Paticca Samuppada Sermon 17

The Law of Dependent Arising

(Pahan Kanuwa Sermon – No. 199)

'*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa*'

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

Taṇhā dutiyo puriso – dīghamaddhāna saṁsaraṁ

itthabhāvaññathābhāvaṁ – saṁsāraṁ nātivattati

etamādīnavaṁ ñatvā – taṇhā-dukkhassa sambhavaṁ

vītataṇho anādāno – sato bhikkhu paribbaje

– Dvayatānupassanā Sutta, Sutta Nipāta

Dear Listeners,

'Worldlings undertake the unending journey of births and deaths in a mad pursuit that holds no gratification' – revealed the Buddha. They do not realize the misery in the samsaric journey due to the foolish expectation of encountering contentment. Craving is the tempting force in hiding, which creates a false shadow of contentment. We hope to discuss the significance of craving, (*taṇhā*), as relevant to the subject of *Paṭicca Samuppāda*, the Law of Dependent Arising, taking the above two verses as the topic of the seventeenth discourse on *Paṭicca Samuppāda*, because they well demonstrate the worldling's samsāric journey with *taṇhā* as the partner. The two verses are found in the *Dvayatānupassanā Sutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*. We have explained to you the style of presentation in the *sutta*, through several discourses on *Paṭicca Samuppāda*. It presents the different topics of the Dhamma one by one in a way conducive to contemplation as a duality. This is how the Buddha introduces the duality of craving.

"Monks, if someone inquires whether there could be another mode of contemplating dualities, you must reply in the affirmative. How is it possible? However much misery arises, all that is conditioned by craving. This is one mode of contemplation. With the complete detachment and cessation of craving, suffering ceases to arise. This is the second mode of contemplation. Monks, a monk who trains himself well in this duality of contemplation applying strenuous effort to burn out the defilements, can hope to realize one of these two spiritual attainments, either Arahanthood in this very life or in case any residue of grasping is left over, the stage of Non-returner (*Anāgāmi*). At the end of this account the Buddha recited the two verses selected as our topic.

Taṇha dutiyo puriso – dīghamaddhāna saṁsaraṁ

The man wandering long, with craving as his partner

itthabhāvaññathābhāvaṁ – saṁsāraṁ nātivattati

Does not transcend this *saṁsāra* which is an alternation between 'thisness' and 'otherwiseness'.

Next he declares:

etamādīnavaṁ ñatvā – taṇhā dukkhassa sambhavaṁ

Seeing the evils of craving which generates misery

vītataṇho anādāno – sato bhikkhu paribbaje

Let the monk conduct himself mindfully with craving dispelled and grasping abandoned.

When discussing the topic craving, *taṇhā*, we must recall how *Paṭicca Samuppāda* deals with it. You all know the 'Law of Dependent Arising' with twelve links.

"*Vedanā paccayā taṇhā*, *taṇhā paccayā upādanaṁ*" from feeling as condition arises craving, from craving as condition arises grasping. You have to remember right along, the two links on either side of craving.

Craving is sixfold in the Buddha's analysis in the *Paṭicca Samuppāda Vibhaṇga Sutta* of the *Vibhaṇga Saṁyutta* in the *Saṁyutta Nikāya*. They are based on the six sense objects as craving for physical form, sound, smell, taste, physical contact and mental objects.

The most popular and the most heard of interpretation is found in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. Those listeners who chant or listen to parittas know well, that the Buddha in the interpretation of the Four Noble Truths, analyses the origin of suffering in relation to craving. We have often emphasized that statement for your benefit.

"*Yāyaṁ taṇhā ponobhavikā nandirāga sahagatā tatratatrābhinandinī seyyathidaṁ kāma taṇhā, bhava taṇhā, vibhava taṇhā."*

This craving is *ponobhavikā*. It has the inherent nature of causing repeated birth. *Nandirāga sahagatā* – Delights in and attaches to lust. *Tatratatrābhinandinī* – takes delight here and there. Those are the three characteristics of *taṇhā*. Then come the three types of craving *kāma taṇhā*, *bhava taṇhā* and *vibhava taṇhā*. *Kāma taṇhā* is craving for the five sense pleasures. *Bhava taṇhā* is in short, the longing for the soul to continue forever as the eternalists advocate. *Vibhava taṇhā* on the other hand is the craving to cease existence as nihilists teach. That is how craving is classified in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*.

Now I wish to introduce to you something that calls for serious thinking. The Buddha in the *Titthāyatana Sutta* of the *Tika Nipāta* in the *Anguttara Nikāya* proclaims these words.

"*Katamaṁ ca bhikkhave dukkha samudayaṁ ariyasaccaṁ*?"

"Monks, what is the Noble Truth of the Arising of Suffering?"

