanimity is superior to this stage, nevertheless all this rapture and exultation is absent. Therefore, the

Visuddhimagga says; “Abandoning delight (*nandiñca vippahāya*).” The meditator has abandoned the exultation and rapture, but dwells contemplating the mental formations as manifested in seeing, hearing, etc., with complete equanimity. There is no longer great exuberance of gladness, happiness, or delight such as had occurred at the stage of knowledge of arising and passing away. This is the absence of fear or delight with respect to the practice of Dhamma.

With regard to mundane affairs too, it becomes plain how a meditator becomes free from fear and delight. When worrying news of worldly affairs with respect to one’s everyday life, reaches the meditator who has attained the stage of equanimity, he or she remains unperturbed, not much moved by worry, anxiety, or fear. He or she remains unperturbed too when hearing glad news, not moved much by exultation, rejoicing, or delight. These are freedom from fear and delight in worldly matters.

## 2. Equanimity Between Pleasant and Unpleasant

The second characteristic is a balanced attitude of mind, not feeling glad over pleasant things, nor sad and depressed by distressing affairs. He or she can view things impartially and with equanimity. The Pāli text quoted here is: “Having seen a visible form with the eye, the meditator remains unaffected by it, neither feeling glad nor sad over it (*Cakkhunā rūpaṃ disvā neva sumano hotī na dummano, upekkhāko viharati, sato sampajano*).” However beautiful or attractive the sight is, the meditator does not feel excited and jubilant; however ugly or repulsive the sight is, he or she remains unperturbed, maintaining equanimity, mindful and knowing it rightly.”

Noting everything, pleasant or unpleasant when seen, and knowing its reality with reference to its impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, and developing neither attachment, liking, or aversion for it, he or she views phenomena with impartiality. He or she observes with detached mind just to know the phenomenon of seeing, which is perishing at every moment. The meditator who has attained the stage of equanimity understands through personal experience how this observation may occur. This is how the phenomenon of seeing is observed with an equanimous mental attitude.

The same thing holds true for all acts of hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or knowing where observation is made with equanimity

just to know the phenomena of hearing, *etc.* This ability to watch the six sense-doors with unperturbed equanimity is known as six-factored equanimity (*chaḷaṅgupekkhā*), a special virtue of the Arahants. However, the ordinary person who has attained the stage of equanimity can also become similarly accomplished. According to the Commentary on the *Aṅguttaranikāya*, the meditator who has advanced to the stage of knowledge of arising and passing away can become equipped with this same virtue as an Arahant. However, the accomplishment is not very prominent at this stage. It becomes more distinct at the stage of knowledge of dissolution. However, at the stage of equanimity this virtue becomes pronounced. Thus the meditator who has reached this stage of development, sharing some of the virtues of an Arahant, deserves great respect from ordinary persons. Even if unknown and not esteemed by others, the meditator, knowing his or her own virtue, should be well pleased and gratified with his or her progress and development.

### **3. Effortless Contemplation**

The third characteristic is effortless contemplation. The Visuddhimagga says, "Taking a neutral attitude with regard to the practice of contemplation (*Saṅkhāravicinane majjhataṃ hutvā*)." This is supported and explained in its Subcommentary, which says, "Just as mental equilibrium is maintained in the matter of mental formations as objects of contemplation, so too an attitude of neutral balance should be taken with regard to the practice of contemplating them." At the lower stages of insight, the meditator has to make great efforts for the appearance of the object for contemplation. At the stage of equanimity no special effort is needed for the appearance of objects for contemplation and no special effort is needed to contemplate them. The objects appear of their own accord one by one, followed by effortless contemplation. The process of contemplation becomes smooth and easy. These are the three characteristics of equanimity and balanced conditions. I will now go on to the three special characteristics of the knowledge of equanimity about formations.

### **4. It Endures for a Long Time**

At the lower stages, it was not easy to keep the mind fixed on a certain object even for half an hour or one hour. At the stage of

equanimity, the concentration remains steady for one hour, two hours, or three hours. Such is the experience of many of our meditators. It is for this characteristic of equanimity that it is defined by the Paṭisambhidāmagga as the insight knowledge that endures well. The Subcommentary on the Visuddhimagga explains that it means, “One long continuous process of development.” Only when it lasts long can it be said to endure well.

