The Magical Mind

Analysis of the *Kālakārāma Sutta*

by Ñāṇasāra Thero

Inspired by Bhikkhu Katukurunde Ñāṇananda's *Magic of the Mind*

Specially revised, enlarged and edited for The Dharmasar Solution

Version 0.1 • December 17, 2014

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Preface

Kālakārāma Sutta—Historical Background

The Buddha preached the *Kālakārāma Sutta* to the monks while he was staying at the Kālaka Monastery in Sāketa. Apart from mention of the venue, as it is recorded in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (II.24), there is no significant context to show us how the discourse was inspired. The commentary on the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* sets it in the aftermath of the conversion of the millionaire Kālaka, who is supposed to have constructed the monastery. According to it, the discourse was a sequel to the widespread acclimation of the Buddha's marvelous qualities. The discourse, as a matter of fact, does contain some marvelous aspects of the Tathāgata's transcendental wisdom. That the impact of the discourse was actually astounding is symbolically expressed by the commentarial assertions that the earth trembled at five points in the sermon, and at its conclusion five hundred monks attained Arahantship.

The Sutta gains great historical importance owing to the tradition, handed down by the commentaries and chronicles,[1] that it was preached by the Venerable Mahārakkhita Thera to convert the country of the Yonakas during the great missionary movement during the reign of Emperor Ashoka. If the identification of the Yonakas with the Greeks is correct, the choice of this deeply philosophical discourse for such a significant occasion could not have been mere coincidence. It likely was prompted by the consideration that the philosophically mature minds of the Greeks would be able to understand and appreciate it. Tradition has it that its impact on the Yonakas was considerable: thirty-seven thousand people attained to the Fruits of the Path on hearing it.

The Buddhists of ancient Ceylon also seem to have recognized the value of *Kālakārāma Sutta* as a theme capable of mustering the essence of Dhamma for a lengthy sermon. On one memorable occasion it formed the subject of an all-night sermon when the Arahant Kāla ('black') Buddharakkhita Thera preached it in the dark night of the new-moon day, in the dark fortnight, under a black Timbaru tree at Cetiyapabbata. The coincidence of 'blackness' (*kāla*) in the names of the Sutta and the

[1] See *Dictionary of Pāḷi Proper Names*, I 573 f.

preacher, as well as the setting, probably accounts for the memorability of the occasion. King Tissa (probably Saddhātissa) also dignified the occasion with his presence.

Significance of the Sutta

Despite its hallowed tradition, the *Kālakārāma Sutta* is not very popular today. It hardly ever comes up as the subject of a sermon, and allusions to it in serious expositions of the Dhamma are equally rare. However, this is no indication of its value or relevance to modern times. The obscurity of the Sutta today is probably due to its terseness and its resemblance to the unfamiliar tetralemma.[2]

The Sutta presents a mosaic of apparently dry phrases and a set of statements that go against the grain of the superficial reader. But beneath that dryness and strangeness of formulation lie vast resources for a perennial philosophy. The Sutta brings out some striking features of the Buddha's epistemology, the implications of which are very helpful for clearing up the muddle in contemporary philosophy and psychology.

Mode of Presentation

To prepare the mind to appreciate the *Kālakārāma Sutta* properly, **Chapter One** treats the reader to a 'magic show' as a prologue to the exposition of the body of this work. This 'magic show' is not at all profane, but an amplification of a canonical prototype attributed to the Buddha himself. From the canonical simile, the prologue expands into a kind of parable that, though modern in flavor, is designed to lubricate the reader's mind to more easily assimilate the following 'dry' discourse. The metaphor of the parable also serves as a framework for discussion.

Chapter Two presents a translation of the Sutta itself followed by explanatory notes, some of which are from Venerable Buddhaghosa's commentary. These notes bring out the sense of the original Sutta, despite many variant readings. Deeper appreciation and consideration of the contents and meaning of the Sutta is found in the following chapters.

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[2] Sanskrit *catuṣkoṭi:* the Buddhist logic of four alternatives—affirmative, both affirmative and negative, neither …nor. See the text of the Sutta.

The nine chapters that follow—the last of which is the **Epilogue**—attempt to demonstrate the value of the simile and parable given in Chapter One. The illusory nature of consciousness will be discussed in context of the doctrinal categories of *khanda* (aggregates), *ayatana* (spheres), *dhātu* (elements) and *paticca-samuppāda* (Dependent Origination). These chapters draw on the 'well-preached Dhamma-word' (*dhamma padaṃ sudesitaṃ*) scattered throughout the Suttas, putting them together, as far as possible, into a garland of flowers.

> "Just as from a heap of flowers
> many garland strands can be made,
> even so one born and mortal should do
> —with what is born and mortal—
> many a skillful thing." — *Dhammapada* 44-45

All along, both canonical and contemporary similes and analogies will illustrate the revenant concept, for 'even with the help of a simile some intelligent men here comprehend the meaning of what is said.'[3]

Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda
Island Hermitage
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October 1972

[3] See *Dīgha Nikāya* II 324, *Majjhima Nikāya* I 384.

Introduction

Application of the Dhamma

> "This Dhamma that I have attained is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, peaceful, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in attachment, is excited by attachment, enjoys attachment. For a generation delighting in attachment, excited by attachment, enjoying attachment, specific conditionality and Dependent Origination are hard to see. This state, too, is hard to see: the resolution of all fabrications, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the ending of craving; dispassion, cessation, Unbinding." — *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 160)

For beginning students, especially English-speaking Westerners, the teaching of the Buddha may seem unapproachably obscure, complex, abstruse, hard to grasp and difficult to apply. The reasons are several but are mainly the result of cultural conditioning. In the East, there is a long tradition of seeking transcendent wisdom. Many of its basic concepts are enshrined in language and culture, especially in Buddhist countries.

In contrast, the emphasis in the West is on getting things done. Consequently, the language and culture have developed to facilitate practical affairs, but are not at all suitable for deep philosophical contemplation or meditative self-realization. Thus when we read a translation of the Buddha's Suttas or a treatise on their meaning, our response tends to be 'So, what am I supposed to *do* with this?'

We are conditioned by language, schooling and society to the Cartesian concept of a 'real world': a shared public objective space filled with solid 'things'. We have forgotten that *what we see* when we observe this so-called objective reality depends, completely and utterly, on *how we look*. Because we expect to see a Cartesian space filled with solid objects, that is exactly what we experience when we observe the world. Though the very concept of absolutes has been thoroughly demolished by science, even after more than a century, our consciousness has not caught up and is still full of them.

More than a decade of government-mandated schooling has conditioned each of us to seek the one right answer to a problem by means of a

stepwise procedure of linear reasoning. That approach may be useful for taking exams on a limited subject matter, or for performing designated assignments while working at a job. But it fails miserably when confronted with something like the teaching of the Buddha, where the answer—enlightenment, Nibbāna—is presented and described apparently without any clear-cut approach or procedure for attaining it. That is because the teaching of the Buddha is the general solution to *all* problems, up to and including suffering, birth and death. It is not so much about *what to do*, as *how to look*.

The discrepancy between the broad universal nature of the Buddha's teaching and the narrow, limited power of our perceptual apparatus and analytical skills has led to a demand for shortcut interpretations. Westerners, especially want a rendering of the Buddha's profound teaching that fits a taste for simple, straightforward procedural instructions. As a result, many narrow and crippled versions of 'Buddhism' have taken root, especially in the West but even in nominally Buddhist countries as they become 'developed'. These cheap, often quasi-religious interpretations are easy to learn and practice, but they lack the power of the synergy and holistic view of the Suttas.

In addition, many modern psychological, philosophical and even spiritual movements have borrowed various features of the Buddha's teaching. Yet almost all of them implicitly or explicitly leave aside questioning the conceits of 'I' and 'mine' the Buddha recognized as the root of all delusions, the empty hub of the vortex of illusion. Therefore none of them have been successful in duplicating the Buddha's skill in realizing Nibbāna and transmitting that skill to others.

Just see the misfortune of our age: narrow, shallow commercialized teachings become popular; actual self-realized teachers are neglected as 'too difficult'; and as a result, no one is becoming enlightened. Should we be surprised? The real culprit is our own laziness, our unwillingness to adjust our priorities and commit sufficient resources of time and energy to learn and practice the actual teaching of the Buddha. We want the recognition and status that accrue to practicing meditators, but we don't want to take a hard look at our personal lust, hatred and delusion. We want to be seen as enlightened, but we don't want to give up our trendy lifestyles and other material advantages.

Whether a Buddha appears to explain it or not, Dhamma is a universal law. We cannot cheat the law of Dhamma, any more than we can cheat

the laws of gravity or thermodynamics. But we can and often do cheat ourselves out of the tremendous benefits available from the Buddha's original complete teaching by seeking a shortcut, an easy way out.

When we encounter something like the *Kālakārāma Sutta*, we are liable to miss its deep meaning and profound possibilities for self-realization. And even when we read an expert explanation of it, such as Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda's *Magic of the Mind*, without a strong background in the Theravāda Suttas and personal practice of insight meditation, we are likely to register only a fraction of its actual significance.

Differences in language and culture are certainly factors leading to this misunderstanding. But beyond that, it's hard for us to see how to apply the knowledge. We are left looking for the exercises at the end of each chapter. They aren't there, and there is a good reason for it.

No truly great idea, no truly powerful breakthrough can be reduced to a simple set of procedures. Although every schoolchild can recite Einstein's famous formula $E = mc^2$, how many of them can use it to build an atomic reactor? Similarly, though many so-called 'Buddhists' can recite the formula of Dependent Origination, how many of them can apply it to transcend conditioned consciousness and attain Nibbāna?

The wandering ascetic Upatissa, who was to become the Buddha's chief disciple Sāriputta, heard the capsule explanation of the Buddha's teaching from the Venerable Assaji:

> "Of things that arise from a cause
> Their cause the Tathāgata has told
> And also their cessation
> Thus teaches the Great Recluse." — *Vinaya* I 40

Immediately upon hearing this couplet, he attained the fruit of the Path known as Stream-Entry. He needed no procedural instruction to realize this insight, for he was able to infer the application of a philosophical principle from its summary expression, even without detailed explanation.

This is precisely the skill needed to apply the Buddha's teaching successfully. Since the details of every individual's illusion are unique to him alone, there can be no specific procedure or set of instructions for everyone. One must be able to take a general principle given in the teaching, and work out the details of its application to one's particular situation.

For example, an engineer designing a bridge or other construction refers to standard formulas for stress, loading, tensile strength and so on. These formulas are worked out by applying principles of chemistry and physics to real-world problems, and by long experience of other engineers. But in the end, each project is unique. Final responsibility for the design, integrity and durability of each component of the entire construction rests with the engineer, who is expected to apply creative thinking and initiative to produce the result.

It's worthwhile keeping in mind the maxim, "In theory, theory and practice are the same; but in practice, they're different."[4] In theory, the principles of the Buddha's teaching are identical for everyone. But in practice, like the engineer we each have to work out their application to our unique situation.

For example, for some people it may be helpful to view the Buddha's teaching as a series of increasingly subtle standards of purity:

> "In the same way, friend, purity in virtue is simply for the sake of purity of mind. Purity of mind is simply for the sake of purity of view. Purity of view is simply for the sake of purity of overcoming perplexity. Purity of overcoming of perplexity is simply for the sake of purity of knowledge and vision of what is and is not the path. Purity of knowledge and vision of what is and is not the path is simply for the sake of purity of knowledge and vision of the way. Purity of knowledge and vision of the way is simply for the sake of purity of knowledge and vision. Purity of knowledge and vision is simply for the sake of total Unbinding through lack of clinging. And the holy life is lived under the Blessed One for the sake of total Unbinding through lack of clinging."
> — *Rathavinīta Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 147)

Here 'purity in virtue' refers to Precepts, especially the basic moral standards: no lying, no stealing, no killing, no intoxication, no sex and so on. One should examine oneself: 'Am I able to follow these Precepts? If not, then why am I unable to follow them?" And we should investigate ourselves to find out the cause. Similarly with purity of mind and the rest.

Certainly the specific circumstances preventing each individual from meeting these standards will be unique in every case. Nevertheless we will invariably find, at the root of our inability to meet even the basic moral standards of the Buddha's teaching, some attachment to desire (lust),

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[4] Attributed to baseball coach Yogi Berra.

aversion (hatred) and ignorance (delusion). Because of our desire to maintain the illusion of a permanent ego-identity, we are unable or unwilling to change. Yet identification with and attachment to specific instances of lust, hatred and delusion are precisely the causes of our suffering. And of course, the inevitable deterioration of whatever impermanent things we are attached to, will force us to change anyway.

We are like a man cast into the torrent of a rapidly flowing river, clinging for dear life to a rotten, crumbling log, while just downstream is a mighty waterfall. If he lets go and tries to swim to shore, he may fail and drown. Even if he clings to the wood, it can disintegrate at any time. In any case, if he does nothing he is certain to go over the falls to his destruction. Here, life is the turbulent torrent, our attachment to sense experiences is the crumbling log, and the waterfall is approaching death. Considering he whole situation, is there really any uncertainty about what to do?

> "Thus you should train yourselves: 'We will listen when discourses that are words of the Tathāgata—deep, deep in their meaning, transcendent, connected with emptiness—are being recited. We will lend ear, will set our hearts on knowing them, will regard these teachings as worth grasping and mastering.' That's how you should train yourselves."
> — *Ani Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* II 266)

The Buddha's teaching, while simple in principle, is certainly difficult in application. If not, it would lack the power to deliver us from the most pressing problems of existence. But its apparent difficulty doesn't justify accepting some adulterated or oversimplified version of it. For whatever we would gain in convenience, we would lose much more in benefit.

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December 2014

Chapter One

Prologue: the Magic Show

"Now suppose, monks, that a magician or magician's apprentice were to hold a magic show at a crossroads, and a man with good eyesight were to see it, observe it and reflect on it radically.[5] Even as he sees it, ponders over it and reflects on it radically, he would find it empty, void, without substance: for what substance could there be in a magic show?

"In the same way, any consciousness—past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near—a monk sees, observes and reflects on it radically. And even as he sees it, ponders over it and reflects on it radically, he would find it empty, void, without substance: for what substance could there be in consciousness?[6]

…That is what the Blessed One said. Having said that, the One Well-Gone, the Teacher, said further:

> Form is like a mass of foam;
> And feeling, but an airy bubble;
> Perception is like a mirage;
> And fabrications, a banana tree;
>
> Consciousness is a magic show,
> A juggler's trick entire
> All these smilies have been taught
> by the 'Kinsman of the Sun'[7]."

— *Phena Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* III 142)

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[5] *yoniso manasikāra*—literally, 'refection by way of source or matrix'. This means being aware not only of the object of contemplation but also of the network of meaning and intentions through which we view it. This 'ontological contemplation' is the theme of this work.

[6] "Impermanent, O monks are sense pleasures; they are hollow, false and delusive; they are conjurors' tricks, O monks—tricks that make the fools prattle." *Ānañjasappāya Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* II 261)

[7] *Ādiccabandhu*, an epithet of the Buddha.

The Magic Show

A famous magician whose miraculous performances you have thoroughly enjoyed on many occasions is back in your town. News of his arrival has spread far and wide, and eager crowds are filling the large hall where he is due to perform.

You too buy a ticket and enter the hall. There is a scramble for seats, but you are not keen on securing one, for you have entered with a different purpose. You have a bright idea to outwit the magician—to play a trick on him yourself. So you cut through the throng and stealthily creep into a concealed corner of the stage.

The magician enters through dark curtains, clad in his pitch-black suit. Black boxes containing his secret stock-in-trade stand onstage. You watch from your vantage point as the performance begins.

As you carefully observe every movement of your favorite magician with sharp eyes, one after another you begin to discover the secrets behind his 'breathtaking miracles': the hidden holes and false bottoms in his magic boxes, the counterfeits and secret pockets, the hidden strings and buttons pulled and pressed under the distractive cover of waving his magic wand.

Very soon you are able to *see through* his bag of wily tricks so well that you are able to predict the next 'surprise' well in advance. Since now you can anticipate his surprises, they no longer surprise you. His tricks no longer trick you. His 'magic' has lost its magic for you. It no longer kindles your imagination as it had in the past.

The magician's 'hocus-pocus' and 'abracadabra', his grand gestures and magic wand now cannot interest or excite you, for you know them now for what they are: meaningless distractions. The whole performance is revealed to be an empty show, a vast hoax, a treacherous deception.