Do you think it's craving? You are mistaken. The Buddha says it's the *Paṭicca Samuppāda* consisting of twelve links. *Avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā*, *saṅkhāra paccayā viññāṇaṁ*, *viññāṇa paccayā nāmarupaṁ* etc. This is sure to pose a problem to many. Are the Buddha's statements

contradictory? In one place he says suffering is conditioned by craving. In another place it's *Paṭicca Samuppāda* with its twelve links. How do we clarify this? Why didn't the Buddha speak of craving in connection with suffering? It is simple logic that if there is a mother, a father has to be present somewhere. You all know that. Similarly the father is revealed through the *Paṭicca Samuppāda* Dhamma.

I shall now explain it to you. In the earlier discourses on *Paṭicca Samuppāda* I have repeatedly stressed the fact that the important point here is not *avijjā* but the inter-relation between *viññāṇa* and *nāmarūpa*. It is this inter-relatedness of conditions that was referred to as the vortex. It's the central spot in the *Paṭicca Samuppāda*. Then what is *avijjā* or craving? I think it will be more lucid if I put it this way.

In the blindness called ignorance, with the darkness of preparations, a process of groping takes place. During this groping, two things get caught within one's grip, consciousness, and name-and-form, *viññāṇa* and *nāmarūpa*. They have an interdependent relationship. But the worldlings being unable to see this connection, always treat them as two. As a result there arise greed (*lobha*), anger (*dosa*), delusion (*moha*), attachment, clashes and deception and many more problems. We have given many a simile to illustrate this situation, so it suffices to touch on them in brief. The simplest simile of the dog on the bridge appears in "Nibbāna – The Mind Stilled".

A dog walking across a bridge sees its own shadow in the water and believing it to be another dog will react by wagging its tail or growling or staring inquisitively. That illustrates greed, anger and delusion (*lobha, dosa, moha*). We have modernized it using an ancient Greek mythical story. It has appealed to many. Narcissus the Greek youth who had never seen his handsome face in a mirror, saw its reflection in a pond as he bent towards it. Assuming it to be a goddess in the water, he spent several days in a futile effort to hold her in his arms and ultimately sacrificed his own life. He was not aware that it was his own reflection.

We have brought out many more similes to show the misconception of duality. We hope you remember in the first discourse, the game of draught between Ajith and Sumith which terminated in utter confusion. In the same way, in the game of cricket that you know so well, the moment two teams are formed, the original inter-relatedness is forgotten. Then there is the simile of the cinema. The worldlings are not capable of understanding this interdependent origin of things, due to its subtle nature. Ven Sāriputta has expertly demonstrated it using the simile of two bundles of reeds. Two bundles of reeds maintain their upright position supported by each other. When one is pulled out of position, the other is bound to fall. Interdependent origination is exactly like that. They are not one, and neither are they two. We have to refer to a simile from folk lore as the last resort in explaining this intrinsic relationship.

If consciousness is questioned "Who are you?" it would answer "Please ask name-and-form".

If *nāmarūpa* is questioned "who are you?" it would reply "please ask *viññāṇa*".

They are so closely inter-related. The worldlings cannot grasp this subtlety and hence the division into two teams. It should be now clear that *viññāṇa* and *nāmarūpa* are closely inter-dependent.

Now see whether you can agree with me here. It's name-and-form that is divided into six sense spheres. They are activated by craving (*taṇhā*), to function as craving for physical form, craving

for sound, craving for smell and so on. Eye consciousness arises through eye and physical form coming together. Forgetting this truth the eye runs in pursuit of form, the ear in pursuit of sound. This apparent duality creates the deception of the five aggregates of grasping instigated by *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (anger) and *moha* (delusion). This analysis may not correspond to what appears in certain books. Commentators attempt to find the root cause of ignorance, which I think is a futile attempt. Ignorance is the father. In other words, the duality of consciousness and nameand-form springs up through preparations in the background of ignorance. The worldlings pick it up as a duality. Craving begins to function from this point. The Buddha proves this in several places such as the *Samiddhi Sutta* when he says "*acchecchi taṇhaṁ idha nāmarūpe."*

Cut off craving towards this name-andform. It is this name-and-form that divides itself into six sense spheres. We think this explanation is sufficient because there is no contradiction here. In certain places where the Buddha talks of the Law of Dependent Arising the Noble Truth of the Arising of Suffering is directly identified as the Law of Dependent Arising.

What we have been discussing is the background of craving. To put it in brief what *Paṭicca Samuppāda* depicts is nothing more than the background of craving which is ignorance. It changes into a vortex and conceals the inter-relationship from the worldlings. The worldlings always live imprisoned between two ends, two extremes, which create attachments, friction and illusion. The final result is suffering, or the weaving of the five aggregates of grasping.

In the discourse on the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha specifically referred to craving as the Noble Truth of the Arising of Suffering. Even when talking of the cessation of suffering, he did not refer to ignorance.

"*Tassā yeva taṅhāya asesa virāga nirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo*"

The total detachment and destruction of craving is called the cessation of suffering. At this point one may ask "Where is ignorance?"

In the earlier mentioned *Titthāyatana Sutta*, the cessation of suffering is explained through the reverse order of the *Paṭicca Samuppāda*.