### 5. Becomes More Subtle with the Passing of Time

The fifth characteristic is getting finer and more subtle just like sifting flour on the edge of a tray, as stated in the Visuddhimagga. The knowledge of equanimity from the moment of arising is subtle, but as time passes, it becomes still finer and more subtle, which is also the experience of many of our meditators.

### 6. Attention Is Not Dispersed

The sixth characteristic is that of non-dispersion. At the lower stages, the concentration is not strong, the mind is dispersed over many objects. However, at the stage of knowledge of equanimity, the mind is barely diffused at all. Not to say of other extraneous objects, even the objects appropriate for contemplation, the mind refuses to take them. While at the stage of knowledge of dissolution, the mind is scattered over the various parts of the body and thus sensations of touch are felt on the whole body. At this stage of equanimity, however, dispersing the mind becomes difficult — it remains fixed only on only a few objects. Thus from observing the whole body, the mind retracts and converges only on four objects just knowing in sequence, rising, falling, sitting, and touching. Of these four objects, sitting may disappear leaving only three objects to note. Then the rising and falling will fade away, leaving only the touching. This cognition of touching may disappear altogether, leaving just the knowing mind being noted as “Knowing, knowing.” At such time when reflection is made on objects in which one is specially interested, it will be found that the mind does not stay long on them. It reverts back to the usual objects of contemplation. Thus concentration is said to be devoid of dispersion. The Visuddhimagga’s description is, “The mind retreats, retracts, and recoils; it does not spread out (*cittam patilīyati patikuṭati pativattati na sampasāriyati*).” These are three characteristics of the

knowledge of equanimity, which should be experienced personally by oneself. When these characteristic are not yet experienced, one can decide for oneself that one has not yet developed up to this stage of insight knowledge.

### Development of Insight Leading to Emergence

When the knowledge of equanimity, with these six characteristics, has become fully perfected, there appears a special kind of knowledge which seems to be fast moving; it seems as if it comes running with some speed. This special kind of cognition is known as insight leading to emergence (*vuṭṭhānagāminī-vipassanā-ñāṇa*). “*Vuṭṭhāna*” means arising, rearing up from somewhere. Insight knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*) is that which dwells on the continued process of incessantly arising and perishing of formations. With each note of observation, it falls on the incessant process of mind and matter. From that stage, when the knowledge of the noble path (*ariyamagga-ñāṇa*) is developed, its object becomes the cessation of mental and physical phenomena. This means that the knowledge rises, as the object gets up from the continuous stream of mind and matter and becomes nibbāna. For this reason of getting up from the object of the continuous stream of mind and matter, the Noble Path is known as rising up (*vuṭṭhāna*). When this fast moving insight comes to an end, the Noble Path achieves the realisation of nibbāna. Thus the special insight appears to have gone over to the Noble Path, having risen from the mental formations, which it previously had as its objects; hence its name. This insight leading to emergence arises while noting one of the six types of consciousness, mind-consciousness, touch-consciousness, etc., which is manifest at that particular moment.

While the meditator contemplates the rapidly vanishing phenomena, he or she perceives the nature of impermanence; or the nature of unsatisfactoriness; or the nature of not-self. This insight leading to emergence arises for at least two or three times; sometimes it may repeat itself four, five, or even ten times. As described in the literature, at the last moment of this insight, three thought moments — preparation (*parikamma*), access (*upacāra*), and adaptation (*anuloma*) of functional impulsion — appear followed by one special moment of moral impulsion of the sense-sphere, which takes as its object nibbāna where mind and matter cease.

After that impulsion, the Noble Path arises, which plunges into the object of nibbāna, devoid of mind and matter, the cessation of all mental formations. Immediately after the Path impulsion the Fruition impulsion of the Noble Path arises two or three times. Its object is the same as that of the Noble Path. With the occurrence of the Path and Fruition impulsions, the ordinary person attains the status of a Stream-winner, a Once-returner, a Non-returner, or an Arahant.