In utter disgust, you turn away from it to gaze at the audience below. And what a sight! A sea of craned necks; eyes that gaze in blind admiration; moths that gape in dumb appreciation; 'Ah!'s and 'Oh!'s and whistles of speechless amazement.

You witness a strange admixture of tragedy and comedy that you could have enjoyed instead of the magic show, but for the fact that you yourself were in the same sorry plight on many previous occasions. Moved by compassion for the illusioned crowd, you frown at the magician as he

chuckles with a cynical grin at every applause from his admirers. "How is it," you wonder, "that I have been deceived for so long by this crook of a magician?" You are fed up with all this and swear to yourself: "Never will I waste my time and money on such empty shows—never again!"

In due course the show ends and the crowd makes for the exit. You slip out of your hiding place unseen and mingle. Outside, you spot a friend you know to be a keen admirer of this magician. You try to avoid him, not wishing to embarrass him with your unusual observations, but too late—he has already seen you. Soon you find yourself listening to a vivid commentary on the wonders of the magic show, as your friend relives the moments of the 'bliss of ignorance' he had just been enjoying. Before long he discovers that you are quite reserved about the show, and wonders how you could be so.

"Why so glum? You were in the hall, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was."

"Then were you sleeping?"

"No, no."

"Maybe you weren't watching closely."

"No, I was watching all right—maybe *too* closely."

"You claim you were watching, but you don't seem to have enjoyed the show."

"No, I did see it. In fact I saw it so well that I *missed the show!*"

Your friend looks at you strangely and walks away, shaking his head.

Chapter Two

Kālakārāma Sutta

On one occasion the Blessed One was staying in Sāketa at Kālaka's park. There he addressed the monks: "Monks!"

"Yes, lord," the monks responded. The Blessed One said:

"Monks, whatever in the cosmos—with its *devas*, Māras and Brahmās, its generations with their contemplatives and brahmans, royalty and common people—is seen, heard, sensed,[8] cognized, attained, sought after, pondered by the intellect: All that do I know. Whatever in the cosmos… is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, pondered by the intellect: All that I directly know. That has been known and realized by the Tathāgata,[9] but the Tathāgata has not taken his stand upon it.[10]

"If I were to say, 'Monks, I don't know whatever in the cosmos... is seen, heard, sensed, cognized... pondered by the intellect,' that would be a falsehood in me. If I were to say, 'I both know and don't know whatever in the cosmos... is seen, heard, sensed, cognized... pondered by the intellect,' that would be just the same. If I were to say, 'I neither know nor don't know whatever is in the cosmos... is seen, heard, sensed, cognized... pondered by the intellect,' that would be a fault in me.[11]

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[8] *muta'*—sensations arising from taste, touch and smell.

[9] According to the Commentary, the three phrases—'all that do I know', 'that I have fully understood' and 'all that is known to the Tathāgata'—establish the plane of omniscience (*sabbaññutabhūmi*).

[10] Commentary: "The Tathāgata does not take his stand upon, or approach by way of craving or views. The Exalted One sees a form with the eye, but in him there is no desire and lust for it; he is well released in mind. The Exalted One hears a sound with the ear… smells an odor with the nose… tastes a flavor with the tongue… touches a tangible with the body… cognizes an idea in the mind, but in him there is no desire and lust for it; he is well released in mind (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* IV 164). Hence it was said that the Tathāgata takes no stand upon it. It should be understood that this phrase makes known the plane of the influx-free (*khīṇāsavabhūmi*).

[11] The phases 'it would be a falsehood in me', 'that too would be a falsehood in me' and 'it would be a fault in me' are said to indicate the plane of truth (*saccabhūmi*).

"Thus, monks, the Tathāgata, when seeing what is to be seen, doesn't conceive[12] an 'object' as seen apart from sight. He doesn't conceive of an 'unseen'. He doesn't conceive of a 'thing-worth-seeing'. He doesn't conceive a 'seer'.[13]

"When hearing what is to be heard, he doesn't conceive a 'sound' as heard apart from hearing. He doesn't conceive of an 'unheard'. He doesn't conceive of a 'thing-worth-hearing'. He doesn't conceive a 'hearer'.

"When sensing what is to be sensed, he doesn't conceive a 'thing to be sensed' as seen apart from sensation. He doesn't conceive of an 'unsensed'. He doesn't conceive of a 'thing-worth-sensing'. He doesn't conceive 'one who senses'.

"When cognizing what is to be cognized, he doesn't conceive a 'concept' apart from cognition. He doesn't conceive an 'unconceptualized'. He doesn't conceive a 'thing-to-be-conceptualized'. He doesn't conceive a 'conceptualizer'.

"Thus, monks, the Tathāgata, being Such-like in regard to all phenomena that can be seen, heard, sensed and cognized, is 'Such.' And I tell you: there is no other higher or more sublime than he who is 'Such'.[14]

Whatever is seen or heard or sensed
or clung to as true by others,
Amidst those self-fettered by their views,[15]
Being Such, I hold none as true or false.

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[12] *na maññati: maññanā* marks that stage in sense perception when one egotistically imagines or fancies a perceived 'thing' to be out there in its own right. It represents a fissure or split in the perceptual continuum which results in the subject-object dichotomy perpetuating the conceits of 'I' and 'mine'.

[13] *daṭṭhāraṃ na maññati:* the Tathāgata does not entertain any conceit of being the agent behind seeing. When sights etc. lose their object-status they no longer reflect a 'seer' on the subjective side. These four modes of conceiving are said to represent the plane of voidness (*suññatābhūmi*).

[14] *tādi:* 'such' or 'suchlike', an epithet of the Emancipated One signifying his supreme detachment. This declaration indicates the plane of the 'Such One' (*tādibhūmi*).

[15] Commentary: "among those who are of diverse views and who had grasped them, having themselves recollected and cherished those viewpoints."

That barb I beheld well in advance,[16]
that arrow where generations are fastened and hung
'I know, I see, that's just how it is!'[17] —
no such clinging for the Tathāgatas."

[16] The barb of views, which the Buddha saw in advance at the foot of the Bodhi Tree.

[17] A phrase often cited in the Pāḷi Canon as representing the stamp of dogmatism characteristic of speculative views. It is equivalent to the dogmatic assertion 'this alone is true, all else is false' which accompanies the formation of the ten points that the Buddha intentionally left unexplained.

Chapter Three

Sign and Significance in Sense Perception

> "Then the thought occurred to me, 'This Dhamma that I have attained is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, peaceful, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in attachment, is excited by attachment, enjoys attachment. For a generation delighting in attachment, excited by attachment, enjoying attachment, this/that conditionality and Dependent Origination are hard to see. This state, too, is hard to see: the resolution of all fabrications, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, dispassion, cessation: Unbinding. And if I were to teach the Dhamma and others would not understand me, that would be tiresome for me, troublesome for me.'"
> — *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 160)

We may find a parallel to the difficulties the Buddha experienced in coming to terms with the world in your unusual experience at the magic show described in Chapter One. You certainly saw the magic show; yet as your subsequent conversation with your friend revealed, once having seen through the illusion to the actual nature of reality, there are difficulties in any categorical affirmation or denial of the impressions of others.

The position of a Tathāgata, who has fully comprehended the magical illusion of consciousness, is somewhat similar. He too has seen through the magical performance of sense data enacted on the stage of consciousness. Thus he is well aware of the limitations of categorical affirmation or denial of any sense experience or 'fact'.

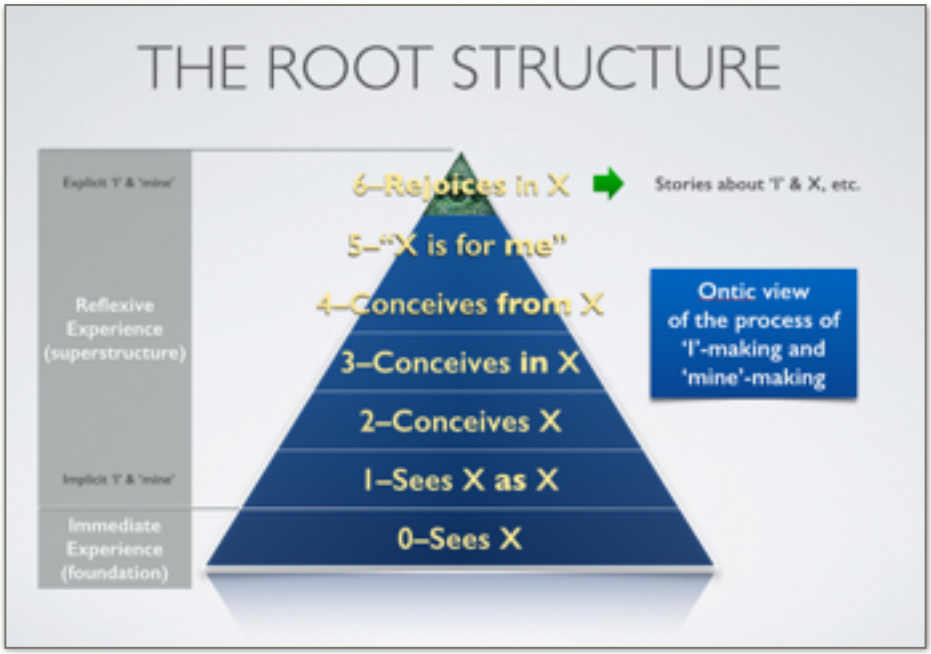
Whereas the uninstructed worldling is willing to 'take his stand' upon the knowledge and experience he has grasped, the Tathāgata regards that as

a 'barb', a sharp arrow, because he has fully understood.[18] In other words, like the protagonist observing the magician from his viewpoint on the stage, he has seen the magic show so well as to miss the show as seen from the worldling's viewpoint.

The question of 'seeing what-is-shown' brings us to the relationship between sign and significance. Sense perception at all levels relies largely on signs or symbols. This might even appear as a truism since the Pāḷi word *saññā* (Sanskrit *saṁjñā*) denotes perception as well as sign, symbol, mark or token. The sign plays such an important part in sense perception due to the implicit processes of recognition and grasping (acquisition), as discussed in *Mūlapariyāya Sutta*:

> The Blessed One said: "Monks, I will teach you the root sequence of all phenomena… There is the case, monks, where an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person—who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for men of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma—perceives earth as earth. Perceiving earth as earth, he conceives 'things' about earth, he conceives 'things' in earth, he conceives 'things' coming out of earth, he conceives earth as 'mine,' he rejoices in earth. Why is that? Because he has not comprehended it, I tell you."
> — *Mūla-pariyāya Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 1)

[18] The *raison d'etre* for the tetralemma formulation in the *Kālakārāma Sutta* is the very detached attitude of the Buddha: "'I know, I see, that's just how it is!'—no such clinging for the Tathāgatas." If not for the reservation attached to the first alternative, he could have stopped at the second alternative, for a categorical affirmative requires only the negation of the opposite standpoint. But in the *Kālakārāma Sutta*, as in the magic show, there is more to it than meets the eye. Normally, in a tetralemma the first alternative is negated. But in the Sutta it is affirmed, but not categorically, for a reservation has been made. The added emphasis serves the rhetorical purpose of showing that not only does he know what the world knows, but he has grown wiser. The peculiarity in this formulation is a flashback to the *Mūlapariyāya Sutta,* since the significance of the additional emphasis conveyed by the word *abbhaññāsiṃ* is distinctly revealed there by the use of *abhijānāti*, while the reservation regarding the first alternative finds its parallel there in the expression *na maññati*—an expression recurring in the exegetical type of disquisition immediately following the tetralemma in the *Kālakārāma Sutta*.



Grasping or acquisition—making something 'mine'—whether physical or mental, is at best merely a symbolic affair. The actual point of contact is temporary, superficial and localized, but it props up the conceit of grasping with the help of signs. Recognition, too, is possible only within limits circumscribed by our more or less arbitrary pre-existing categories of thought. The impermanence of the world persistently undermines grasping, but the conceits of 'I'-making and 'mine'-making are maintained by progressively ignoring the fact of constant change. Thus both recognition and grasping are kept up with the help of signs and symbols.

What do signs and symbols signify? The less-sophisticated would readily answer, "Things, of course!" Common sense presumes signs to stand for the 'things' we perceive with their aid. The 'things' are the forms we see, the sounds we hear, the scents we smell, the flavors we taste, the objects we touch and the ideas we cognize.

The more-sophisticated would prefer to draw finer distinctions. They would take the position that behind the ever-changing attributes we perceive with our imperfect sensory apparatus, there lies an unchanging essence, a noumenon. But careful observation and analysis fail to reveal any such real essence, a 'thing-in-itself' under the ever-receding layers of

qualities and attributes.[19] Nevertheless they would still maintain that after all, there could not possibly be an attribute without a substance, a quality without a 'thing' that it 'qualifies'.

To paraphrase the *Kālakārāma Sutta*, a Tathāgata 'does not conceive of a visible thing as apart from sight, an audible thing apart from hearing, a sensible thing apart from sensation or a cognizable thing apart from cognition'. Furthermore, the Suttas make it clear that all percepts must be regarded as signs (*saññā, nimitta*).[20] Hence while the worldling says that he perceives 'things' with the help of signs, the Tathāgata says that *all* that we perceive are mere signs. Sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and ideas are all signs that consciousness pursues.

So if the question is asked: "What do these signs signify?" The Tathāgata would reply, "Things, of course!" However, these 'things' are not the ones the worldling has in mind when he answers this question. According to the teaching of the Tathāgata, the 'things' signified by all sense perceptions are lust, hatred and delusion.

> "Lust, friend, is a something; hatred is a something; delusion is a something… Lust, friend, is something significative; hatred is something significative; delusion is something significative." — *Mahāvedalla Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 298)

The conclusion of the Buddha that all sense precepts are signs, and that the 'things' they signify are lust, hatred and delusion might at first appear to be an unhappy blend of philosophy and ethics. But there are deeper implications. The metaphysician often overlooks that the reality attributed to sense data is necessarily connected with its evocative power: its ability to produce effects. The reality of a thing is usually registered in terms of its experiential impact, the acid test by which an object proves its existence as reality. The *Sangiti Sutta* hints at the validity of this test when it describes materiality as 'manifestive and offering resistance'.[21]

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[19] 'Perception is like a mirage'—see Chapter One

[20] "And how does one not live at home? Any desire, passion, delight, craving, any attachments, clingings, fixations of awareness, biases, or obsessions with regard to the property of form… feeling… perception… fabrication… consciousness: these the Tathagata has abandoned, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Therefore the Tathagata is said to be not dwelling at home." — *Hāliddakāni Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* III 10)

[21] *sanidassana, sappaṭighaṃ rūpam* — *Sangiti Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* III 217)

Now, the 'objects' of sense that we grasp and recognize as existing 'out there' derive their status as objects from their impact or evocative power. Their ability to produce effects in the form of reactions of the senses is generally taken as the criterion of their reality. Sense objects are therefore signs that have become significant in themselves, owing to our ignorance that their significance actually depends on the psychological mainsprings of lust, hatred and delusion. This is a result of reasoning from the wrong end (*ayoniso manasikāra*) leading both the philosopher and scientist into an infinite regress of speculative theorizing.

Some reflection on your experience of the magic show might provide some insight into the truth of the conclusion that sense precepts are signs, and that the 'things' they signify are lust, hatred and delusion. Whatever you may say to the contrary, to the audience steeped in the bliss of ignorance, the magic show was full of significance. To them, the magician's articles and artifices—his 'hocus-pocus', 'abracadabra' and magic wand—had 'reality' in terms of evocative power. They seemed to have the ability to produce impactful effects. And their sense reactions inarticulately expressed the 'reality' of the magic show.

Last but not least, the vivid commentary of the friend you had to listen to after the show was a fully articulate expression of the 'reality' of the show, which you well knew was simply a wily bag of tricks presented by the shrewd magician to deceive the audience. Behind all the gestures, exclamations and descriptions evoked by the 'things' seen at the magic show, you clearly saw the *actual* things that were there: attachment, aversion and delusion.

Chapter Four

Dependent Origination—a Via-medium

The Buddha's insight into the backstage workings of the magic show of consciousness revealed to him the almost unbridgeable gulf between his transcendental experience and the ordinary worldling's sensory experience.