"*Avijjāyatveva asesa virāga norodhā saṁkhāranirodho."*

With the cessation of ignorance each of the other links cease to be. In fact the most detailed analysis of the Noble Truth of the Arising of Suffering is found in the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*. Here the Buddha exposes the place where *taṇhā* arises and where it remains hiding, in the following words:

"*sā kho pana esā taṇhā kattha uppajjamānā uppajjati, kattha nivisamānā nivisati."*

This is presented in the form of a question.

Before I proceed further, I want to point out to you that *taṇhā* is a feminine gender noun, in Pāli. It's useful to know this, because the term 'mother' is used in this context. Some *suttas* say "*taṇhā janeti purisaṁ*."

Craving gives birth to man. Craving is the mother.

"*Sā kho pana esā taṇhā*…" if translated in conformity with the gender rules in ancient Pāli grammar – though an accurate English translation is not possible – it would appear as follows.

"That this lass craving, in taking birth, where will she take birth?"

Another important point, dear listeners, is the correct rendering of '*nivisamānā*' into English. The idea of "lying under, hiding or creeping under" is implied here. So let's take it as 'lying in hiding'. Then the Buddha's question would be "That this lass craving (*taṇhā*), in taking birth where will she take birth?

In lying in hiding where will she lie hiding?"

Now comes the Buddha's reply' "*Yaṁ loke piyarūpaṁ sātarūpaṁ etthesā taṇhā uppajjamānā uppajjati. Ettha nivisamānā nivisati*".

Please remember that '*piyarūpa'* here means 'delightful in nature'. '*Sātarūpa'* means 'agreeable in nature'. Since this reference is to the place where birth takes place, whatever is delightful in appearance and agreeable in appearance, that is where craving takes birth and lies in hiding.

Next the Buddha proceeds to analyze this position.

"*Kiñca loke piyarūpaṁ sātarūpaṁ*?"

What is delightful and agreeable in this world? The answer consists of a long list which begins with:

"*cakkhuṁ loke piyarūpaṁ sātarūpaṁ etthesā taṇhā uppajjamānā uppajjati ettha nivisamānā nivisati.*"

"The eye is delightful and agreeable in this world. Therein is craving born. Therein craving lies concealed."

In this manner the Buddha talks of the six internal sense spheres, the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind. Then he proceeds to list the six external sense objects, physical form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mental objects. I hope you can understand them, though I have listed them in brief. They are all delightful and agreeable to the worldling so that craving takes birth in them and lies in hiding.

That is not all. The six-fold consciousness that arises due to contact between each pair such as the eye-consciousness, *cakkhu viññāṇa* the ear consciousness *sota viññāṇa* and so on are delightful and agreeable to the worldling. There too craving arises and lies in hiding. Then the Buddha points out that the six sense contacts eye contact, ear contact, nose contact, tongue contact, body contact and mind contact (*cakkhu, sota, ghāna, jivhā, kāya and mano samphassa*) are also delightful and agreeable so that craving can arise and wait in hiding. So also the six feelings generated through six sense contacts (*samphassajā vedanā*) are also delightful and agreeable. Next comes *saññā* or perceptions such as the perception of form, the perception of sound, the perception of smell and so on. This is followed by the six intentions *saṁcetanā*. Worldings like to think of the intention of physical forms, sounds, smells, tastes etc. as delightful and agreeable There too craving arises and waits in hiding.

Next comes an amazing statement from the Buddha.

"*Rūpataṇhā loke piyarūpaṁ sātarūpaṁ etthesā taṇhā uppajjamānā uppajjati*."

Worldlings are delighted by craving for physical form (*rūpataṇhā*). They are comforted by it. They are delighted by craving for physical form, craving for sound, craving for smells, craving for taste, craving for physical contact and craving for mental objects. This reveals the unbelievable truth that there is craving within craving, *taṇhā* within *taṇhā*. *Taṇhā* is born within itself and lies in hiding. Can you believe it? The next list is under *vitakka* or reflection. Reflection on physical form, *rūpavitakka* is enticing. So is investigation of form, *rūpavicāra*. The ten-fold analysis of craving with reference to its arising and lying in hiding is found in the *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.

Then the Buddha explains how the cessation of craving is brought about. I shall put it briefly to you. I am confident you can follow the entire procedure.

"*Sā kho panesā taṇhā kattha pahīyamānā pahīyati, katta nirujjhamānā nirujjhati*."

Where does that *taṇhā* cease? Where does *taṇhā* get eliminated? Where craving arises, there it ceases.

"*Yaṁ loke piyarūpaṁ sātarūpaṁ etthesā taṇhā pahīyamānā pahīyati. Ettha nirujjhamānā nirujjhati*."

A lengthy and descriptive analysis is given in this manner on the cessation of craving in the *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.

Let us now move on to the *Majjhe Sutta* in the *Ekaka Nipāta* of the *Anguttara Nikāya*. In our discussion on craving or *taṇhā*, this *sutta* is of great relevance to us. We have discussed it several times because we are compelled to draw on its content when talking of craving. You will remember it when I tell you its background. Once when the Buddha was residing at Isipatana Deer Park in Benares, a group of Senior Monks, after the mid-day meal sat in conference in their conference hall. Their main topic was a verse from *Metteyya Pañha*, a discourse of the Buddha.