The moral impulsion of the sense-sphere that takes nibbāna as its object is known as “Change of Lineage” or Maturity Knowledge (*gotrabhū*), the impulsion consciousness that overcomes the lineage of the ordinary person. The Paṭisambhidāmagga defines *Gotrabhū* as follows: “Rising from the objects of mental formations, which have the nature of becoming, has the tendency to plunge headlong towards the object of nibbāna, which is free from becoming and it is therefore called change of lineage.” Or, “Getting up from the object of the continuous process of mind and matter, and plunging headlong towards the object of nibbāna, free from becoming.” This is how *Gotrabhū* consciousness rushes towards the object of nibbāna. The Noble Path also descends into nibbāna towards which the *Gotrabhū* consciousness is inclined and rushes along.

The Milindapañha describes it thus: “The mind of the meditator who is contemplating and noting one phenomenon after another, step by step, overcomes the continuous stream of mind and matter, which is flowing uninterruptedly, and plunges into the state where the flowing stream of mind and matter comes to cessation.”

At first the meditator has been completing one noting after another and step by step on the ever arising phenomena of mind and matter as manifested in seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or thinking. He or she perceives only the continuous stream of mind and matter, which do not appear to come to an end at all. Whilst thus contemplating the incessant phenomena and reflecting on their impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, there comes a time immediately after the last moment of reflection, when the consciousness suddenly inclines towards and descends into the state where all the objects of contemplation and the contemplating mind come to cessation. This inclining is bending towards change of lineage consciousness whereas the descending is the realisation of nibbāna by mean of the Noble Path and its Fruition.



“Oh, great King, the meditator, having practiced meditation in the correct way, and plunging into where there is cessation of the mental and physical phenomena, is said to have realised *nibbāna*.”

This is the textual account of how insight leading to emergence, and the Path and its Fruition are realised. Meditators have found this account to conform to what they have personally experienced.

This is how the texts and experience in conformity: the meditator generally begins by observing the consciousness of seeing, hearing, touching, thinking, *etc.*, in brief, by contemplating on the nature of the five aggregates of attachment. As stated earlier, at the stage of knowledge of dissolution the meditator constantly notes the rapid dissolution of phenomena and finds them to be dreadful and terrible. This leads him or her to regard them as baneful and disgusting. Then wishing to be free from them, he or she strives harder until he or she reaches the stage of equanimity when he or she views all things with equanimity. When this knowledge is fully perfected, the very fast and distinctive insight leading to emergence and adaptation knowledge arise, and the meditator descends into a state of complete cessation of all objects of contemplation as well as acts of contemplation. This is the realisation of *nibbāna* by means of the Noble Path and its Fruition. Such realisation elevates an ordinary person to the state of a Stream-winner; or a Stream-winner to the state of a Once-returned; or a Once-returned to the state of a Non-returned; and finally a Non-returned to the state of an Arahant. The *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* gives the following description of such transformations.

### **Disgust Leads to the Noble Path and its Fruition**

*“Nibbindaṃ virajjati; virāgā vimuccati.”*

“Being weary, he becomes dispassionate.”

In this freedom from passion and the Noble Path being developed, the meditator is emancipated from defilements. The meditator develops from the stage of knowledge by comprehension to that of knowledge of dissolution by contemplating the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self nature of phenomena. The Blessed One was referring to this development by the words “Seeing thus (*Evaṃ passaṃ*), in the above text. The stage from the knowledge of dissolution to the knowledge of equanimity and adaptation knowl-

edge was described as “Feeling weary or disgusted (*nibbindati*).” Then comes, “When disgusted, he gets weary; when weary, he become dispassionate; when dispassionate, he become free (*nibbindaṃ virajjati, virāgā vimuccati*),” to describe the development of the knowledge of the Path and its Fruition. A very concise description, perfectly matching the practical experience of meditators.

### How the Experience and Description Match

When the knowledge of equanimity gets strengthened, extraordinary knowledge appears very rapidly. The meditator whose development in feeling of disgust is not yet strong enough to abandon mind and matter is overtaken by anxiety, “What is going to happen? Am I about to die?” As anxiety appears, the concentration gets weakened. However, when the feeling of disgust is intense, there is no occasion for anxiety to arise and the meditator contemplates effortlessly and smoothly. Soon he or she descends into the condition where there is freedom from passion and attachment, and the complete cessation of all mental and physical phenomena, the cessation of mental formations.