> "Whatever, monks, that has been pondered over as 'truth' by the world with its gods and Māras, by the progeny consisting of recluses and brahmins, gods and men—that has been well-discerned as *untruth* by the Noble Ones, as it really is, with right wisdom. This is one mode of reflection. And whatever, monks, that has been pondered over as 'untruth' … that has been that has been well-discerned as *truth* by the Noble Ones, as it really is, with right wisdom. This is the second mode of reflection." — *Dvayatānupassanā Sutta* (*Sutta Nipāta* p. 147)

> "Monk, everything of a deluding nature is indeed false, and that is the truth, namely Nibbāna, of a non-deluding nature… For, monk, this is the highest truth, namely the non-delusive Nibbāna." — *Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* III 245)

Despite such declarations by the Buddha of the wide disparity between the worldling's conception of truth and that of the Noble Ones, the *Kālakārāma Sutta* attributes to the Buddha himself a statement that seems to contradict those declarations:

> "Whatever is seen or heard or sensed
> or clung to as true by others,
> Amidst those self-fettered by their views,
> Being Such, I hold none as true or false."

How can we resolve this paradox? Once again, recall your unusual experience at the magic show. In your moment of compassion for the frenzied crowd applauding the magician, you stumbled upon a wider concept of truth: the principle of relativity behind the concept of truth. You realized that, given the same ignorance of the secrets of the magician, given the same psychological impulses of greed and hate, anyone would take up the same standpoint as that frenzied crowd.

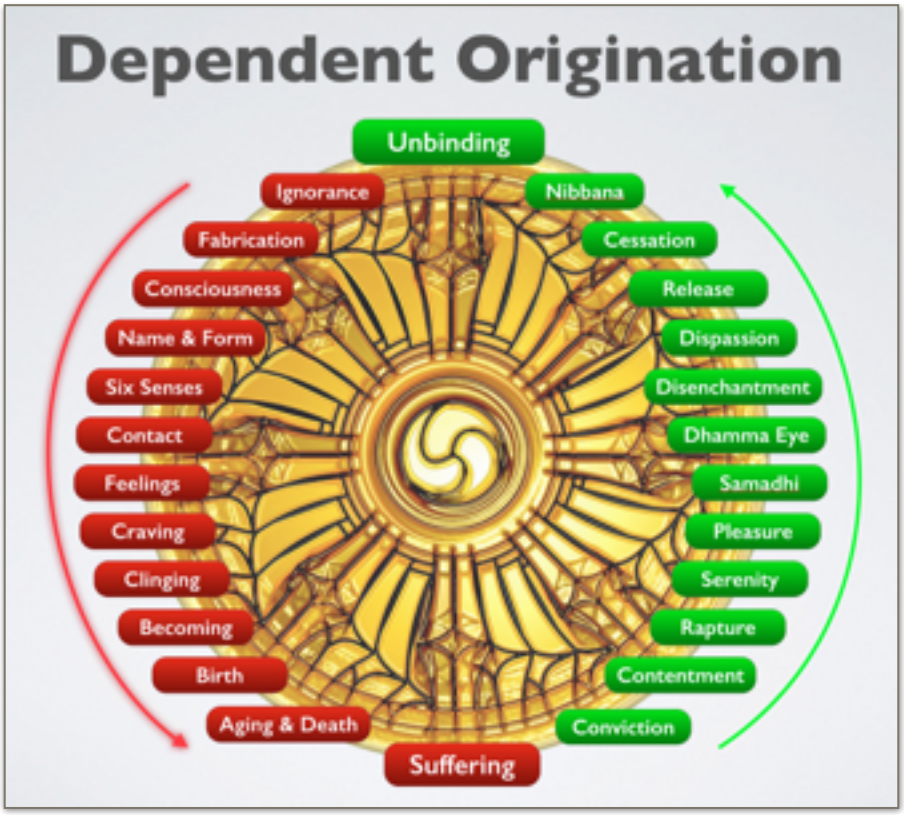
Realizing that anyone placed in a similar situation would behave as that crowd mellowed your sense of judgment.

The same conviction caused some embarrassment and hesitation in the later conversation with your friend. The same magic show was seen from two different perspectives. While the audience saw *what* the magician performed, from your different vantage point you saw *how* he performed. Thus there were actually two levels of experience of one and the same event: one arising out of ignorance, the other out of knowledge. Each level carried its own reactions and convictions, its own conception of bliss. The crowd's experience tended towards the tumultuous bliss of ignorance; your experience tended towards a bliss of appeasement born of understanding.

Both levels find a place in the Buddha's conception of 'knowledge and vision of things as they are' (*yathābhūtañāṇa-dassana*). Its content is not any particular theory or definite body of knowledge, but a Norm that analyzes and lays bare the very structure of experience. This is none other than the law of Dependent Origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) which accounts for experience arising from ignorance in its manifestive order, and recognizes the experience arising from knowledge by its formulation in unmanifestive order.

> "This being, that comes to be; with the arising of this comes the arising of that. This not being, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.
>
> "That is to say:
> From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.
> From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.
> From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form.
> From name-and-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.
> From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.
> From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.
> From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.
> From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance.
> From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming.
> From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.
> From birth as a requisite condition, then aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress and suffering.

"Now from the remainderless fading and cessation of that very ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications.
From the cessation of fabrications comes the cessation of consciousness.
From the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-and-form.
From the cessation of name-and-form comes the cessation of the six sense media.
From the cessation of the six sense media comes the cessation of contact.
From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling.
From the cessation of feeling comes the cessation of craving.
From the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging/sustenance.
From the cessation of clinging/sustenance comes the cessation of becoming.
From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth.
From the cessation of birth, then aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress and suffering." — *Bahudhātuka Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* III)



This law of Dependent Origination, which embraces the entire gamut of experience from the worldling's to the Arahant's, applies to our problem of the magic show. If anyone had asked you and your friend about the show, "Is there any magic?" the two answers would appear contradictory. Since by then you had seen through the so-called 'magic', you would answer, "There was no magic." But for your friend who was under the magician's spell of deception, "There was."

The two opposing answers would be contradictory only if understood in an absolute sense and asserted dogmatically without reference to the question of viewpoint. The law of Dependent Origination resolves the apparent contradiction by avoiding the two extremes 'is' and 'is not' by the wise proviso: "It depends on your viewpoint." Given the ignorance of the magician's tricks, fabrications ('magical' incantations, gestures, exclamations, imaginations) come into being; dependent on these fabrications, consciousness of the 'magic' of the show comes into being; dependent on this consciousness, the name-and-form of the 'magic show' come into being;[22] dependent on this name-and-form comprising the magician's entire bag of tricks and the audience's mental reactions, the six sense media of the deluded audience were kept engaged, bewildered by curiosity; dependent on these six sense media, feelings of sensory contact with the marvelous but illusory world of magic come into being, resulting in excitement and exhilaration; depending upon these feelings, a craving for perpetuation of these feelings comes into being; dependent on this craving, grasping for and attachment to the wonderful experience of the magic show comes into being; dependent on that grasping, the audience finds itself 'born' into a chimerical 'world of magic'. This 'birth', however, is impermanent. The magic show necessarily comes to an end, the joy experienced by the audience fades, and that is its aging, decay and death.

This illustration should make it clear that the existence of the magic can neither be affirmed nor denied absolutely. And what is true of this example is true of all phenomena comprising the magic show of consciousness. The worldling usually overlooks the fact that existence is a relative concept. Says the Buddha:

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[22] Feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention constitute the 'name' aspect and the four primaries of solidity, liquidity, heat and air, together with the derivative concept of form make up the 'form' aspect.

> "By and large, Kaccāyana, this world is supported by (takes as its object) the polarity of existence and non-existence. But when one sees the origination of the world as it actually is with right discernment, 'nonexistence' with reference to the world does not occur to one. When one sees the cessation of the world as it actually is with right discernment, 'existence' with reference to the world does not occur to one.
>
> "By and large, Kaccāyana, this world is in bondage to attachments, clingings (sustenances), and biases. But one such as this does not get involved with or cling to these attachments, clingings, fixations of awareness, biases, or obsessions; nor is he resolved on 'my self.' He has no uncertainty or doubt that just stress, when arising, is arising; stress, when passing away, is passing away. In this, his knowledge is independent of others. It's to this extent, Kaccāyana, that there is right view.
>
> "'Everything exists': That is one extreme. 'Everything doesn't exist': That is a second extreme. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications. From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness… Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress and suffering.
>
> "Now from the remainderless fading and cessation of that very ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications. From the cessation of fabrications comes the cessation of consciousness… Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress and suffering." — *Kaccānagotta Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* II 17)

The rigid opinionatedness on which debates thrive is sometimes the result of an alleged spiritual experience. It comes out in a dogmatic tone: 'I know, I see, that's just how it is!' If the opponent is prompted by a different experience, leading him to a different conclusion, there is an irreconcilable conflict, a classic example of which is found in the words of two Brahmin sophists:

> "Master Gotama, Pūraṇa Kassapa—all-knowing, all-seeing—claims exhaustive knowledge and vision: 'Whether I am standing or walking, awake or asleep, continual, unflagging knowledge and vision is established within me.' He says, 'I dwell with finite knowledge, knowing and seeing the finite cosmos.' Yet Nigaṇṭha Nāthaputta—all-knowing, all-seeing—also claims exhaustive knowledge and vision: 'Whether I am standing or walking, awake or asleep, continual, unflagging knowledge

> and vision is established within me.' He says, 'I dwell with infinite knowledge, knowing and seeing the infinite cosmos.' Of these two speakers of knowledge, these two who contradict each other, which is telling the truth, and which is lying?"

The Buddha refuses to act as arbiter in this irreconcilable conflict of viewpoint. Instead he says,

> "Enough, brahmans. Put this question aside.[23] I will teach you the Dhamma. Listen and pay close attention. I will speak." — *Brāhmaṇa Sutta* (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* IV 428)

And he taught them the Dhamma, pointing out in the course of it that in the terminology of the Noble Ones, 'the world' is defined as the five strands of sense pleasures and 'the end of the world' is Arahantship itself.

One might wonder why the Buddha set aside such a clear-cut question. First, the Buddha wanted to redefine 'the world' to bring out its phenomenal nature. But there is another reason. Both brahmans in the debate claimed omniscience, but whereas one saw 'a finite world with finite knowledge,' the other saw 'an infinite world with infinite knowledge.' Now by logic the latter could point out a flaw in the former's position: "You see a finite world because your knowledge is *limited* (finite)." But the former can reply, with equal logical justification, "You see an infinite world because your knowledge *lacks finality* (infinite)." In other words, while the latter can claim the former's knowledge is imperfect because he cannot see what is beyond 'the end of the world', the former can claim that the former's knowledge is imperfect because 'the end of the world' is beyond its range.

This kind of circular argument is often found in speculative views put forward by worldly philosophers.[24] Those who cling to their views dogmatically are compared to the blind men who fought over their individual views on the appearance of the elephant, which concludes:

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[23] The expression *ṭiṭṭhatetam* indicates that the question belongs to the type called *ṭhapanīya-pañha:* questions that should be set aside. It is one of the four categories of questions classified by the Buddha, the other three being *ekaṃsavyākaranīya* (questions that admit of a categorical reply) *paṭipucchāvyākaranīya* (those requiring an analytical reply) and *vibhajjavyākaranīya* (those that need counter-questioning). Another set of ten questions he set aside are technically called *avyākatavatthūni* (unexplained points) and the two viewpoints appear there too, in the form: 'Is the world finite? Is the world infinite?"

[24] See also *Cūla-sakuludāyi Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* II 32)

> With regard to these things they're attached—
> some contemplatives and brahmans. They quarrel and fight—
> people seeing one side. — *Udāna* 66

There is, however, one truth that people would not dispute, and that is the very synoptic understanding of the arising, the passing away, the satisfaction, the misery and the 'stepping-out' in regard to that sense experience upon which all speculative theories are founded.

> "And that, monks, the Tathāgata understands thus: 'These viewpoints thus taken up, thus laid hold of, will have such-and-such consequences, will lead to such-and-such future states of existence.' But he does not grasp that understanding; and not grasping, he has known appeasement (*nibbuti*) within himself. Having known the arising, the passing away, the satisfaction, the misery and the 'stepping-out' in regard to feelings as they really are, monks, the Tathāgata is released without grasping." — *Brahmajāla Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* I 21)

Chapter Five

Vortical Interplay of Consciousness and Name-and-form

The most outstanding contribution made by the law of Dependent Origination to the ethical, psychological and philosophical enquiries of all times is the revelation that there is a vortex hidden behind the flux and turbulence of mental life. In any vortex, whether made of air like a tornado, of water like a whirlpool, or of storm clouds like a hurricane, the center is empty. The stages of 'consciousness' and 'name-and-form'[25] are the axis, the empty hub of the vortex of Dependent Origination. They perpetually support and revitalize each other in mutual rotation, an emptiness like the eye of a hurricane, around which orbits all existence.

> "Very well then, Kotthita my friend, I will give you an analogy; for there are cases where it is through the use of an analogy that intelligent people can understand the meaning of what is being said. It is as if two sheaves of reeds were to stand leaning against one another. In the same way, from name-and-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness, from consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form. From name-and-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media. From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance. From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of suffering and stress.
>
> "If one were to pull away one of those sheaves of reeds, the other would fall; if one were to pull away the other, the first one would fall. In the same way, from the cessation of name-and-form comes the cessation of consciousness, from the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-and-form. From the cessation of name-and-form comes the

[25] "Feeling, perception, intention, contact, attention—these, O friends, are called 'name'. The four great elements (earth, water, fire and air) and the form dependent on them—these, O friends, are called 'form'." — *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 53)

> cessation of the six sense media. From the cessation of the six sense media comes the cessation of contact. From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling. From the cessation of feeling comes the cessation of craving. From the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging/sustenance. From the cessation of clinging/sustenance comes the cessation of becoming. From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering and stress." — *Nalakalapiyo Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* II 114)

> "This consciousness turns back at name-and-form, and goes no farther. It is to this extent that there is birth, aging, death, falling away, and re-arising, i.e., from name-and-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness, from consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form. From name-and-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media... Thus is the origination of this entire mass of stress." — *Nagara Sutta* (*Samyutta Nikaya* II 104)

> "Ānanda, one can be born or grow old, die, pass away or reappear only insofar as there is any pathway for verbal expression, only insofar as there is any pathway for terminology, only insofar as there is any pathway for designations, only insofar as the range of wisdom. Insofar only is the round of *saṃsāra* kept going for there to be any designation of the conditions of this existence; that is to say, name-and-form together with consciousness." — *Mahānidāna Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* II 63)

In the vortical interplay of consciousness with name-and-form, consciousness represents actuality while name-and-form represents potentiality. When name-and-form develops, drawing vitality from consciousness, it gives rise to the six sense bases, which divide into internal (*ajjhattika*) and external (*bāhira*) due to the discriminative function of consciousness. The ensuing processes of contact, feeling, craving, grasping, clinging and becoming portray the potentialities indicated by name-and-form springing forth into life.

With 'becoming' (*bhava*) the vicious circle is complete and 'birth' occurs, and with it the unpleasant prospects of decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. The preliminary conditions of ignorance and fabrication are implicit in the above three passages, for the murk of ignorance provides the background for, while fabrications directly manifest themselves as the prelude to, and motive force behind, the vortex of narcissistic conceit.

To illustrate, consider a game of football or any sporting contest. Here consciousness recognizes the necessity of two sides as a precondition for the game, while 'name-and-form' represents the rules, procedure and paraphernalia of the game. The five constituents of name-and-form—contact, feeling, perception, intention and attention—are like the competition itself, the feelings of elation or depression in the course of winning or losing the game, the scoreboard, the resolution to win the game, and watching the game. The six sense bases which consciousness divides into internal and external are the actual players selected for the game. The game begins with contact, and with feeling, craving, grasping, clinging and becoming, the game is in full swing. With 'birth', the game is over, the final score is posted, and all that is left is decay-and-death as the teams pack up and everyone goes home. That all pathways for verbal expression, terminology and designation converge on the vortex of consciousness and name-and-form is amply illustrated since the significance of the game depends upon one's being conscious of the type of game, with all its implications regarding the players, their positions, the rules and paraphernalia involved.

In the wider context of our existence in *saṃsāra*, the vortex of consciousness and name-and-form manifests itself as a kind of double-bind:

> A tangle within, a tangle without,
> This world is entangled in a tangle. — *Jatā Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* I 13)

Consciousness as the subject always finds itself entangled with name-and-form as the object, depending on which it develops the concepts of resistance (*paṭighā*) and form (*rūpasaññā*). A tragicomic interplay follows, where consciousness tries to justify its existence on the basis of form, and form tries to justify its existence on the basis of consciousness.