Yo ubhante viditvāna

majjhe mantā na lippati

taṁ bhrūmi mahā puriso'ti

sodha sibbanimaccagā.

Knowing the two ends, he who with wisdom refrains from attachment to the middle, I call him a great man who transcends the seamstress in this world.

Based on this verse four questions were formulated. What is the first end? What is the second end? What is the middle? Who is the seamstress? Six senior monks addressed the assembly and gave six different interpretations.

The first interpreter presented his view as follows. The first end is contact (*phassa*). The second end is the arising of contact. The middle is the cessation of contact. The seamstress is craving. Here he explains how craving functions.

"*Taṇhā hi naṁ sibbati tassa tasse'va bhavassa abhinibbattiyā*."

"Craving stitches him on to repeated births."

That is why craving is called the seamstress.

To state the other interpretations in brief, the second monk said "The first end is the past, the second end the future and the middle is the present. The seamstress is craving."

We too can agree with this argument, watching how our thoughts work, running between the past and the future. We are not even aware of the existence of a present. That's because craving keeps tying up the ends. The third interpretation suggests pleasant feelings as one end, painful feelings as the second end, the feelings that are neither pleasant nor painful as the middle and the seamstress of course *taṇhā*, craving. Here too we are so engrossed in the two ends, we are hardly aware of feelings that are neither pleasant nor painful. In the fourth, name (*nāma*) is one end. Form (*rūpa*) is the other. In the middle is consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Here again the seamstress is craving who keeps stitching together the two ends, name-and-form. What is the fifth interpretation? The internal sense spheres eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind constitute one end. The six external objects, physical form, sound, smell, taste, physical contact and cognizable objects form the other end. In the middle is consciousness. Craving, playing her role as the seamstress ties up the two ends, ignoring the middle. The sixth and final interpretation gives the view of self (*sakkāya*) or the five aggregates of grasping as one end. The other end is the arising of the view of self (*sakkāya samudaya*) or the arising of the five aggregates. The middle is the cessation of the view of self. Craving is the seamstress in this sixth interpretation as well, who keeps tying up the knots every moment, taking care that the cessation of *sakkāya diṭṭhi* and its arising, is impossible. These interpretations give ample proof of the vicious activity of *taṇhā,* craving.

We have occasionally used the sewing machine as a modern simile to explain the behavior of *taṇhā*. Each time the needle goes in, the thread of the shuttle ties a knot. Tying knots is a specific characteristic of craving. *Tatratatrābhinandinī nandirāgasahagatā* are words that well demonstrate the function of the needle, piercing into the machine, tying a knot and coming up and repeating the process. *Majjhe Sutta* well describes the ruthless behavior of craving.

I would like to discuss this topic from yet another angle, using another expression in the same verse, since I am very particular that you understand it clearly.

"*Taṇhā dutiyo puriso dīghamaddhāna saṁsaraṁ itthabhāvaññathābhāvaṁ saṁsāraṁ nātivattati."*

The true nature of this *saṁsāra* is summarized as something found between 'thisness' and 'otherwiseness'. Let me explain it. Think of a being taking birth here from somewhere, let us say from the animal world. This baby seeing things, hearing sounds around him, he develops the notion 'here' followed by the idea of 'thisness' or *itthabhāva*. From the moment thisness is established, it keeps changing into 'otherwiseness', or *aññathābhāva*.

It is an amazing thing. The nature of '*bhava*' (becoming) – what is called *bhava* – is something that happens due to grasping. Whenever a being grasps – clings to – something, impermanence begins to function from that moment. Explaining this subtle point is no easy task. Try to

comprehend it yourself. We have explained before that only subsequent to arising of a 'thing' that it becomes 'otherwise'. When something becomes a 'thing', from that point onwards it starts to change. I shall give a simile though not a perfect one. Think of buying a toy from a toy shop for a little baby. Paying for it adds more value to it. What they have brought home has its own nature or 'thisness' – *itthabhāva*. The moment the little one breaks it, it changes into 'otherwiseness' – *aññathābhāva*. From then onwards it begins to change. The notion of a 'thing' with its particular characteristics is called '*maññanā'*. It means to assume something to be a 'thing' with its own identity. From then onwards it begins to change.

The Buddha, immediately after his enlightenment has proclaimed as follows:

"*Aññathābhāvī bhavasatto loko bhavapareto bhavamevābhinandati*"

The worldling attached to *bhava* – continuous becoming – which has the nature of otherwiseness, and overcome by *bhava*, delights in it. It is the seamstress craving who instigates the worldling. For example, imagine you lost something. Craving would say "Don't worry. There is another one beyond. Have it."