This is then emancipation from defilements (*āsava*), which should become absent at this stage. When descending without any attachment into where there is cessation by means of the first Path (*Sotāpatti-magga*), the meditator becomes liberated from the defilements of wrong views (*ditthi āsava*), from the ignorance that is associated with doubt (*vicikicchā*), and from coarse forms of sense-desires that may lead to states of loss. This is emancipation by virtue of the Fruition, which is the resultant of the Path of Stream-winning.

When descending to where there is cessation by means of the second Path of Once-returning (*Sakadāgāmi-magga*), there is freedom from the coarse types of sense desires. When descending to where there is cessation by means of the third Path (*Anāgāmi-magga*), one becomes free from subtle types of sense-desires as well as from similarly fine types of ignorance. With the knowledge of the Path of Arahantship (*Arahattama-gga-ñāṇa*), there is the liberation from all defilements. This accords with the statement “Being dispassionate, he is free (*virāgā vimuccati*).” When free from passions and descending to where there is cessation, there arises emancipation by virtue of Fruition which is the result of the Path. This emancipation is perceived vividly by the process of reflection.

## Reflection by an Arahant

The process of reflection by an Arahant is described in the concluding words of the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta:

*“Vimuttasmim vimuttamiti-ñāṇaṃ hoti. ‘Khīṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ, nāparaṃ itthattāyā’ti pajānā’ti.”*

“When emancipated, the knowledge arises on reflection that freedom from defilements has been achieved, and he knows ‘Birth is exhausted, lived is the holy life, what should be done has been done; there is nothing more to be done.’”

He or she knows thus by reflection. This is how an Arahant reflects on his or her attainments. Here it may be asked, How does an Arahant know that birth is exhausted? So long as there is wrong view and illusion with regard to the aggregates and attachment to them taking them to be permanent, satisfactory, self and a living entity, there will be renewal of becoming in the cycle of existence. When one becomes free of wrong views and illusions, one is free of attachment too. The Arahant knows on reflection that he or she is free of wrong view and illusion with regard to the aggregates and that he or she has no more attachments for them. Therefore, he or she perceives and concludes that birth is exhausted. This is reflecting on the defilements that have been discarded and exhausted. Here the holy life means the practice of morality, concentration, and wisdom. However, keeping the precepts, or only developing *jhāna*, will not achieve the purpose of attaining the highest goal. The purpose is achieved only by noting the mental and physical phenomena as they occur until the attainment of the Path of Arahantship and its Fruition. Therefore, “The holy life is lived” must be taken to mean that meditation has been practised to reach the highest goal. “What should be done” means practicing meditation to fully comprehend the Four Noble Truths. By practicing meditation until the attainment of Arahantship, this task is accomplished.

Even after having seen personally the nature of cessation by means of the three lower paths and having known the truth of suffering, which is the same as knowing impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, certain illusions of perception and mind still remain to be eradicated. Because of these illusions, there is still delight and craving in perceptions and mind believing them to be

pleasant and enjoyable. The origin of craving has not yet been abandoned. So even for the Non-returner there is still fresh becoming. At the stage of Arahantship, the truth of suffering is fully comprehended. All illusions of perception and mind are eradicated. Since there is no more illusions, there are no more misconceptions about delighting in pleasure, no opportunity for the cause of suffering (craving) to arise, as it is completely eradicated, The task of knowing the Four Noble Truths is fully accomplished. That is why the Arahant reflects that there is nothing more to be done.

In this account of the reflection by an Arahant, there is no mention of reflection on the Path, its Fruition, or nibbāna and the defilements directly and separately. However, it should be taken that they are reflected on first, followed by reflection on the others. Thus it should be taken that the reflection on, "The holy life is lived; what should be done has been done," came as a continuation after the Path, its Fruition, and nibbāna had been reflected on. "The mind is free; birth is exhausted," is reflected on, only after reflecting on the defilements that have been eradicated. Accounts of reflections by the Stream-winner, Once-returner, and the Non-returner are given in my discourse on the *Sīlavanta Sutta*.

### Conclusion of the Sutta

"Being weary he becomes dispassionate and the Noble Path arises. When there is freedom from the passion and the Path has arisen, he is emancipated from the bonds of defilements. With the emancipation comes the reflection that the mind has become free, and he knows 'Birth is exhausted; the holy life is lived; what has to be done is done; there is nothing more of this becoming.'"