As mentioned above, the criterion of the reality of a thing is the impact it has on one's experience. Hence the worldling tries to cling to name-and-form as real, based on the experience of contact (*phassa*), which depends upon it. According to the Buddha, contact itself is a hybrid manifesting traits proper to both name and form. The following discussion on this aspect of the problem of existence is of immense value to the modern psychologist and philosopher:

> "'From name-and-form as a requisite condition comes contact.' Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how contact comes

> from name-and-form as a requisite condition. If the qualities, traits, themes, and indicators by which there is a description of name-group (mental activity) were all absent, would designation-contact with regard to the form-group (the elements and physical properties) be discerned?"
>
> "No, lord."
>
> "If the permutations, signs, themes, and indicators by which there is a description of the form-group were all absent, would resistance-contact with regard to the name-group be discerned?"
>
> "No, lord."
>
> "If the permutations, signs, themes, and indicators by which there is a description of name-group and form-group were all absent, would designation-contact or resistance-contact be discerned?"
>
> "No, lord."
>
> "Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for contact, i.e., name-and-form." — *Mahā-nidana Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* II 62)

The relevance of signs and symbols to the subject of contact is recognized throughout this disquisition. Both the name-group and the form-group derive their respective designations with the help of modes, characteristics, signs and symbols. But the most extraordinary fact is that their significance is reciprocal—their meanings depend on each other. A verbal impression regarding the form-group is possible only because of the modes, signs and symbols proper to the name-group. The concept of form is established only when the constituents of the name-group (feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention) have experienced it sufficiently for proper discernment and expression. Even the four primaries or great elements are subject to this test of validity, without which they could not stand. As elements they are mere abstractions, but they come within the purview of contact as form or matter (*rūpa*) in the guise of verbal impressions[26] which distinguish among them according to the degree of predominance of their respective qualities. The name-group owes its validity to the modes, characteristics etc. proper to the form-group. The notion of resistance or impact is central to the concept

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[26] "The four great elements, monk, are the cause, the four great elements are the condition for the designation of the aggregate of form." — *Mahā-puṇṇama Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* III 17)

of form or matter. Earth, water, fire and air actually represent experiences of solidity, liquidity, heat and motion—all different kinds of resistance—in which the name-group plays its part. Hence feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention find 'actual' or 'real' objects in the world of matter. In other words, impact or sense-reaction is primarily associated with signs proper to the form-group (*paṭighā-samphassa*) and is associated with the name-group only secondarily and metaphorically (*adhivacanasamphassa*).

The complex relation between name-and-form and contact indicates that the Buddha did not recognize a duality between mind and matter. Instead, it reveals that mentality and materiality are inextricably woven into 'a tangle within' and 'a tangle without'. Name-and-form plays a dual role. In organic combination with consciousness, it is already found within the individual as implied by the expression *saviññanaka-kāya* (consciousness-body). This is the tangle within. Name-and-form is also projected outside as a thing to be measured with this consciousness-body into signs (*nimitta*) in need of interpretation and evaluation. This is the tangle without. The six internal and external sense bases both partake of name-and-form. The instrument of measurement and the things to be measured thus both presuppose each other, as inferred by the following passages:

> "'Name', friends, is one end, 'form' is the other end; consciousness is in the middle, and craving is the seamstress. For it is craving that stitches it into the arising of this and that form of existence…
>
> "The six internal sense bases are one end, the six external sense bases are the other end, consciousness is in the middle, and craving is the seamstress. For it is craving that stitches it into the arising of this and that form of existence…" — *Angutta Nikāya* III 400
>
> "For the fool, monks, cloaked by ignorance and tied to craving, this body is wrought in this way: There is this body, and name-and-form without —thus this pair. Because of this pair there is contact and the six sense bases." — *Saṃyutta Nikāya* II 23
>
> "How, lord, does one know, how does one see, so that in regard to both this conscious body and all all external signs, the mind has gone away from all notions of 'I' and 'mine' and from vain conceits, transcending all distinctions, is at peace and well released?" — *Saṃyutta Nikāya* II 253

In the context of these two 'tangles', any rigid duality between mind and matter as envisioned by worldly philosophers would appear to be a gross

oversimplification. Thus any attempt to solve the problem of existence by taking up an exclusive idealistic or realistic attitude is bound to fail. And indeed, all such attempts to date have failed. In the opinion of the Buddha, the solution lay in cutting off completely these tangles, this Gordian knot:

> "Where name-and-form,
> along with perception
> of contact and form,
> totally stop without trace:
> that's where the tangle is cut." — *Jatā Sutta*

The trend beginning with the duality and vortical interplay between consciousness and name-and-form continues through subsequent stages of the process of Dependent Origination. The six sense bases divide into the duality of internal and external, with its concomitant notions of 'here' and 'there'. Contact is a sequel to this duality in a very specific sense. It implies a discrimination between two things, and consciousness fulfills this condition:

> "Dependent on the eye and forms, friends, arises eye-consciousness. These three together is contact." — *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 111)

The canonical simile of the friction between two sticks illustrates this aspect of contact:

> "Just as from the coming together and rubbing of two sticks of wood heat results and fire is produced, and by the separation and disconnection of the sticks, the heat produced by them ceases and disappears, so it is also with these three [types of] feelings [pleasurable, displeasurable and neutral] that are born of contact, rooted in contact, caused by contact, dependent on contact: dependent on a contact of a certain kind there arises a corresponding feeling; by the cessation of that contact the corresponding feeling ceases." — *Phassamulaka Sutta* (*Saṃyuta Nikāya* IV 215)

With feeling, the split in experience becomes sufficiently explicit as to call forth the notion of 'I am'.

> "Where, friend, there is no feeling at all, would there be any such notion as 'I am'?"
>
> "There would not, lord." — *Mahānidāna Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* II 67)

The discriminative function of consciousness is seen here in the form of distinguishing the three types of feelings. Hence sometimes we find consciousness defined in terms of discriminative knowing (*vijānāti*) of the three types of feelings: pleasurable (*sukha*), displeasurable (*dukkha*) and 'neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant' (*adukkhamasukha*).[27] Out of this discrimination arises a craving or thirst for pleasant feelings and consequently a reaching-out or grasping for them. The process of grasping includes a kind of projection of desires (*nati*—inclination, bent) whereby the split in experience widens into a definite gap between subject and object. 'Becoming' or 'existence' is the illusory attempt to bridge this gap which, however, remains perpetually unbridgeable, for the material on which it relies is constantly crumpling up underneath due to the inevitable changes in material conditions.

Yet the struggle to bridge the gap between subject and object somehow props up the concept of an ego—the conceit 'I am' (*asmimāna*). From the point of view of the ego, the things clung to (*upādāna*) appear as possessions or assets (*upadhi*) and one takes inordinate pride in the very same unreliable things one depends upon. Thus in ego-consciousness, liabilities are looked upon as assets, and the abject slavery of the ego to its illusory acquisitions is seen as petty mastery. The reversal of internal and external, subject and object, begun by the vortical interplay of consciousness with name-and-form, and the double-bind of becoming it enables, is complete.[28] The ego now finds itself 'born' into and trapped in conditioned existence, a world of likes and dislikes, subject to inevitable decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.

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[27] See *Mahā-vedalla Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 292)

[28] "That old black magic got me in its spell, that old black magic that I knew so well… down and down I go, round and round I go… In a spin—look at the spin I'm in…" lyrics from *Old Black Magic* by Cole Porter

Chapter Six

'Self'—the Point of View

> "Whatever birth, taking birth, descent, coming-to-be, coming-forth, appearance of aggregates and acquisition of sense bases of the various beings in this or that species of beings, that is called birth." — *Sammaditthi Sutta*

The birth of the ego or 'self' out of the vortical interplay as an 'individual' is also the birth of a point of view. Personality-view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*—literally, 'existing-body view') in its twenty modes portrays the desperate attempt of an illusory self to build a foundation for itself by grasping and clinging to the five aggregates, though these are constantly disintegrating.

> "Monks, suppose there were a river, flowing down from the mountains, going far, its current swift, carrying everything with it, and—holding on to both banks—*kasa* grasses, *kusa* grasses, reeds, *birana* grasses and trees were growing. Then a man swept away by the current would grab hold of the *kasa* grasses, but they would tear away, and so from that cause he would come to disaster. He would grab hold of the *kusa* grasses... the reeds... the *birana* grasses... the trees, but they would tear away, and so from that cause he would come to disaster.
>
> "In the same way, there is the case where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person—who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for men of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma—assumes form (the body) to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form. That form tears away from him, and so from that cause he would come to disaster. And so with feelings, perception, fabrications and consciousness…" — *Nadī Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* III 137)

The tragedy of the double-bind of conditioned consciousness is that despite their transient nature, the five groups of aggregates are used to sustain the individual's conceit 'I am', the illusory conception of a permanent self, just as a mirror reflects the image of one who gazes at it:

> "'"Through dependence, friend Ānanda, comes the conceit 'I am', not without dependence. And through dependence on what comes the conceit 'I am'? Through dependence on form there is 'I am'. Through

> dependence on feeling... perception... fabrications... Through dependence on consciousness there is 'I am', not without dependence.
>
> "'Just as if a young woman or man, youthful, fond of adornment, contemplating the image of her face in a mirror, clean and spotless, or in a bowl of clear water, would look with dependence, not without dependence. In the same way, through dependence on form there is 'I am', not without dependence. Through dependence on feeling... perception... fabrications... Through dependence on consciousness there is 'I am', not without dependence.'" — *Ānanda Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* III 105)

If 'selfhood' appears as something self-evident in the ignorant worldling's reflection in the aggregates, it is due to the predicament in which he finds himself. The self-image follows him like a shadow that can neither be escaped nor left behind. Hence one can sympathize with the self-created problems of both the eternalist and the nihilist. The eternalist's discomfort in the face of impermanence is easily understood, but it is not so easy to understand the nihilist's. He is dismayed to find the 'self' that he so vehemently denies following him close behind whenever he turns to introspection.

Thus whether one takes the viewpoint 'I have a soul' (eternalism) or the opposite, 'I don't have a soul' (nihilism), either way he is bound. The Buddha includes these two among the views that arise in one who reflects wrongly in the following ways:

> "This is how he attends inappropriately: 'Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what was I in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I be in the future?' Or else he is inwardly perplexed about the immediate present: 'Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?'" — *Sabbāsava Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 8)

These kinds of reflection lead one into a jungle of views because one has taken for granted the existence of 'I'. The proper mode of reflection is in terms of the Four Noble Truths, because all that exists and ceases is suffering. The two questions of Vacchagotta—'Is there a soul, or is there no soul?' carried the same presumptions of wrong view and reflection. Hence the Buddha remained silent. Since the Buddha had no conception of a soul, which is but a figment of the worldling's imagination, he would

negate it only when it was asserted with specific reference to one of the aggregates. For example, before answering Poṭṭhapāda's question 'Is perception a man's soul, or is perception one thing and the soul another?' he counter-questioned him: "What do you *mean* by a soul?" (*Poṭṭhapāda Sutta*)

> "Monks, the Tathāgata understands thus: 'There are recluses and Brahmins who make known an existing being's annihilation, obliteration and nonbeing. Because of fear of the existing body, because of disgust with the existing body, they keep running around, keep circling around, that same existing body. Just as a dog tethered by a leash anchored to a stout pole keeps running around, keeps circling around, that same pole or post, so too these worldly recluses and Brahmins, because of fear of the existing body, because of disgust with the existing body, they keep running around, keep circling around, that same existing body…" — *Pañcattaya Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* II 232)

Since the obsession of self persists whether one runs toward or away from the shadow of the body, the solution advanced by the Buddha was the comprehension of the conditioned nature of the five aggregates of grasping (form, feeling, perceptions, fabrications and consciousness), thereby simply recognizing the shadow for what it is.

> "Whoever sees Dependent Origination sees the Dhamma; whoever sees the Dhamma sees Dependent Origination. And these five clinging-aggregates are dependently originated. Any desire, embracing, grasping and clinging to these five clinging-aggregates is the origination of stress. Any subduing of desire and passion, any abandoning of desire and passion for these five clinging-aggregates is the cessation of stress." — *Mahā-Hatthipadopama Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 191)

One who sees things as they are by the light of the Buddha's wisdom comes to understand that the shadow is cast in the murk of ignorance by a narrow point of view. This insightful vision is the result of the arising of the 'dustless, stainless Eye of the Dhamma' (*virajaṃ vītamalaṃ dhammacakkhuṃ*). It is also called the 'Eye of Wisdom' (*paññācakkhu*), revealing to the Stream-winner the Noble Norm summed up in the words, 'Whatever is of the nature to arise, all that also ceases'.

The disillusionment and awakening brought by this extraordinary vision is so pervasive and transforming that the Buddha compared it to the case of a congenitally blind man who, on gaining his sight, becomes disillusioned about a grimy cloth about which he had been deceived. And

just as that formerly blind man would disfavor the trickster who misrepresented the cloth as being pure and white, the Noble Disciple, on gaining the Eye of Wisdom, changes his attitude towards his own mind:

> "Māgandiya, it's just as if there were a man blind from birth who couldn't see black objects... white... blue... yellow... red... the sun or the moon. Now suppose that a certain man were to take a grimy, oil-stained rag and fool him, saying, 'Here, my good man, is a white cloth — beautiful, spotless, and clean.' The blind man would take it and put it on.
>
> "Then his friends, companions, and relatives would take him to a doctor. The doctor would concoct medicine for him: purges from above and purges from below, ointments and counter-ointments and treatments through the nose. And thanks to the medicine his eyesight would appear and grow clear. Then together with the arising of his eyesight, he would abandon whatever passion and delight he felt for that grimy, oil-stained rag. And he would regard that man as an enemy and no friend at all, and think that he deserved to be killed. 'My goodness, how long have I been fooled, cheated, and deceived by that man and his grimy, oil-stained rag!'
>
> "In the same way, Māgandiya, if I were to teach you the Dhamma — 'This is that freedom from Disease; this is that Unbinding' — and you on your part were to know that freedom from Disease and see that Unbinding, then together with the arising of your eyesight you would abandon whatever passion and delight you felt with regard for the five clinging-aggregates. And it would occur to you, 'My goodness, how long have I been fooled, cheated, and deceived by this mind! For in clinging, it was just form that I was clinging to... it was just feeling... just perception... just fabrications... just consciousness that I was clinging to. With my clinging as a requisite condition, there arises becoming... birth... aging and death... sorrow, lamentation, pains, distresses and despairs. And thus is the origin of this entire mass of stress.'" — *Māgandiya Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 511)

Your own disenchantment on seeing through the magician's wily tricks might indicate the nature of the transformation of attitude that results from the arising of the Eye of Wisdom. The Noble Disciple begins to discover the mind's magical 'surprises' well in advance, so he is able to anticipate them. The 'magic' of the mind loses its magic for him, now that he sees exactly where the magic lies: in his own psychological wellsprings of lust, hatred and delusion. Apart from them, he realizes, there is no reality in the articles and artifices of the magic show of

consciousness. Now he is in a position to appreciate the Buddha's statement in the Kālakārāma Sutta:

> "Thus, monks, a Tathāgata does not conceive of a visible thing apart from sight; he does not conceive of an unseen; he does not conceive of a thing-worth-seeing; he does not conceive of a seer…"

This insightful penetration into the dependent, conditioned nature of consciousness is equivalent to overcoming the illusion of 'self'. With it, personality-view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*) is abandoned and the 'assets' (*upadhi*) on which the 'self' depended—the five clinging-aggregates—are liquidated. Consciousness ceases to appear as a substantial core of living experience. Instead, one now sees it with radical reflection (*yoniso manasikāra*) as a dependently-originated phenomenon specific to circumstances, just as fire is:

> "Just as fire is classified simply by whatever requisite condition in dependence on which it burns — a fire that burns in dependence on wood is classified simply as a wood-fire, a fire that burns in dependence on wood-chips is classified simply as a wood-chip-fire; a fire that burns in dependence on grass is classified simply as a grass-fire; a fire that burns in dependence on cow-dung is classified simply as a cow-dung-fire; a fire that burns in dependence on chaff is classified simply as a chaff-fire; a fire that burns in dependence on rubbish is classified simply as a rubbish-fire — in the same way, consciousness is classified simply by the requisite condition in dependence on which it arises. Consciousness that arises in dependence on the eye and forms is classified simply as eye-consciousness. Consciousness that arises in dependence on the ear and sounds is classified simply as ear-consciousness. Consciousness that arises in dependence on the nose and aromas is classified simply as nose-consciousness. Consciousness that arises in dependence on the tongue and flavors is classified simply as tongue-consciousness. Consciousness that arises in dependence on the body and tactile sensations is classified simply as body-consciousness. Consciousness that arises in dependence on the intellect and ideas is classified simply as intellect-consciousness."
> — *Mahā-Taṇhāsaṃkhaya Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 259)

The five aggregates of form, feelings, perception, fabrications and consciousness, which from the point of view of 'self' one assumed to be absolute and original, now appear as dependently-originated, derivative and composite. The process of acquisition and accumulation (*upacaya*) is also seen to be something like filtering the world through a sieve of

consciousness. But even the sieve of consciousness performs its function only under the proper conditions:

> "Now if internally the eye is intact but externally forms do not come into range, nor is there a corresponding engagement, then there is no appearing of the corresponding type of consciousness. If internally the eye is intact and externally forms come into range, but there is no corresponding engagement, then there is no appearing of the corresponding type of consciousness. But when internally the eye is intact and externally forms come into range, and there is a corresponding engagement, then there is the appearing of the corresponding type of consciousness.
>
> "The form of what has thus come into being is gathered under the form clinging-aggregate. The feeling of what has thus come into being is gathered under the feeling clinging-aggregate. The perception of what has thus come into being is gathered under the perception clinging-aggregate. The fabrications of what has thus come into being are gathered under the fabrication clinging-aggregate. The consciousness of what has thus come into being is gathered under the consciousness clinging-aggregate. One discerns, 'This, it seems, is how there is the gathering, meeting and convergence of these five clinging-aggregates.'"
> — *Mahā-Hatthipadoma Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 190)

Chapter Seven

The Transcendental Path

A momentary insight might give one a glimpse of the subtle backstage maneuvers behind the illusory magic show of consciousness. But it could not be powerful enough to completely destroy all the cankers or influxes (*āsavā*) that seek to influence every moment of one's life.