It expresses what is implied by *tatratatrābhinandinī, taṇhā ponobhavikā*. *Ponobhavikā* is not merely suggestive of the moment of death. It takes place every moment. *Punabbhava* apparently means the next birth. But every moment something becomes a 'thing' or a 'this'. It keeps changing. Due to this change, it is discarded and another 'thing' is grasped. Another 'thing' is grasped. This grasping is done through craving, which lies in hiding. This process is referred to as *tatratatrābhinandinī*, the fact that the beings wander in *saṁsāra* between 'thisness' and 'otherwiseness'. This happens not only from life to life and birth to birth but also within a lifetime. This change is extremely subtle. I have given you these details to enable you to understand *itthabhāva* and *aññathābhāva*.

There are several meaningful verses in the *Taṇhā Vagga* of the *Dhammapada,* that expand on this subject but unfortunately the meanings of some verses are lost to us. Anyway let us discuss one verse for our purpose.

Tasiṇāya purakkhatā pajā

parisappanti sasova bādhito

saṁyojana saṁgasattā

dukkhamupenti punappunaṁ cirāya

Here is its meaning.

Tasiṇā is a synonym for *taṇhā* – craving.

"*Tasiṇāya purakkhatā paj?"*

The human race placed in the forefront by craving "*parisappanti sasova bādhito*" like a rabbit entrapped in a snare. What happens to the humans? The commentary says *parisappanti* means frightened. Frightened like a rabbit in a snare. This interpretation overlooks a very valuable implication referred to here. Why was the rabbit taken as simile? It can leap far. Think of a rabbit with its hind foot caught in a noose. Ignorant of the confronted plight it leaps far. Then

realizing the perilous situation, it leaps in all directions but is hopelessly caught. Similar is the noose of craving. *Saṁyojanasaṁgasattā* – stuck in the bond of sticky craving.

"*Dukkhaṁ upenti punappunaṁ cirāya*" – humans are gripped by suffering repeatedly for long. In short, unless one attains the stage of Non-returner, even though born in Brahma world, one is destined to return here, due to the trap of craving.

This verse in the *Dhammapada* which you are quite familiar with, emphasises how strong the fetter of craving is.

Yathāpi mūle anupaddave daḷhe

chinnopi rukkho punareva rūhati

evampi taṇhānusaye anūhate

uppajjati dukkhamidaṁ punappunaṁ

"*Yathāpi mūle anupaddave daḷhe*" – When the root is uninjured and firm, *chinnopi rukkho punareva rūhati* – even though the tree is cut down, grows again and again.

"*Evampi taṇhānusaye anūhate*" – similarly as long as the latency of craving is not eliminated,

"*uppajjati dukkhamidaṁ punappunaṁ*" – this suffering arises again and again.

This verse reveals the strength of craving. It's not different from the plight of the rabbit. I am not trying to include everything in this discourse. I am only trying to bring out the hidden meanings of these valuable verses, which have not been given their due.

Now let us look at another aspect of *taṇhā* as given in another *sutta*. we have explained how conditioned by craving, grasping (*upādāna*) arises. In some places craving itself plays the role of grasping. I would like to cite an example from *Kutuhalasālā Sutta* of the *Saṁyutta Niyāka*, which has been subjected to much criticism. To put it in brief, the *Paribbājaka* Vacchagotta visited the Buddha and made a critical comment. He said the six teachers such as Pūranakassapa, Makkhalī Gosāla and Ajithakesakambalī, when their ordinary followers die, reveal their destinations and also when their spiritually developed disciples pass away, reveal their destinations as well. But the Recluse Buddha reveals where ordinary followers are born, but is silent about the next birth of his disciples with the highest spiritual attainment. The Buddha only utters the phrase:

"*Acchecchi taṇhaṁ vāvattayī saṁyojanaṁ, sammā mānābhisamayā anta– makāsi dukkhassa.*"

Even the Buddhists of today do not know what Vacchagotta knew about the Buddha. This statement is about the emancipated person.

"*Acchecchi taṇhaṁ*" – cut off craving.

"*Vāvattayī saṁyojanaṁ*" – reversed the hooks of bonds.

"*Sammā mānābhisamayā antamakāsi dukkhassa*" – comprehending pride correctly, expelled suffering. That is what the Buddha says about the emancipated person after death. Vacchagotta

puzzled by this explanation, confesses his doubt, his confusion. The Buddha says he well understands Vacchagotta's confusion and explains his position as follows.

"*Saupādānassa khvāham vaccha uppattiṁ paññapemi no anupādānassa*."

I disclose the birth of him who grasps, not of him who is detached. The Buddha then gives a simile.

"Vaccha, just as a fire,

"*saupādāno jalati*."

Here the fire is a *saupādāno* fire, which needs an explanation. *Upādāna* is used in Pāli to mean fuel. A fire burns only when it grasps some sort of fuel, such as wood. The Buddha here explains that a fire burns "*saupādāno*" only by grasping a fuel,

"*no anupādānassa*" not without a fuel.

That is the simile of the fire. This simile prompts Vacchagotta to pose another question.

"Friend Gotama, if a flame (*acci*) is carried far by the wind, what would you say is the fuel – *upādāna*?"