The Venerable Elders who recited the Sutta at the Council had recorded the following terminal passage:

*"Idamavoca Bhagavā. Attamanā pañcavaggiyā bhikkhū  
Bhagavato bhāsitaṃ abhinandum.*

*"Imasmiñca pana veyyākaraṇasmim bhaññamāne pañca-  
vaggiyānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ anupādāya āsavehi cittāni  
vimuccimūti."*

"Thus the Blessed One said, (*Rūpaṃ, bhikkhave, anatta ..  
nāparam itattathāya ti pajānāti*) to teach this Anattalakkhaṇa

Sutta to the group of five monks so that they could attain Arahantship. The group of five monks delighted in the exposition of the Blessed One.

“Moreover, as this exposition was being spoken (or just at the conclusion of this discourse), the minds of the group of five monks were freed from attachments and they become emancipated from defilements.”

Among the group of five monks, the Venerable Koṇḍañña became a Stream-winner on the first watch of the full-moon of July (Wāso) while listening to the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta. He must have continued contemplation. However, he had not attained Arahantship before he heard the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta. Venerable Vappa became a Stream-winner on the first waning day of July, the Venerable Bhaddiya on the second, the Venerable Mahānāma on the third, and the Venerable Assaji on the fourth waning day of July respectively. All five of them were Stream-winners at the time of listening to this Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta. They contemplated the five aggregates as, “This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self,” just as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self phenomena. They progressively attained the three higher stages of the Path, and became Arahants. According to the Commentary on the Paṭisambhidāmagga, they gained Arahantship just at the end of the discourse by reflecting on the teaching.

Counting back from this year 1963, it was 2,552 years ago. That year, on the fifth waning day of July after the discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta ended, there appeared six Arahants including the Blessed One in the world. It arouses great piety to visualise this scene at the deer sanctuary near Benares, how the Blessed One was teaching the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta and how the group of five monks, while giving respectful attention to the discourse attained to Arahantship, the cessation of all defilements. Let us try to visualise this scene.

### **Homage to the Six Arahants**

Two thousand five hundred and fifty-two years ago, on the fifth waning day of July, the Blessed One gave the discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta to the group of five monks. Listening to the discourse and contemplating on the teaching, all the five monks became free from defilements and attained Arahantship. We pay our reverential homage with raised hands, and palms joined together,

to the Perfectly Enlightened One and the group of five monks who became the first six Arahants, completely free from defilements, at the beginning of the Buddha's Dispensation.

I have been giving these twelve discourses during the past twelve weeks and have covered the whole of the Sutta. I will now bring to a close this series of lectures on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta.

### Concluding Prayer

May all of you good people in the audience, by virtue of having given respectful attention to this discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, be able to contemplate as instructed in this Sutta on the five aggregates of materiality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, noting each moment of manifestation of seeing, hearing *etc.*, as, "This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self," and perceiving them with personal direct knowledge, rightly and truly as incessantly arising and vanishing and, therefore as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. May you soon be able to attain through the Path and its Fruition, the end of all suffering, which is nibbāna.

### Abbreviations

*A	Commentary on *	Nd2	Cūḷaniddesa
A	Anguttaranikāya	Nett	Nettipakaraṇa
Abhi	Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha	Paṭṭh	Paṭṭhāna
Ap	Apadāna	Pṭs	Paṭisambhidāmagga
Bu	Buddhavaṃsa	PTS	Pali Text Society
Cp	Cariyapiṭaka	Pug	Puggalapaññatti
D	Dīghanikāya	Pv	Petavatthu
Dhp	Dhammapada	S	Samyuttanikāya
Dhs	Dhammasaṅgaṇī	Sn	Suttanipāta
Iti	Itivuttaka	Thag	Theragāthā
Jā	Jātaka	Thig	Therīgāthā
Khp	Khuddakapāṭha	Ud	Udāna
Kvu	Kathāvatthu	Vbh	Vibhaṅga
M	Majjhimanikāya	VbhA	Sammohavinodanī
M.E.	Myanmar Era (638 years after C.E.)	Vin	Vinaya
Miln	Milindapañha	Vism	Visuddhimagga
Nd1	Mahāniddeśa	Vv	Vimānavatthu

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