> "My friend, although I have seen properly with right discernment, as it actually is present, that 'The cessation of becoming is Unbinding,' still I am not an arahant whose fermentations are ended. It's as if there were a well along a road in a desert, with neither rope nor water bucket. A man would come along overcome by heat, oppressed by the heat, exhausted, dehydrated and thirsty. He would look into the well and would have knowledge of 'water,' but he would not dwell touching it with his body. In the same way, although I have seen properly with right discernment, as it actually is present, that 'The cessation of becoming is Unbinding,' still I am not an Arahant whose fermentations are ended." — *Kosambi Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* II 118)

The influxes are generally considered to be threefold: sensuality (*kāmāsavā*), becoming (*bhavāsavā*) and ignorance (*avijjāsavā*)—although sometimes influxes of wrong views (*diṭṭhāsavā*) are also mentioned. These are the cankers born of our long experience in *saṃsāra*. They include all corrupting tendencies, inclinations and obsessions that constitute the ruts and grooves of our mental terrain.

A deeper analysis of the influence of the influxes is seen in the seven latencies (*anusayā*): attachment, aversion, wrong views, doubts, conceits, attachment to becoming and ignorance. If the influxes are compared to streams manifest at the conscious level, the latencies are the same streams at the subterranean, subconscious level. The ethical terminology of early Buddhism compares the sweeping influence of the influxes by comparing them to floods (*oghā*).

Considering the deep-rooted and all-pervading influence of the influxes, the complete reorientation of our attitudes toward sense perception often seems to be an arduous discipline requiring prolonged diligent practice. The transcendental aspect of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path provides

the Noble Disciple with a framework for mental training that effectively checks the accumulation of the five clinging-aggregates, nullifying the corrupting influence of the influxes.

> "Knowing and seeing the eye as it actually is, knowing and seeing forms... consciousness at the eye... contact at the eye as they actually are, knowing and seeing whatever arises conditioned through contact at the eye — experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither-pleasure-nor-pain — as it actually is, one is not infatuated with the eye... forms... consciousness at the eye... contact at the eye... whatever arises conditioned by contact at the eye and is experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither-pleasure-nor-pain.
>
> "For him — uninfatuated, unattached, unconfused, remaining focused on their drawbacks — the five clinging-aggregates head toward future diminution. The craving that makes for further becoming — accompanied by passion and delight, relishing now this and now that — is abandoned by him. His bodily disturbances and mental disturbances are abandoned. His bodily and mental torments are abandoned. His bodily and mental distresses are abandoned. He is sensitive both to ease of body and ease of awareness.
>
> "Any view belonging to one who has come to be like this is his right view. Any resolve, his right resolve. Any effort, his right effort. Any mindfulness, his right mindfulness. Any concentration, his right concentration: just as earlier his actions, speech, and livelihood were already well-purified. Thus the Noble Eightfold Path goes to the culmination of its development." — *Mahāsalāyatanika Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* III 288)

The five clinging-aggregates are said to be compounded or concocted (*saṅkhata*); they are accumulated sensory experience fermented by ignorance. Due to egoistic clinging in the form of conceiving (*maññanā*), sensory data become impregnated with this dynamic ferment, and proliferation (*papañca*) then follows. Because of this, the Buddha laid particular emphasis on viewing sensory data with detachment. The Buddha's advice to Bāhiya clearly indicates that this training has as much a philosophical as an ethical background:

> "Then, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in

reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bāhiya, there is no 'you' in connection with that. When there is no 'you' in connection with that, there is no 'you' there. When there is no 'you' there, you are neither here nor yonder nor in between the two. This, just this, is the end of stress." — *Bāhiya Sutta* (*Udāna* 1.10)

Chapter Eight

Suchness and the Suchlike One

Any serious discussion of the Buddha's teaching sooner or later gets around to a consideration of Dependent Origination. The principle of causality underlying the 12-stage formula of Dependent Origination is a universal law of nature, applicable to both the inanimate and animate realms. It presents a dynamic view of all phenomena, arising dependent on causes, and ceasing when those causes are removed.

> "This being—that comes to be;
> With the arising of this—that arises.
> This not being—that does not come to be;
> With the cessation of this—that also ceases." — *Bodhi Sutta* (*Udāna* 1:1)

The law of Dependent Origination is so integral that any two consecutive stages of the formula illustrate it clearly. Hence the Buddha, well knowing the human tendency to lose sight of principles by getting caught up in the details, often draws the distinction between the principle of Dependent Origination (*paticca-samuppāda*) and dependently originated phenomena (*paticcasamuppannā dhammā*):

> "Monks, I will teach you Dependent Origination and dependently-originated phenomena…
>
> "Now what is Dependent Origination? From birth as a requisite condition comes aging and death. Whether or not there is the arising of Tathāgatas, this property stands: this regularity of the Dhamma, this orderliness of the Dhamma, this this/that conditionality. The Tathāgata directly awakens to that, breaks through to that. Directly awakening and breaking through to that, he declares it, teaches it, describes it, sets it forth. He reveals it, explains it, makes it plain and says, 'Look:'
>
> "From birth as a requisite condition comes aging and death.
> From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth...
> From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming...
> From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance...
> From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving...
> From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling...
> From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact...

> From name-and-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media...
> From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form...
> From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness...
> From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.
>
> "…What's there in this way is a reality, not an unreality, not other than what it seems, conditioned by this/that. This is called Dependent Origination.
>
> "And what are dependently-originated phenomena? Aging and death are dependently-originated phenomena: inconstant, compounded, dependently-originated, subject to ending, subject to passing away, subject to fading, subject to cessation.
>
> "Birth… Becoming… Clinging/sustenance… Craving… Feeling… Contact… The six sense media… Name-and-form… Consciousness… Fabrications… Ignorance are dependently-originated phenomena: inconstant, compounded, dependently-originated, subject to ending, subject to passing away, subject to fading, subject to cessation. These are called dependently-originated phenomena." — *Paccayā Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* II 25)

The Pāḷi terms 'Suchness' (*tathatā*), 'invariability' (*avitathatā*), 'not-otherwise-ness' (*anañññathatā*) and 'relatedness of this-to-that' (*idappaccayatā*) or specific conditionality found in the above quote are highly significant terms indicating the degree of importance that the Buddha associated with this law of Dependent Origination.

The first three terms especially affirm the validity and universality of the law. *Tathā* means 'thus' or 'such'—an apparently unassuming expression with some nuances of detachment. As a correlative of *yathā*[29] ('in whatever way') *tathā* says very little on its own, but for that reason *tathatā* (Suchness, Thusness) is a fitting description of the law of Dependent Origination. For here is a concept of truth, a Dhamma that describes not only the *way* things are, but also *why* and *how* they are the way they are, shorn of all sectarian prejudice and pretension. Only a universal Norm, an unconditional law applicable in all times and under all conditions, can rightly be called a Suchness.

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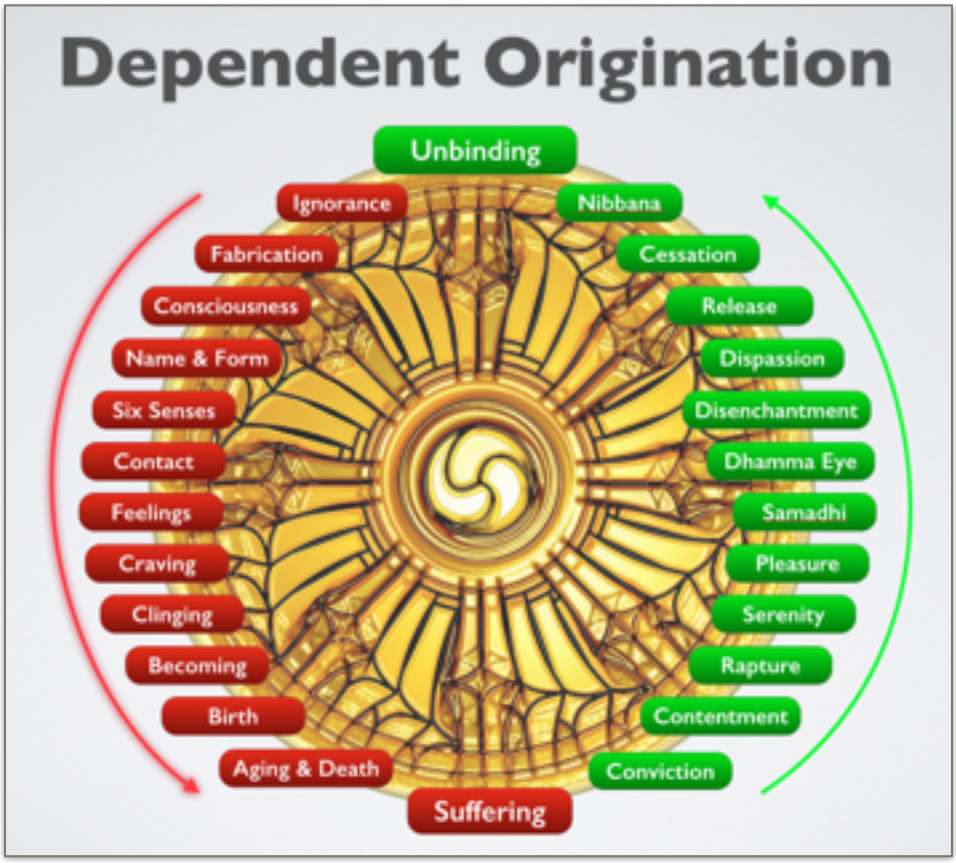
[29] For example, in the expression *yathābhūtañāṇadassana:* 'knowledge and vision of things as they really are'.

The 'relatedness of this-to-that' (*idappaccayatā*) implies specific conditionality, bringing out the essentially relative and dependent quality of the phenomena the law describes. In particular, it explains the pair-wise formulation, showing that in each pair given the presence of the first item, the second follows of necessity.[30] Phenomena in nature are not static; they manifest themselves in an ever-changing flux, one conditioned phenomenon leading on to another. The Buddha expresses this dynamic aspect of the law in the following simile:

> "Just as when the gods pour rain in heavy drops and crash thunder on the upper mountains: The water, flowing down along the slopes, fills the mountain clefts and rifts and gullies. When the mountain clefts and rifts and gullies are full, they fill the little ponds. When the little ponds are full, they fill the big lakes. When the big lakes are full, they fill the little rivers. When the little rivers are full, they fill the big rivers. When the big rivers are full, they fill the great ocean. In the same way:
>
> "Fabrications have ignorance as their prerequisite, consciousness has fabrications as its prerequisite, name-and-form has consciousness as its prerequisite, the six sense media have name-and-form as their prerequisite, contact has the six sense media as its prerequisite, feeling has contact as its prerequisite, craving has feeling as its prerequisite, clinging has craving as its prerequisite, becoming has clinging as its prerequisite, birth has becoming as its prerequisite, stress and suffering have birth as their prerequisite, conviction has stress and suffering as its prerequisite, contentment has conviction as its prerequisite, rapture has contentment as its prerequisite, serenity has rapture as its prerequisite, pleasure has serenity as its prerequisite, *samādhi* has pleasure as its prerequisite, the Dhamma Eye (knowledge and vision of things as they actually are) has *samādhi* as its prerequisite, disenchantment has the Dhamma Eye as its prerequisite, dispassion has disenchantment as its prerequisite, release has dispassion as its prerequisite, cessation has release as its prerequisite." — *Upanisa Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* II 29)

[30] "This being—that comes to be; With the arising of this—that arises."

Here is a graphical presentation of the sequence of dependent relations given in the above Sutta:



Thus the law of Dependent Origination holds as well for water as it does for psychological states. The alternation of flow and ebb is a tendency, not only of water but of the individual in *saṃsāra*. The recognition of this process marks a significant advance on previous approaches to self-realization based on animistic conceptions that explained phenomena in terms of an eternal anthropomorphic god or an essence, self or soul.

The process of Dependent Origination becomes all the more meaningful when we consider its corollary: that the entire process can be made to cease by the proper means. According to the Buddha's teaching, the path of enlightenment is attained by 'starving' the conditions of their 'nutriments': the causes that bring them into existence and sustain them. Thus we can consider the Path in negative terms, as the progressive cessation of the items of Dependent Origination, or positively in terms of

the development of wholesome karmic and mental states, as depicted above.

The right side of the diagram above expresses the 'leading-on' (*opanāyiko*) of practicing the Eightfold Noble Path. As each cause of Dependent Origination is abandoned, the corresponding positive quality is developed. For example, dropping Ignorance leads to Conviction in the Buddha's teaching and Path. Dropping Fabrication leads to Contentment, and so on.

> "Where do currents turn back? Where whirls no more the whirlpool."
> — (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* I 15).

Instead of the typical expression of Dependent Origination as a series of causes and the conditions they create, the above Sutta pictures it as a unified whole, a whirlpool that can be stopped by appropriate methods, turning back the currents of becoming, leading to attaining Nibbāna. The famous simile of the relay chariots depicts this leading-on:

> "I will give you an analogy, for there are cases where knowledgeable people can understand the meaning of what is being said through analogies. Suppose that while King Pasenadi Kosala was staying at Savatthi, some urgent business were to arise at Saketa; and that between Savatthi and Saketa seven relay chariots were made ready for him. Coming out the door of the inner palace in Savatthi, he would get in the first relay chariot. By means of the first relay chariot he would reach the second relay chariot. Getting out of the first relay chariot he would get in the second relay chariot. … By means of the seventh relay chariot he would finally arrive at the door of the inner palace at Saketa. …
>
> "In the same way, my friend, purity in virtue is simply for the sake of purity of mind. Purity of mind is simply for the sake of purity of view. Purity of view is simply for the sake of purity of overcoming perplexity. Purity of overcoming of perplexity is simply for the sake of purity of knowledge and vision of what is and is not the path. Purity of knowledge and vision of what is and is not the path is simply for the sake of purity of knowledge and vision of the way. Purity of knowledge and vision of the way is simply for the sake of purity of knowledge and vision. Purity of knowledge and vision is simply for the sake of total Unbinding through lack of clinging. And the holy life is lived under the Blessed One for the sake of total Unbinding through lack of clinging."
> — *Rathavinīta Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 147)

Another figurative explanation is given by the Buddha:

> "Thus, monks, mere phenomena flow into other phenomena, mere phenomena fill up or perfect other phenomena in the process of passing from the near shore (conditioned life) to the far shore (Nibbāna)." — *Aṅguttara Nikaya* V 3

Dependent Origination reveals a well-known chain of causality, where the effect of one cause becomes the cause for the next. The same process underlies both our suffering in conditioned life and the possibility of freedom from it. Accordingly, some far-reaching conclusions flow from considering the law of Dependent Origination as a Suchness and as a set of relations of specific conditionality.