You can imagine a forest fire, where the wind could carry a flame to a tree far away. That is the simile here. The Buddha replies that the wind is the fuel. We refer to this as

"caught by the wind."

The flame was definitely 'caught by the wind' and carried afar. This reply instigates Vacchagotta to ask an unusual question.

"Friend Gotama, if a being lays down this body and enters a certain other body, what then would you point out as the fuel?"

This *sutta* words it as "*aññataraṁ kāyaṁ anuppatto hoti*."

'*Aññataraṁ*' here means 'a certain'.

"A being reaching (entering) a certain other body, lays down this body" means he gives up this body and reaches another. The Buddha specifically states that craving is the fuel in that situation. This shows how forceful the functioning of craving is. But unfortunately, Dear listeners, due to misinterpretation of this simile and this paragraph, the modern readers understand this as '*antarābhava*' – a period of existence between death and next birth.

We have often explained in our books that the theory of interim birth is unacceptable. How did this misconception come about? One reason is the misinterpretation of the simile. Here Vacchagotta questions, not regarding the gap between two existences, but regarding the passage from one existence to the next. There is also a very intricate language problem visible here. In the process of the Buddha word passing from one generation to the next generation, confusion regarding phrases and words occurred. Sometimes the version in one written copy differed from another. Those who profess the theory of *antarābhava* read '*anuppatto*' which

means ‘reached’ as ‘*anuppanno*’ which means ‘not born’. *Anuppatto* means the opposite of *anuppanno*. These theorizers explain their position thus.

A being lays down the body. Did he enter the next birth? No, not yet. ‘*anuppanno*’ ‘not born’. What is the grasping during this gap? That is their interpretation. But I have emphatically pointed out the special word ‘*aññataraṁ*’ that occurs here. It means ‘a certain’. We use this adjective always with something existing, not with something non-existant. If we select something really existing and use the word *aññaṁ* before it, it is correct.

This is a very subtle point. But why go so far? It’s clear that Vaccha questions how one birth leads to another. These theorizers, imagining that there is a time gap between the two, have in the recent past continuously argued that an interim birth exists. They have not understood the *suttas* correctly.

One thing is clear however. The Buddha confirms that craving itself is the grasping at the moment of death. It can be proved with several examples. A synonym for craving is ‘*bhavanetti*’. *Netti* is a projection, a point that juts out. *Bhavanetti* – ‘bent’ is another term used. During a rainy season like this, somebody levels a strip of high ground leaving a projection at the top. With a shower of rain that projection would collapse. Similarly, the projection in continuous becoming is craving. Why so? Because there is a shortcoming, a possibility to collapse. ‘*ūno loko atitto taṇhādāso*’.

In this world there is always a flaw, a shortcoming to be seen. ‘*atitto*’ no contentment. *Taṇhādāso* – a slave to craving. *ūno loko atitto taṇhādāso* is a statement in the *Raṭṭhapāla Sutta*. The worldlings always find shortcomings. Even a millionaire would complain he is short of something or the other. ‘*Atitto*’ means never gratified. *Taṇhādāso* means a slave to craving. In this sense craving is called *bhavanetti* because craving alone is sufficient to create continuous existence. Due to the presence of that projection ‘*netti*’, one is bound to fall into existence somewhere. That itself explains why the Buddha referred to craving as grasping. This statement contains not one or two but several important facts.

Next let us talk about the cessation of craving. The term used to describe *Nibbāna* on certain occasions is ‘*taṇhakkhaya*’

“*taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho Nibbānaṁ*.”

The very ceasing of *taṇhā* is treated as *Nibbāna*. It’s the very ceasing of *taṇhā*, craving. Many educated people are confused by this. They argue if craving means ‘wishing for’ something, wishing for *Nibbāna* is also craving.

There is a *Sutta* that offers a solution to this problem.

When Venerable Ananda was residing at Ghositārāma in Kosambi, a certain Bhikkhunī sent a man to say that she was seriously ill and wished to meet him. Venerable Ananda accepted the invitation. As he was approaching the nunnery, she lay down on her bed fully covered, with a hidden intention. Venerable Ananda, seeing through this lowly behavior, delivered an effective discourse to suit the occasion. Thanks to the nun’s unseemly plan, we are rewarded with a valuable discourse.

Let us first listen to four statements which conveys the essence of the discourse.

Āhārasambhūto ayaṁ bhagini kāyo āhāraṁ nissāya āhāro pahātabbo.

taṇhāsambhūto ayaṁ bhagini kāyo taṇhaṁ nissāya taṇhā pahātabbā.

mānasambhūto ayaṁ bhagini kāyo mānaṁ nissāya māno pahātabbo.

methūnasambhūto ayaṁ bhagini kāyo

methūneca setughāto vutto bhagavatā.

Then follows an analysis of each statement by Venerable

Ananda. First let us understand their meanings.

"*Āhāra sambhūto ayaṁ bhagini kāy?"*

Sister, this body has arisen based on food,

"*Āhāraṁ nissāya āhāro pahātabbo*."