First, simply knowing that there exists such a lawful process behind the apparently complex and confusing phenomena of life has a wholesome effect on one's outlook. Especially, it enables one to avoid entanglement in the innumerable speculative theories extant in the world. In addition, the understanding that life is a constant flux of being and becoming fosters an attitude of enlightened equanimity. One begins to see phenomena once imagined as permanent as actually impermanent (*anicca*), arising and passing away, and void of essence (*suñña*) or any trace of selfhood.

But a more astounding revelation is the realization and conviction that the cause giving rise to all these temporary phenomena is the very conceiving (*mañña*ṇ*ā*) or egotistic imagining of a 'self'. The conception of a 'self' as a permanent 'thing' cannot survive in a world where impermanence, separation (*nānābhāvo*) and transformation (*aññathābhavo*) of one thing into another are the inexorable law.

> "Whatever thing they conceive of, by that very act it becomes otherwise; and that becomes false for him—the very puerile thing that it is" — *Saṃyutta Nikāya* V 757

Selfhood established on impermanent phenomena that will inevitably disintegrate (*palokadhammaṃ*) or transform into other phenomena is itself subject to the inexorable law of impermanence. In the face of this predicament, one craves, grasps, clings to and becomes yet another 'self' another 'thing' that too yields to the same laws of nature.

> "The world, attached to becoming, is becoming otherwise (transforming), subject to becoming, yet it delights in becoming. What it delights in is a source of fear, and what it fears is suffering." — *Udāna* 31

> "Just as a monkey, swinging through a forest wilderness, grabs a branch. Letting go of it, it grabs another branch. Letting go of that, it grabs

> another one. Letting go of that, it grabs another one. In the same way, what's called 'mind', 'intellect' or 'consciousness' by day and by night arises as one thing and ceases as another.
>
> "The instructed disciple of the noble ones, however, radically reflects carefully and appropriately on the lay of Dependent Origination:
>
> "'When this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this isn't, that isn't. From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.'
>
> "In other words: From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications. From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.
> From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form.
> From name-and-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.
> From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.
> From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.
> From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.
> From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance.
> From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming.
> From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.
> From birth as a requisite condition, then aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress and despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress and suffering." — *Assutavā Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* II 94)

The process of becoming is therefore perpetually going on within the mind of the individual in *saṃsāra*, conditioned existence. He identifies himself with the sense-data under the influence of the proliferating tendencies of craving, conceits and wrong views. This identification is implied by the term *tammayatā*—literally, 'of-that-ness'—and one who resorts to it is called *tammayo:* one who is 'made-of-that' or is 'of-that-stuff'.

The perpetual psychological process of becoming is inevitably followed by birth, decay and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair in every single instance of identification. This insight into the law of Dependent Origination is the key to the entire experience of *saṃsāra*. This is why the Existentialists concluded that there is no escape from suffering, and therefore the natural condition of life is despair. The great cycle of conditioned existence—birth, aging, decay and death followed by rebirth—is reflected in each epicycle of the very structure of living experience. One who gains this insight is convinced that ignorance and craving are

the villains in the drama of *saṃsāra*, bringing about re-becoming (*ponobhavikā*) by delighting 'now-here-now-there' (*tatratatrābhinandinī*), wandering aimlessly in conditioned existence, searching for fleeting sense-pleasure, devoid of any stable foundation.

Thus the timeless epicycle of *saṃsāra* revolving in the mind—the wheel of Dependent Origination—reveals the causes of the great problems of existence, of life and death and suffering, that so many have tried in vain throughout many lives to solve. The solutions to all problems whatsoever converge upon the abandonment of the craving that causes re-becoming. But craving cannot be suppressed directly, or it simply sprouts up again stronger than ever; rather, its roots or causes must be removed.

The law of Dependent Origination reveals the antecedents of craving—ignorance, fabrications, consciousness, name-and-form, contact and feelings—pointing out a technique whereby the tendency to crave and cling to the objects of the senses finally can be completely uprooted.[31] Ignorance has to be replaced by knowledge, especially knowledge of the Four Noble Truths.

The long-established habit of imagining that dependently-originated phenomena—especially 'I' and 'mine'—have some kind of independent existence, can be overcome by training the mind to analyze sense experience in terms of Dependent Origination instead. In one of the Sutta passages quoted above, each stage of the process of Dependent Origination was described as "impermanent, compounded, dependently arisen, of a nature to wither away, pass away, fade and cease." Thus the secret of uprooting craving is to train the mind to focus on the unsatisfactory *nature* of things rather than on the things themselves. This self-training is a very high form of psychotherapy introduced by the Buddha. It is a way of making conditioned phenomena 'fade away and cease' by penetrating to their cause. This insight into the Noble Norm (*ariyo ñāyo*) of Dependent Origination implies knowledge of the cause (*hetu*) as well as the things dependently arisen.

> "Of things that arise from a cause
> Their cause the Tathāgata has told
> And also their cessation
> Thus teaches the Great Recluse." — *Vinaya* I 40

[31] The Second Noble Truth of the cause of suffering is sometimes defined in the Suttas simply as craving, and sometimes as the law of Dependent Origination.

This is the stanza in which the Venerable Assaji presented the quintessence of the Buddha's teaching to the wandering ascetic Sāriputta, later the Buddha's Chief Disciple, the Foremost-in-Wisdom. On hearing it, both Sāriputta and Moggallāna attained the fruit of Stream-entry. It aroused in them the 'dustless, stainless Dhamma-eye', the insight into the law of Dependent Origination.

As one meditates on this law of Dependent Origination, one's insight into its underlying causal principle:

> "This being—that comes to be;
> With the arising of this—that arises.
> This not being—that does not come to be;
> With the cessation of this—that also ceases."

goes deeper and deeper into the sequence of the formula. This leads to fading away of the imaginary attractive features of conditioned phenomena, in which one realizes the destruction of the conditioned causal links forming the structure of the formula in both its direct and reverse order.

> "As phenomena grow clear to the *sādhu*
> —ardent, in *jhāna*— his doubts all vanish
> when he penetrates the ending
> of requisite conditions." — *Udāna* 2

Thus by testing the truth of impermanence in the crucible of one's own experience, one realizes a panoramic view of the world arising and passing away as seen through one's own six sense bases.

> "In the six the world has arisen;
> in the six it forms intimacy;
> by clinging to the six the world
> has its woes in regard to the six."
> — *Loka Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* I 70)

The reference in *Udāna* 1–3 to the Buddha's reflection on Dependent Origination in direct order, reverse order and both direct order and reverse order (*anuloma-paṭilomaṃ*) soon after his enlightenment should be understood in this sense. This insight into the arising and cessation of all phenomena dispels all doubts about speculative problems of existence and nonexistence, unity and plurality, etc. Avoiding all absolutes and extremes, the mind is brought to rest in the middle—though, paradoxically, it now rests on nothing.

'Thing-ness' has completely faded away, so craving finds no thing to grasp at and cling to. Instead of the usual habitual attempt at identification (*tammayatā*), mind engages in a detached contemplation of the Norm of Suchness (*tathatā*). With this emancipation of mind from 'I'-making and 'mine'-making, one's attitude toward the world, with all its imperfections, becomes one of 'Such-like-ness' (*tāditā*), of detached aloofness. At this point one deserves to be called 'Such One' (*tadi*) or 'Such-like One' (*tādiso*).

> "That ardent one, who touched the destruction of birth by overcoming Māra—by vanquishing the Ender—that wise sage, the Such-like One, the Knower of the World, is unattached in regard to all phenomena." — *Aṅguttara Nikāya* I 150

The attitude of the Such-like One combines an extraordinary blend of qualities ranging from firmness and steadfastness to adaptability and resilience. This appears paradoxical to the worldling because he always associates firmness with some rigid standpoint or dogmatic view. He thinks not to adopt a viewpoint is to vacillate, hence he finds it difficult to conceive of firmness apart from extreme views. The Buddha, however, discovered that the truth is just the opposite:

> "One who is dependent has wavering. One who is independent has no wavering. There being no wavering, there is calm. There being calm, there is no yearning. There being no yearning, there is no coming or going. There being no coming or going, there is no passing away or arising. There being no passing away or arising, there is neither a here nor a there nor a between-the-two. This, just this, is the end of stress and suffering." — *Udāna* 81

> "One who is independent doesn't waver. One who is dependent doesn't go beyond the wandering-on, which is of the nature of clinging to 'this-ness' and 'otherwise-ness'. Knowing this drawback—the great danger in dependencies—independent, mindful the monk lives the wandering life, clinging to nothing." — *Dvayatānupassanā Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* 724-765)

When the worldling finds his 'self' being swept away by the swiftly flowing stream of time, he has the tendency to grasp and cling to 'things', temporary phenomena. He tries to rest on the fleeting phenomena with cravings, conceits and views, only to be foiled again and again. Every failed attempt to salvage the 'self' from the flux is followed by a definite series of psychological reactions. From the moment of identifying his 'self' with any 'thing' of his choice (conceiving, *maññanā*) he feels

unsteadiness or wavering in the face of possible dislodgment. 'Bending' or inclination is blind reaching out into an unknown future, pushed by craving or 'thirst': the 'guide-in-becoming' (*bhavanetti*). The concepts of coming-and-going are relative to the standpoint taken in the process of identification. Having established a relationship between one's present identity (identification) and some possible future state, there follows the inevitable change, death-and-birth with its feeling of finality.

The entire process, whether observed in the context of the great cycle of *saṃsāra* from one life to another, or in its epicycle visible in every moment of unenlightened experience, is a perpetual process of transformation, of alternation between 'this-ness' and 'otherwise-ness'. With it, the relative distinctions of a 'here', a 'there' and an 'in-between' provide an illusory feeling of going somewhere, of 'progress'. This is indeed the 'wandering-on' of the worldling in *saṃsāra*.

However, the Such-like One sees the danger of clinging to supports that only give way. Therefore he grasps at and clings to nothing. He has given up all standpoints and positions, and discovered a basis for firmness that never gives way or betrays. His deliverance is unshakable because he is free from attachment (*anurodha*) and aversion (*virodha*) in the face of worldly vicissitudes of gain and loss, honor and dishonor, praise and blame, happiness and unhappiness.

> "Suppose, friend, there was a stone pillar eight meters long. Four meters would be within the ground and four meters above ground. If a violent rainstorm should then arrive from the east… west… north… south, it would not shake the pillar or make it quake, wobble or tremble. So too, friend, when a monk is thus perfectly liberated in mind, even if powerful forms cognizable by the eye come within range of the eye… even if powerful phenomena cognizable by the mind come into range of the mind, his mind is not at all affected. It remains steady, attached to imperturbability, and he observes its vanishing." — *Aṅguttara Nikāya* IV 404

The Buddha is referring to this state of liberated mind when he declares in the *Kālakarāma Sutta:*

> "Thus, monks, the Tathāgata, being Such-like in regard to all phenomena that can be seen, heard, sensed and cognized, is 'Such.'"

Despite the fact that firmness is usually associated with rigidity, the Such-like One also possesses extensive adaptability and resilience. The Such-

like One escaped from the swift-flowing stream of *saṃsāra* by letting go of both the 'self' and the 'things' ordinarily grasped as supports for the 'self'. Actually all he has done is to attune himself to reality (*dhammā*) by getting rid of the illusion of 'self'. The illusioned being clings to the frail grasses and reeds on the riverbank, the ever-changing phenomena of the world, in a bid to save his 'self' by attaching it to something substantial. The conceits of 'I am' and 'becoming' are the result of this clinging (*upādānapaccayā bhavo*), and all stages of birth, decay, death and suffering are but consequential to them.

The Such-like One has removed himself from the influence of the worldly vicissitudes, which are but manifestations of the conceits of 'I' and 'mine', by penetrating the truths of impermanence, suffering and not-self (*anicca-dukkha-anattā*). Suffering and other relative qualities of existence cannot touch or affect him because he has cut himself of from craving, the 'guide-in-becoming' (*ucchinnabhavanettiko*):

> "'He has been stilled where the currents of conceit do not flow. And when the currents of conceit do not flow, he is said to be a sage at peace.' Thus was it said. With reference to what was it said? 'I am' is a conceit. 'I am this' is a conceit. 'I shall be' is a conceit. 'I shall not be'... 'I shall be possessed of form'... 'I shall not be possessed of form'... 'I shall be percipient'... 'I shall not be percipient'... 'I shall be neither percipient nor non-percipient' is a conceit. Conceit is a disease, conceit is a cancer, conceit is an arrow. By going beyond all conceit, he is said to be a sage at peace." — *Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* III 246)

Chapter Nine

Essence of Concepts

Concept can mean an abstract idea; a general notion; a plan or intention; a conception; an idea or invention; an idea or mental picture of a group or class of objects formed by combining all their aspects.

Concepts play a major role in the magic show of consciousness. Concepts are useful as currency in all the transactions of mental life. Even a deep thinker in quest of ultimate truth cannot dispense with them, no matter how inadequate they may be. Though he might doubt their authenticity, he has to recognize their utility.

The Buddha discovered the Middle Path regarding concepts when he distinguished between the law of Dependent Origination and dependently-arisen phenomena. Concepts, as dependently-arisen phenomena, are illustrations of the law; hence their utility. Yet as the Buddha pointed out, the essential thing is the insight into the law itself. Concepts, once they have served the purpose of fully illustrating the law as examples, must fade away in that radiance of wisdom (*paññāpabhā*).

This recognition of the higher purpose of concepts is a sort of alchemy that transmutes it into a precursor of deliverance. It marks a remarkable advance on the extreme attitudes of dogmatism versus cynicism or agnosticism. It also explains why *dhamma* (variously signifying a thing, phenomenon, mind-object, concept, doctrine, law, etc.) is such a generic term in the Buddha's teaching. Neither clinging to the concept nor trying to wriggle out of it, the Buddha penetrated deep into its character, revealing the qualities useful for our quest for truth and freedom.

Once he instructed the monks how they should reply to questions that could be raised by other wandering ascetics of other sects concerning the origin, behavior and purpose of all 'things':

> "On being asked this by those who have gone forth in other sects, this is how you should answer them:
>
> "'All phenomena are rooted in desire.
> All phenomena come into play through attention.
> All phenomena have contact as their origination.

All phenomena have feeling as their meeting place.
All phenomena have concentration as their presiding state.
All phenomena have mindfulness as their governing principle.
All phenomena have discernment as their surpassing state.
All phenomena have release as their heartwood.
All phenomena gain their footing in the deathless.
All phenomena have Unbinding as their final end.'

"On being asked this by those who have gone forth in other sects, this is how you should answer." — *Mūla Sutta* (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* V 106)

Here the Buddha uses the generic term *dhammā*, which in this case may be rendered as phenomena or 'things'. But that the reference is to thoughts and concepts is clearly revealed by the following catechism used by the Venerable Sāriputta to test the Venerable Samiddhi's acquaintance with the above disquisition of the Buddha:

"Based on what, Samiddhi, do thoughts and resolves arise in a person?"
"Based on name and form, sir."
"And how do they go to diversity?"
"Through the properties, sir."
"And what do they have as their origination?"
"They have contact as their origination, sir."
"And what do they have as their meeting place?"
"They have feeling as their meeting place, sir."
"And what do they have as their presiding state?"
"They have concentration as their presiding state, sir."
"And what do they have as their governing principle?"
"They have mindfulness as their governing principle, sir."
"And what do they have as their surpassing state?"
"They have discernment as their surpassing state, sir."
"And what do they have as their heartwood?"
"They have release as their heartwood, sir."
"And where do they gain their footing?"
"They gain their footing in the deathless, sir."
— *Samiddhi Sutta* (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* IV 385)

The phenomenal character of concepts can easily be inferred from the Buddha's explanation regarding the origin of 'things'. As he states in the opening stanzas of the *Dhammapada*, "All things have mind as their forerunner, mind is their chief and they are mind-made." The worldling, with his object-oriented worldview might find it difficult to appreciate the Buddha's remarks that 'things' are rooted in interest or desire (*chanda*), that they are born of attention (*manasikāra*) and that they arise from

contact (*phassa*). The worldling has so alienated himself by projecting his desires that he often believes that 'word' and 'meaning' are eternally united in nature, and that words are actually 'things'.

However, radical reflection (*yoniso manasikāra*) as to the matrix of the concept reveals that the meaning of 'meaning' is close to the psychological wellspring where all desires, interests, purposes and designs arise. It is the community of interests, prompted by a measure of homosapient conceit, that gives the concept its stamp of authority, after infusing into it a set of meanings hammered out on the anvil of logic (*takkapariyāhata*). Once it comes out of the factory of reason as a finished product, we are apt to forget its compounded and synthetic character. It thus becomes the task of radical reflection to rediscover its actual origin. In the matrix of the concept, our interest isolates the 'thing', the beam of attention magnifies it, while contact defines and circumscribes it.

Concepts may be said to converge with feelings to the extent that they become significant. The concentration that guides them and the power of mindfulness that dominates them are redeeming features of concepts from the point of view of deliverance. The actual point of intersection, however, is wisdom. Wisdom transcends concepts when penetrates the rise-and-fall (*udayatthagāminī paññā*) of concepts and intuits their reverse and obverse. Concepts penetrated by wisdom expend themselves, yielding deliverance as their essence and getting merged in the Deathless, reaching consummation in Nibbāna.

The Buddha adopted a rare methodology in rallying concepts for the higher purpose of developing wisdom, whereby concepts themselves are transcended. Concepts, which make up the delusion of *saṃsāra*, are pressed into the service of developing the spiritual faculties—but always with adequate safeguards. This approach is known as 'removing a thorn with another thorn'. It is well illustrated in the famous *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, where each subsection introducing a particular type of contemplation is followed by a paragraph, thematic in form, neutralizing any errors arising from literal interpretation. For example, the subsection on the contemplation of bodily postures is set forth as follows:

> "Furthermore, when walking, the monk discerns, 'I am walking.' When standing, he discerns, 'I am standing.' When sitting, he discerns, 'I am sitting.' When lying down, he discerns, 'I am lying down.' Or however his body is disposed, that is how he discerns it.
>
> "In this way he remains focused internally on the body in and of itself, or externally on the body in and of itself, or both internally and externally on the body in and of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomena of origination and passing away with regard to the body. Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge and remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in and of itself." — *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* II 292)

The dogmatist and the cynic might go astray by interpreting the words '**I** am walking', '**I** am standing', '**I** am sitting', '**I** am lying down' too literally. They would do well to consider the practical hint: "his mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge and remembrance." Undue emphasis on 'I am' is likely to create an obsession with the concept of a 'self' or ego. And the cynic may criticize the contradiction with the teaching of *anattā* (no-self).

But mindfulness of the body is not meant to be taken as obsession with the body or the concept of 'self'. Contemplation of the arising-nature, the dissolving-nature and the arising-and-dissolving nature of the body tends to deemphasize any notions of substantiality of the body, and also prepares the mind for the final penetration of the concept of the body through wisdom.

Finally, the awareness that 'there is a body' is merely a means to an end—its purpose is to sharpen the spiritual faculties of mindfulness and wisdom. This is warning to anyone who would 'miss the forest for the trees'. A monk who keeps the detached spirit of the practice "abides independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world."

When a concept is utilized to serve higher ends, constant awareness of its dependently-arisen nature acts as a safeguard. The ardent monk never loses sight of the fact that any concept is only a 'reckoning' (*sankhā*), never an absolute, and its composite nature is easily demonstrated analytically. It matters little to such a detached outlook whether the concept in question is of a 'house' or of a 'body'.

> "Friends, just as when—in dependence on timber, vines, grass and clay —space is enclosed and reckoned under the term 'house', in the same way, when space is enclosed in dependence on bones, tendons, muscle and skin, it is reckoned under the term 'body'."
> — *Mahā-Hatthipadopama Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 190)

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* enjoins one to observe the same practical hints not only in regard to the bodily contemplation (*kāyānupassanā*), but also in the other three contemplations: feelings (*vedanānupassanā*), mind (*cittānupassanā*) and mind-objects (*dhammānupassanā*). Thus, mindfulness such as 'there are feelings', 'there is a mind' or 'there are mind-objects' is established only to the extent necessary for knowledge and remembrance. Thus it is clear that the Buddha has steered clear of the ontologist, who is apt to treat such categories as absolute. According to the phenomenological approach of the Buddha, not only the body, feelings and mental states but also the entire range of doctrinal categories summed up under the heading of mind-objects has nothing in it worth clinging to. All of them can be summed up under the term 'concept', and that means recognition of their conditioned nature of arising-and-ceasing.

> "Now, when there is no eye, when there are no forms, when there is no eye-consciousness, it is impossible that one will delineate a designation of contact. When there is no designation of contact, it is impossible that one will delineate a designation of feeling. When there is no designation of feeling, it is impossible that one will delineate a designation of perception. When there is no designation of perception, it is impossible that one will delineate a designation of thinking. When there is no designation of thinking, it is impossible that one will delineate a designation of obsession by the perceptions and categories of objectification.

> "When there is no ear...
>
> "When there is no nose...
>
> "When there is no tongue...
>
> "When there is no body...
>
> "When there is no intellect, when there are no ideas, when there is no intellect-consciousness, it is impossible that one will delineate a designation of contact. When there is no designation of contact, it is impossible that one will delineate a designation of feeling. When there is no designation of feeling, it is impossible that one will delineate a designation of perception. When there is no designation of perception, it is impossible that one will delineate a designation of thinking. When there is no designation of thinking, it is impossible that one will delineate a designation of obsession by the perceptions and categories of objectification." — *Madhupindika Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 112)

It may appear strange to us that the Buddha treats even contact and feeling—with which we feel so intimate—as 'designations'. We might feel this as an intrusion into jealously guarded regions of the psyche. Yet if we observe ourselves carefully, we see that in the very act of apperception, contacts and feelings are defined, designated, reckoned and evaluated on the basis of one's latencies (the aggregates of form, intention, attention, feelings and consciousness). Thus there is no justification for treating them as sacred, or as given, although through lack of mindfulness we are used to taking them for granted. In other words, the contacts and feelings that we usually treat as absolute and sacrosanct, on closer inspection actually turn out to be synthetic and composite (*sankhata*).

Body, feelings, mind and mind-objects—the concepts upon which the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*cattāro satipaṭṭhānā*) are established—have nothing 'essential' about them in any ontological sense. In other words, they are but a net, a matrix or context for the development of mindfulness and wisdom. This matrix is meant to be 'seen through'; hence when penetrative wisdom is fully developed, consciousness soars unimpeded through the meshes of the net.

> The Blessed One said, "I will teach and analyze for you the origination and subsiding of the four foundations of mindfulness. Listen and pay close attention. I will speak."
>
> "As you say, lord," the monks responded.

> The Blessed One said, "And what, monks, is the arising of the body? With the arising of nutriment is the origination of the body. With the cessation of nutriment is the cessation of the body.
>
> "With the arising of contact is the arising of feeling. With the cessation of contact is the cessation of feeling.
>
> "With the arising of name-and-form is the arising of the mind. With the cessation of name-and-form is the cessation of the mind.
>
> "With the arising of attention is the arising of mental objects. With the cessation of attention is the cessation of mental objects." — *Samudaya Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* V 184)

The catechism quoted at the beginning of this chapter reveals that the thoughts and concepts arise dependent on name-and-form. Recall that this name-and-form is the 'partner' of consciousness in the empty 'eye' at the center of the vortex of becoming. Name-and-form is often associated with the idea of 'entering into' or 'getting entangled', while delusion is expressly called a net.

> "Behold this world with all its gods
> Fancying a self where none exists
> Entering into name-and-form
> It builds the conceit: 'This is the Truth'."
> —*Dvayatānupassanā Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* V 756)
>
> "Let one put away wrath, abandon conceit
> And get well beyond all fetters as well.
> That one by name-and-form untrammeled
> And possessionless, no suffering befalls."
> — *Dhammapada* V 221
>
> "There is no fire like lust
> No grip so tight as hate
> No net like crass delusion
> No river like craving."
> —*Dhammapada* V 251

Because of craving, consciousness finds itself enmeshed in name-and-form, its object (*ārammaṇa*). All speculative views based on sense experience, no matter how logical they may appear, are but cobwebs on the matrix of name-and-form. Hence when the dogmatic philosopher clings to the theory he has hammered out from his limited viewpoint and

asserts: 'I know, I see, that's just how it is!' all he sees, according to the Buddha, is the net of name-and-form.

> "'I know. I see. That's just how it is!' — Some believe purity is in terms of dogmatic views. But even if a person has seen, what good does it do him? Having slipped past the truth, he speaks of purity in connection with something or somebody else.
>
> "A person who actually sees, sees name-and-form. Having seen, he'll know only these things. No matter if he's seen little or a lot, the skilled don't say purity is in connection with that." — *Mahā-Viyūha Sutta* (*Sutta-nipāta* 895-914)

All objects of the six senses lure consciousness into the net of name-and-form using craving as the decoy. Craving is called an ensnarer in the following verse from *Dhammapada* (180):

> Whose conquest can't be undone,
> whose conquest no one in the world can reach;
> awakened, his pasture endless, pathless:
> by what path will you lead him astray?
>
> In whom there's no craving—the sticky ensnarer—
> to lead him anywherever at all;
> awakened, his pasture endless, pathless:
> by what path will you lead him astray?

And the speculative views symptomatic of delusion are compared in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* I 46) to an 'all-embracing net of views'.

Worldly consciousness always finds itself glued to some object that tends to cloud its vision of reality. The objects forming the meshes of the net of delusion have a stimulating effect on the conditioned mind, which makes it difficult to thrust them out of the contents of consciousness. They cannot simply be wished away, for they are there as long as the senses are there. We cannot abandon greed, hatred and delusion, of which those objects are but signs and symbols, verbally or physically, but by wisdom:

> "And what are the things to be abandoned neither by body nor by speech, but by having repeatedly seen with wisdom? Greed… Hatred… Delusion… Anger… Hostility… Denigration… Insolence… Miserliness are to be abandoned neither by body nor by speech, but by having repeatedly seen with wisdom." — *Aṅguttara Nikaya* V 39

The essence of the concept—deliverance—is attained when consciousness is weaned away from the tendency to get enmeshed in name-and-form. Then one will be gazing not at the net, but through it, not at 'things' but at the nature of 'things': emptiness. And that gaze is neither attentive nor non-attentive, neither conscious nor unconscious, neither fixed nor unfixed—a gaze that knows no horizon.

Chapter Ten

Non-Manifestive Consciousness

> "Consciousness without manifestation,
> without end, luminous all around:
> Here water, earth, fire and wind
> find no footing.
>
> Here long and short, coarse and fine
> pleasant and unpleasant, name-and-form
> are all brought to an end.
>
> With the cessation of consciousness
> each is here brought to an end."
> — *Kevaḍḍha Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* I 223)

The illusory nature of consciousness revealed by the Buddha is a recognition of its reflexive character. Like a mirror, it reflects the five aggregates: form, feelings, perception, fabrications and consciousness itself. When consciousness reflects on itself, it reflects as self-consciousness, and since consciousness depends on fabrications and name-and-form, all consciousness is actually self-consciousness.

This duplicity of consciousness leads to a paradox. When one identifies oneself as reflected in the mirror of consciousness, saying 'I am' or 'Here I am', one unwittingly accepts a duality between self-as-subject and self-as-object. A gap is created, a split in experience, in which one measures oneself in terms of a preexistent set of standards. Just as when gazing in the mirror, one becomes aware not only of his form but also the feelings, perceptions, intentions, contacts and attention regarding oneself. Thus in becoming self-conscious, one becomes aware of a similar set of objects, which are collectively called 'name-and-form'.

As in any magic show, form (*rūpa*) plays an important part. The inertia or resistance peculiar to form provides the basis for the most elementary judgment in the life of all beings: the dichotomy between existence and nonexistence.

> "What they call 'appealing' and 'unappealing' in the world—
> in dependence on that desire arises.

> Having seen becoming and non-becoming with regard to forms,
> a person gives rise to decisions in the world."
> — *Kalahavivāda Sutta* (*Sutta-nipāta* V 867)

The law of impermanence is camouflaged by the fact that material objects exist for some time before being destroyed. The delusion (*vipallāsa*) of permanence is radically traceable to a misjudgment about material objects. The ever-present process of change is overlooked and instead, the extreme views of existence and nonexistence are asserted.

> But this is just one strand in the tangle of conditioned consciousness forming the double-bind already discussed in Chapter Five. There is another: the notion of sense-reaction or resistance (*paṭigha*), the polar opposite of the inertia associated with the perception of form (*rūpasaññā*). This notion manifests as the feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention comprising the 'name' in name-and-form.

The actual condition of sense contact arises when both 'name' and 'form' collaborate.

> "Contact comes from name-and-form as its requisite condition."
> — *Mahā-Nidāna Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* II 55)

Hence when 'form' ceases to exist, contacts cease to function.

> "If the permutations, signs, themes, and indicators by which there is a description of name-group and form-group were all absent, would designation-contact or resistance-contact be discerned?"
>
> "No, lord." — *ibid.*

The problem, then, boils down to this:

> "To one endowed in which manner does form cease to exist?"
> — *Sutta-nipāta* V 873

The reply comes in the form of a paradox:

> "He is neither percipient of normal perception, nor abnormal perception. He is not non-percipient nor has he put an end to perception. It is to one thus constituted that form ceases to function, for reckonings characterized by conceptual prolificity have perception as their source." — *ibid.*

This portrays an extraordinary level of perception that is fully extricated from the obsession of form, so basic to the structure of ordinary perception. The negative formulation indicates that the transcendence is

not by temporary or permanent suppression of perception. Rather, it suggests seeing *through* perception, so that if anyone had enquired whether he was conscious of any sense-data, or whether he was unconscious or non-conscious or completely without consciousness in that perception, he would have replied negatively to both.

> "Now one time, Pukkusa, I was staying at Atuma, and had my abode in a barn there. And at that time there was a heavy rain, with thunder rolling, lightning flashing and thunderbolts crashing. And two farmers who were brothers were killed close to the barn, together with four oxen, and a great crowd came forth from Atuma to the spot where they were killed.
>
> "Now at that time, Pukkusa, I had come out of the barn and was walking up and down in thought before the door. And a certain man from the great crowd approached me, respectfully greeted me, and stood at one side.
>
> "And I asked him: 'Why, brother, has this great crowd gathered together?' And he answered me: 'Just now, Lord, there was a heavy rain, with thunder rolling, lightning flashing, and thunderbolts crashing. And two farmers who were brothers were killed close by, together with four oxen. It is because of this that the great crowd has gathered. But where, Lord, were you?'
>
> "'I was here, brother.' 'Yet, Lord, did you not see it?' 'I did not see it, brother.' 'But the noise, Lord, you surely heard?' 'I did not hear it, brother.' Then that man asked me: 'Then, Lord, perhaps you slept?' 'No, brother, I was not sleeping.' 'Then, Lord, you were conscious?' 'I was, brother.' Then that man said: 'Then, Lord, while conscious and awake, in the midst of a heavy rain, with thunder rolling, lightning flashing, and thunderbolts crashing, you neither saw it nor heard the noise?' And I answered him, saying: 'I did not, brother.'"
> — *Mahā-parinibbāna Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* II 131)

If this dialogue is reminiscent of the conversation you had with your friend after seeing the magic show (see **Chapter One**), the resemblance is purely intentional. Nevertheless, that state of concentration, which displays such a paradoxical character, appeared strange—not only to the 'man from the crowd' assembled around the scene of the fatal lightning strike, but also to monks and nuns who were not yet Arahants. Again and again in the Suttas we find accounts of them inquiring from the Buddha

about the possibility and nature of such a concentration.[32] Once the Venerable Ānanda put this question to the Buddha:

> "Lord, could a monk have an attainment of concentration such that he would neither be percipient of earth with regard to earth, nor of water with regard to water, nor of fire... wind... the dimension of the infinitude of space... the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness... the dimension of nothingness... the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception... this world... nor of the next world with regard to the next world, and yet he would still be percipient?"
>
> "Yes, Ānanda, he could."
>
> "But how, lord, could a monk have an attainment of concentration such that he would neither be percipient of earth with regard to earth... nor of the next world with regard to the next world, and yet he would still be percipient?"
>
> "There is the case, Ānanda, where the monk would be percipient in this way: 'This is peace, this is exquisite: the resolution of all fabrications; the relinquishment of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; Unbinding.' It's in this way that a monk could have an attainment of concentration such that he would neither be percipient of earth with regard to earth, nor of water with regard to water, nor of fire... wind... the dimension of the infinitude of space... the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness... the dimension of nothingness... the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception... this world... nor of the next world with regard to the next world, and yet he would still be percipient." — *Samādhi Sutta* (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* V 7)

It appears from this explanation that perception is not entirely rescinded, only instead of the usual objects of earth, water, fire and air, it has discovered some quasi-object worth attending to. Actually this is none other then the cessation aspect of Dependent Origination, in the contemplation of which all all fabrications that go to compound 'things' are completely calmed down, cooled down: Nibbāna. In this state all assets get liquidated, craving loses its power. Supreme detachment, as the transcendental experience of the cessation of all existence, is realized even in the here-and-now. This is a dynamic experience in which all percepts and concepts are deprived of their object status. This is revealed in the following conversation:

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[32] See *Aṅguttara Nikāya* IV 426, V 7, 318, 322, 353.