Food has to be eliminated through food.

Taṇhā sambhūto ayaṁ bhagini kāyo."

This body has arisen based on craving.

"*Taṇhaṁ nissāya taṇhaṁ pahātabbo*."

Craving has to be eliminated through craving. This sounds rather contradictory. Then he says

"*Māna sambhūto ayaṁ bhagini kāyo*."

Sister, this body arises based on conceit. But conceit has to be eliminated through conceit. The final statement seems rather queer.

"*Methuna sambhūto bhagini ayaṁ kāyo*."

Sister, this body arises through sexual intercourse. Here the phrase '*methunaṁ nissāya*' does not occur. It says '*methuneva setughāto'*. That bridge has to be pulled down. All relations have to be severed. That is the approach suggested with reference to sex.

Now Venerable Ananda goes into detail taking one statement at a time.

"*Āhārasambhūto ayaṁ bhagini kāyo*."

That can be understood easily. Food is essential. One cannot go into total starvation like the Nigaṇṭhas. A monk partakes of food contemplating as follows; "*Neva davāya, na madāya, na maṇḍanāya"* etc. It is known as '*ñāṇa saṁvara'*, restraint through wisdom. One partakes of food, contemplating on food. It turns out to be meditation. We have time and again reminded you that eating is not a game, not a source of entertainment. It's merely for maintenance of the body so that higher life could be fulfilled. Such a monk, says Venerable Ananda, will eliminate food eventually.

Next is '*taṇhā sambhūto*' which is rather difficult to grasp. Venerable Ananda explains it as follows. A certain monk comes to know that a certain bhikkhu attained Arahanthood, through destruction of influxes. This monk thinks "When will I be able to become an Arahant like that monk?"

A wish, a yearning arises in him. We admit that it is craving. But inspired by that wish, that yearning, he strives hard and becomes an Arahant.

Mānasambhūto is also somewhat similar. A certain monk comes to hear that a particular bhikkhu known to him had become an Arahant. The monk's thoughts are given in a peculiar phrase.

"*Kimañga pana aham*?"

Why can't I? It shows conceit. Perhaps this Arahant monk was uneducated or belonged to a low caste.

"If he can, why can't I achieve it?" is an expression of conceit. But this conceit might pave the way to Arahanthood.

The fourth statement was handled very briefly without explanation. Venerable Ananda only said "*Methuneca setu ghāto vutto bhagavatā*."

What he said about *methuna* is not similar to what he said about the earlier three. He advocated the breaking off of all connections. Thoroughly embarrassed, the nun, jumped off the bed, fell at the feet of Venerable Ananda and apologized for her disgraceful suggestion due to her foolishness and unwholesome thoughts. Through her foolishness and evil thoughts, we were rewarded with a useful *sutta*. Although we look at it positively, certain Buddhist sects have taken undue advantage of it by misinterpreting the statement. The *Tantrayāna* sect took it as "*Methunaṁ nissāya methunaṁ pajahati*".

Methuna is abandoned through *methuna*. These are indecent trends not worth discussing.

I am reminded of another incident centered round Venerable Ananda, again at Ghositārāma in Kosambi, which sheds light on the same topic. One day a Brahmin named Uṇṇābha enquires of the Venerable Ananda "For what purpose do you practice celibacy (higher life) under the Ascetic Gotama?"

Being a non-Buddhist, he questioned out of curiosity. Venerable

Ananda's reply was "*chanda pahānattha?"*

We practice the disciplines of higher life in order to dispel desire (*chanda*). The second question was,

"Is there a path of discipline laid down to dispel desire?"

The reply was purposely given with the intention of arousing more critical inquiry.

"Yes. The path is the four bases of success – *iddhipādas*, desire, resolution, will and investigation."

Most probably you have heard of them. *Chanda* is described as

"*chanda samādhi padhāna saṅkhāra samannāgataṁ iddhipādaṁ bhāveti*."

Basing his effort on the contemplation of desire, a monk develops *iddhipāda*. It implies that desire can be eliminated by developing *iddhipāda*. It is a contradictory statement inviting criticism. Naturally, the Brahmin retorted,

"*chandeneva chandaṁ pajahissatīti netaṁ ṭhānaṁ vijjati*."

'Desire is dispelled by desire itself' is an impossibility. Venerable Ananda gives a simple simile to clarify the situation.

"Brahmin, do you admit that you had a desire to visit the monastery, but it vanished on arrival here?"

"Yes friend."

Do you admit you had some resolution to visit the monastery but it vanished on arrival here?"

"Yes friend."

Do you admit you had the will to visit the monastery but it vanished on arrival?"

"Yes friend."

"Do you admit you had a sense of investigation when arriving at the monastery but it vanished on arrival?"

"Yes friend."

Similarly, Brahmin, a monk following the path of discipline with the support of the four *iddhipādas*, attains total destruction of desire, which is his goal. When the aspiration of a worldling is accomplished, more aspirations crop up. Goals in the life of a worldling are all created by craving. They help to multiply craving. But here, what is the goal? *Nibbāna* which is a synonym for the elimination of craving (*taṇhakkhayo*). The effort directed towards the destruction of craving, ends at achieving the goal. We have on earlier occasions given you various similes to clarify this point. Then the critics cannot say that the desire to attain *Nibbāna* is also desire. We have to face facts. Here we see the Middle Path in action. We have explained it in diverse ways such as the simile of crossing a current. The fundamental characteristics of the Middle Path are pragmatism and relativity.

Even what is harmful is not totally discarded but utilized to achieve the goal. To give an example, the Niganṭhas gave up food altogether and even untied the knot of their robe. They walked about naked. The Buddha, with the experience he went through, always avoided the extremes. He introduced contemplation, through which the Middle Path was made a reality. Contemplation became an essential feature in it. *Saṁsāra* or continuous existence is such that, crossing the current of *saṁsāra* calls for extreme caution. That is exactly why the Buddha resorted to the middle path.

"*Taṇhaṁ nissāya taṇhā pahātabbā*" is perfectly applicable in this context. *Taṇhā* craving is abandoned by means of craving. The difference lies there. With regard to worldly goals, when one is achieved, when one is realized, another crops up. But *Nibbāna* terminates everything.

What is *Nibbāna*? It is not something like Siyadoris's *Nibbāna –Nibbāna* of Simple Simon. '*Taṇhakkhayo*' means the destruction of craving. In the discourse on the Four Noble Truths, the arising of suffering is illustrated by '*taṇhā ponobhavikā*'. Cessation of suffering was illustrated by "*tassāyeva taṇhāya asesa virāga nirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo*."

It speaks of nothing but the destruction of craving.

At the same time, remember the question asked by Vacchagotta Paribbājaka. In talking of the birth of the emancipated person, the Buddha used the most appropriate term '*Acchecchi taṇhāṁ*.' He cut off craving. '*Vāvattayī saṁyojanaṁ*.' Reversed the hooks of fetters (*saṁyojanas*). These fetters are fixed one to the other like the railway compartments connected to one another by hooks. Reverse the hooks and they are disconnected. Try to understand the fetters as similar. Hooks or bonds of rebirth are turned backwards. Another phrase that adds depth to this idea is '*sammā mānābhisamayā*'. It gives the reason for endless births. The final target is the destruction of *māna*, conceit. It is the final attack on Māra's *asmimāna* or conceit of self. In other words the pride of self as "I am" is the subtle attachment to continuous becoming. Those who have read the Dhamma will know, that after the attainment of *Anāgāmi* (Nonreturner) one is born in the Brahma world, because the conceit of self still remains. Concealed within the fivefold fetters such as passion for worlds of form, passion for formless worlds, conceit, agitation and ignorance, there is self-pride in a very subtle form. That too has to be eliminated. I have been trying to emphasize the significance of craving, which is treated as the mother.

There seems to be some confusion regarding the connection between the *Paṭicca Samuppāda* and craving. That's why some people, like the Hindus our Pāli commentators, keep guessing what the root cause of ignorance is. It is an unnecessary attempt. Let us understand it this way. The groping that takes place in the darkness of ignorance is called *kāya saṁkhara*, *vacī saṁkhara* and *mano saṁkhara*, that is the preparation of the body, speech and the mind. In this process of preparation, there arises *viññāṇa* and *nāmarūpa*, (consciousness and name-andform). These are the two forces we referred to as the vortex. The worldlings unable to understand their inter-dependent nature take a firm stand, mistakenly seeing something to grasp in the form of subject-object. This is what activates in *upādāna* or grasping. To facilitate better understanding of this position, let me recall the simile of the mirage which I have often referred to. Imagine a row of posts fixed far apart on a flat land. The deer imagining there is water, runs upto the first post, then upto the second and the third, and so on. This is the deception which we call *taṇhā ponobhavikā* or craving that leads to continuous existence. Craving is the force that pushes beings forward. All this should make you realize the depth of the Buddha's Dhamma. It is an amazingly rewarding dhamma, if you have the correct vision of the goal. Many people understand *Nibbāna* to be another birth. When explaining the *Paṭicca Samuppāda*, we have emphasized that the speciality about the Dhamma is that one has to terminate the entire mass of suffering as the final goal. The attachment to continuous birth and the very notion of becoming has to be eliminated, or else it will persist even after the attainment of a Non-returner (*Anāgāmi*). Such is the subtlety of the dhamma.

Now Dear Listeners, I hope you will support your meditation with what I have explained, particularly in seeing the negative aspect of craving as the Buddha has taught us. If you are aware of the conditions under which craving arises and ceases, you can definitely reach the spiritual attainment described as "*taṇhakkhayo virāgo, nirodho Nibbānaṁ*."

I want you to put this discourse into practical use in improving your meditation and religious practices, so that you could attain the different stages of the path and the peace of *Nibbāna* in this very life. Whatever beings there be from the lowest hell *Avīci* to the highest Brahma world *Akaniṭṭha*, may they rejoice in this discourse and may they attain the peace of *Nibbāna*!