> "But how, friend Sāriputta, could a monk have an attainment of concentration such he would neither be percipient of earth with regard to earth... nor of the next world with regard to the next world, and yet he would still be percipient?"
>
> "Once, friend Ananda, when I was staying right here in Savatthi in the Blind Man's Grove, I reached concentration in such a way that I was neither percipient of earth with regard to earth... nor of the next world with regard to the next world, and yet I was still percipient."
>
> "But what, friend Sāriputta, were you percipient of at that time?"
>
> "'The cessation of becoming — Unbinding — the cessation of becoming — Unbinding.' One perception arose in me, friend Ananda, as another perception ceased. Just as in a blazing woodchip fire, one flame arises as another flame ceases, even so, 'The cessation of becoming — Unbinding — the cessation of becoming — Unbinding.' One perception arose in me as another one ceased. I was percipient at that time of 'The cessation of becoming — Unbinding'."
> — *Sāriputta Sutta* (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* V 8)

Here, then, is consciousness of the cessation of consciousness:

> "His mind is firm and well-released. He sees its passing away." — *Aṅguttara Nikāya* III 379
>
> "With the cessation of consciousness
> each is here brought to an end."
> — *Kevaḍḍha Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* I 223)

Though it seems to be a contradiction, it remains a possibility because of the reflexive character of consciousness. Instead of a consciousness supported by 'things' or objects, this is consciousness without an object or support (*anārammaṇaṃ*). It is also called non-continuing (*appavattam*). Whereas normal consciousness mirrors or manifests some 'thing', in this concentration it is non-manifestive. It is as though one were formerly aware only of a stockpile of wood, and now becomes aware that the wood is on fire:

> "Monks, the All is aflame… Forms are aflame… Feelings experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too is aflame. Perception is aflame… Fabrications are aflame… Consciousness is aflame.

> "Aflame with what? Aflame with the fire of passion, the fire of aversion, the fire of delusion. Aflame, I tell you, with birth, aging and death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses and despairs…
>
> "Seeing thus, the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with forms, disenchanted with feelings, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with fabrication, disenchanted with consciousness.
>
> "Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is fully released. With full release, there is the knowledge, 'Fully released.' He discerns that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world'." — *Āditta Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* III 71)

There is a radical shift of attitude and focus from the fuel to the fire, or from nutriment to its significance. This is well illustrated by the Buddha's discourse to the Venerable Sandha on this subject.

> "Sandha, practice the absorption of a thoroughbred horse, not the absorption of an unbroken colt. And how is an unbroken colt absorbed?
>
> "An unbroken colt, tied to the feeding trough, is absorbed with the thought, 'Barley grain! Barley grain!' Why is that? Because as he is tied to the feeding trough, the thought does not occur to him, 'I wonder what task the trainer will have me do today? What should I do in response?' …
>
> "And how is a thoroughbred absorbed? An excellent thoroughbred horse tied to the feeding trough, is not absorbed with the thought, 'Barley grain! Barley grain!' Why is that? Because as he is tied to the feeding trough, the thought occurs to him, 'I wonder what task the trainer will have me do today? What should I do in response?' … The excellent thoroughbred horse regards the feel of the spur as a debt, an imprisonment, a loss, a piece of bad luck.
>
> "In the same way, an excellent thoroughbred of a man, having gone to the wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, dwells with his awareness not overcome by sensual passion, not obsessed with sensual passion. He discerns the escape, as it actually is present, from sensual passion once it has arisen…
>
> "He is absorbed dependent neither on earth, liquid, fire, wind, the sphere of the infinitude of space, the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness, the sphere of nothingness, the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, this world, the next world, nor on

> whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, or pondered by the intellect — and yet he is absorbed…
>
> When this was said, Ven. Sandha said to the Blessed One, "But in what way, lord, is the excellent thoroughbred of a man absorbed when he is absorbed dependent neither on earth, liquid, heat, wind, the sphere of the infinitude of space, the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness, the sphere of nothingness, the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, this world, the next world, nor on whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, or pondered by the intellect — and yet he is absorbed…"
>
> "There is the case, Sandha, where for an excellent thoroughbred of a man the perception of… whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, or pondered by the intellect: the perception of that has ceased to exist.
>
> "Absorbed in this way, the excellent thoroughbred of a man is absorbed dependent neither on earth, liquid, fire, wind, the sphere of the infinitude of space, the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness, the sphere of nothingness, the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, this world, the next world, nor on whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, or pondered by the intellect — and yet he is absorbed." — *Sandha Sutta* (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* V 323)

An untrained man, explains the Buddha, doesn't understand as it really is stepping out from sensuous lust, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubts, and dwells with his mind obsessed by these five hindrances. But a good thoroughbred of a man, when gone into solitude, doesn't brood on the hindrances. Nevertheless, he does concentrate his mind without depending on any object. This is so remarkable that even the gods and Brahmās from afar bow down to him, saying:

> 'Homage to you, O thoroughbred man.
> Homage to you, O superlative man —
> you of whom we don't know even what it is
> dependent on which you're absorbed.' — *ibid.*

We find many mentions of this type of contemplation in the Suttas:

- *avitakka-samādhi:* 'thought-less concentration' (*Udāna* 71)
- *avitakka jhāyī:* 'one who meditates thoughtless' (*Saṃyutta* I 126)
- *jhājati anupādāno:* 'meditates fuel-less or without clinging' (*Theragata* 840)

- *avitakkaṃ samāpanno:* 'one who has attained to the thoughtless concentration' (*Theragata* 999)

'Things' play no part in this perception, precisely because the subject —'self or 'I'—is missing. This experience of cessation of existence (*bhavanirodho*), which is nothing less than 'Nibbāna in the here-and-now', is the outcome of the eradication of the conceit 'I am'.

> "He should develop the perception of inconstancy so as to uproot the conceit, 'I am'. For a monk perceiving inconstancy, the perception of not-self is made firm. One perceiving not-self attains the uprooting of the conceit, 'I am': Unbinding in the here-and-now." — *Sambodhi Sutta* (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* IV 351)

The element of egoistic measuring or reckoning present in a perceptual situation results in concepts or 'things':

> "And what is the result of perception? Perception has expression as its result, I tell you. However a person perceives something, that is how he expresses it: '**I have** this sort of perception.' This is called the result of perception." — *Nibbedhika Sutta* (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* III 410)

> "Reckonings characterized by conceptual proliferation have perception as their source." — *Sutta-nipāta* 874

When name-and-form, which stands in the relation of object (*ārammaṇa*) to concepts is transcended, concepts lose their point of reference, their foothold. Hence,

> Here long and short, coarse and fine
> pleasant and unpleasant, name-and-form
> are all brought to an end.
>
> With the cessation of consciousness
> each is here brought to an end."
> — *Kevaḍḍha Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* I 223)

The elements and other 'things' find no footing in that non-manifestive consciousness. The fecundity that feeds the proliferation of concepts and manifests in ordinary consciousness as 'essence' or 'substantiality' is thereby destroyed.

> "Consciousness without surface, endless, radiant all around, has not been experienced through the earthness of earth ... the liquidity of liquid ... the fieryness of fire ... the windiness of wind ... the allness of the all." — *Brahma-nimantanika Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 329)

> The Blessed One said, "What is the All? Simply the eye and forms, ear and sounds, nose and aromas, tongue and flavors, body and tactile sensations, intellect and ideas. This, monks, is called the All." — *Sabba Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* IV 15)

Having lost their fecundity in the emancipated mind, concepts are no longer capable of proliferation (*papañca*). The emancipated one, who has realized the emptiness of concepts through higher knowledge, no longer entertains egotistic imaginings based on them.

> "The Tathāgata—a worthy one, rightly self-awakened—directly knows the All as the All. Directly knowing the All as the All, he does not conceive things about the All, does not conceive things in the All, does not conceive things coming out of the All, does not conceive the All as 'mine,' does not delight in the All. Why is that? Because he has known that delight is the root of suffering & stress, that from coming-into-being there is birth, and that for what has come into being there is aging & death. Therefore, with the total ending, fading away, cessation, letting go, relinquishment of craving, the Tathāgata has totally awakened to the unexcelled right self-awakening, I tell you." — *Mūla-pariyāya Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 1)

As the *Kālakārāma Sutta* puts it:

> "Thus, monks, the Tathāgata, when seeing what is to be seen, doesn't conceive an 'object' as seen apart from sight. He doesn't conceive of an 'unseen'. He doesn't conceive of a 'thing-worth-seeing'. He doesn't conceive a 'seer'.

This is the result of the conviction, gained through his transcendental experience of the extinction of all phenomena in that non-manifestive consciousness. When consciousness is not arrested at the point of focus by any object, it penetrates the matrix of name-and-form and expands out into infinity. Thus discrete viewpoints give way to an all-encompassing vision. This is described as 'lustrous all around' (*sabbatopabhaṃ*), and the luster is wisdom itself.

> "Monks, there are these four types of brightness. Which four? The brightness of the sun, the brightness of the moon, the brightness of fire, and the brightness of wisdom. These are the four types of brightness. And of these four types of brightness, the foremost is the brightness of wisdom." — *Obhasa Sutta* (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* II 139)

The illumination of wisdom causes fading away (*virāga*) of all 'things', the objects which before seemed so significant because of the bewitching

gleam of sense-consciousness. Consequently, this experience is sometimes called 'cessation of the six sense spheres' (*saḷāyatananirodha*).

> Therefore, monks, that sphere should be known wherein the eye ceases and the perception of form fades away; the ear ceases and the perception of sounds fades away; the nose ceases and the perception of smells fades away; the tongue ceases and the perception of tastes fades away; the body ceases and the perception of touches fades away; the mind ceases and the perception of concepts fades away—that sphere should be known, that sphere should be known." — *Lokakāmaguṇa Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* IV)

The monks who conveyed this utterance of the Buddha to Ānanda for explanation, were told that it concerns the cessation of the six sense-spheres. The cessation of consciousness is called 'non-manifestive consciousness' insofar as it is a level of experience:

> "Desire is appeased, thought is appeased, perceptions are appeased; owing to that also there is an experience." — *Saṃyutta Nikāya* V 13

So also the cessation of the six sense spheres is also described as a sphere or dimension (*āyatana*).

> "There is that dimension, monks, where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor air; neither dimension of the infinitude of space, nor dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, nor dimension of nothingness, nor dimension of neither perception nor non-perception; neither this world, nor the next world, nor sun, nor moon. And there, I say, there is neither coming, nor going, nor staying; neither passing away nor arising: unestablished (*appatiṭṭhaṃ*), unevolving (*appavattaṃ*), without support or mental object (*anārammaṇaṃ*).This, just this, is the end of suffering." — *Udāna* 80

The world of sense experience where laws of relativity dominate is thus transcended in a sphere or dimension which is not somewhere else, but in this very fathom-long body.

> "I tell you that there is no making an end of suffering and stress without reaching the end of the cosmos. Yet it is just within this fathom-long body, with its perception and intellect, that I declare that there is the cosmos, the origination of the cosmos, the cessation of the cosmos, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of the cosmos."
> — *Rohitassa Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* I 62)

Along with the sense objects that appear concrete, such as earth, water, fire, air, sun and moon, concepts like 'coming', 'going', 'stopping', 'arising' and 'passing away'—all of which are signs—have now lost their significance. They no longer signify 'things', for in the emancipated one, lust, hatred and delusion are extinct. His 'signless deliverance of mind' signifies only the absence of lust, hatred and delusion. This is the actual knowledge and experience of Nibbāna: the cessation of birth, becoming and all fabrications that breed manifold suffering.

> "Passion is a something. Aversion is a something. Delusion is a something. In a monk whose fermentations are ended, these have been abandoned, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Now, to the extent that there is nothingness awareness-release, the unprovoked awareness-release is declared the foremost. And this unprovoked awareness-release is empty of passion, empty of aversion, empty of delusion.
>
> "Passion is a making of signs. Aversion is a making of signs. Delusion is a making of signs. In a monk whose fermentations are ended, these have been abandoned, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Now, to the extent that there is signless awareness-release, the unprovoked awareness-release is declared the foremost. And this unprovoked awareness-release is empty of passion, empty of aversion, empty of delusion. This, friend, is the way of explaining whereby these qualities are one in meaning and different only in name."
> — *Mahā-vedalla Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 298)
>
> "There is, monks, an unborn—unbecoming—unmade—unfabricated. If there were not that unborn—unbecoming—unmade— unfabricated, there would not be the case that escape from the born—become—made—fabricated would be discerned. But precisely because there is an unborn—unbecoming—unmade—unfabricated, escape from the born—become—made—fabricated is discerned." — *Udāna* 80

In a psychological sense, a design or gestalt can be 'unmade' or dissolved by shifting one's attention to its components. Similarly, 'things' or what is born (*jātaṃ*), what has become (*bhūtaṃ*), is made (*kataṃ*) and compounded (*saṃkhataṃ*) is transformed into the unborn, unbecoming, unmade and unfabricated simply by penetrative insight into its causes and conditions. Similarly, all designs or gestalts involved in the magic show of

consciousness, which are conditioned or dependently arisen, also cease when ignorance and craving are eradicated.

> "Bound round with delusion,
> the world only appears to be desirable.
> To the foolish, surrounded by darkness,
> bound with acquisitions, it seems eternal,
> but for one who sees, there is nothing." — *Udāna* 79

Where there is no compounding or fabrication, there is no falling apart. Hence Nibbāna is also called *apalokitaṃ:* non-disintegrating. Once attained, it never deteriorates.

The descriptions of Nibbāna in the Suttas are therefore psychological, not mystical or metaphysical. It is unfortunate that many scholars have misinterpreted the passages quoted herein in a way that contradicts the teaching of *anattā*, no-self. Though the Buddha was certain that all states of being, becoming or existence are subject to impermanence, the widespread tendency is to see Nibbāna as a reference to some mysterious alternate dimension where things are somehow different. This seems to be a carryover from the theistic religions where believers hope for a ticket to some heaven or other realm where, for reasons never fully explained, the qualities of *anicca-dukkha-anattā* don't apply.

> "It's not easy for those overcome by passion for becoming,
> flowing along in the stream of becoming,
> falling under Mara's sway,
> to wake up to this Dhamma.
>
> Who, apart from the Noble Ones,
> is worthy to wake up to this state? —
> the state that, through rightly knowing it,
> they're free from fermentation, totally unbound."
> — *Dvayatānupassanā Sutta* (*Sutta-nipāta* 759-765)

Epilogue

Blessed Peace in Nibbāna

> Lead me from untruth to truth!
> Lead me from darkness into light!
> Lead me from death to deathlessness! — *Ṛg-veda*

Such was the yearning of the Indian mind—a yearning in sympathy with the highest aspirations of humankind. The *Kālakārāma Sutta*, when understood in the light of the teachings and sermons of the Buddha, goes a long way towards showing us how that yearning can be fulfilled.

However, the Buddha's teaching is a radical departure from the usual approaches to the problems of truth, light and deathlessness. Truth, the key to the riddle of existence, was believed to be the exclusive property of a personal, anthropomorphic Godhead. Light, which dispels the gloom of the spirit, could be obtained only through mystic propitiation of that Godhead. Immortality, the solution to the problem of death, the inexorable tragedy of all living beings, was supposed to be secured only in an alternate dimension of existence where the immortal gods (*amarā*) eternally revel in deathless pastimes of ambrosia (*amṛta*).

The teaching of the Buddha is distinct from this popular but naive religious psychology. He discovered truth where the religions of old least expected to find it. Existence and deliverance, the problem and its solution, were found interwoven in a tangle, in a vortex at the very center of existence: the interplay of 'I' and 'mine', of consciousness and the 'things' that are its objects. If only one could disentangle it! And this he did, and also revealed to humanity the means of attaining it.

Truth, according to the Buddha, belongs to no one and has no esoteric or mystical dimensions. It is a question of seeing things as they really are. Once the necessary clarity of vision is developed, anyone can see the truth in all lucidity and clarity in the very structure of all phenomena. Dhamma, as truth, invited everyone to 'come and see' (*ehipassiko*).

> "Just as if there were a pool of water in a mountain glen—clear, limpid, and unsullied—where a man with good eyesight standing on the bank could see shells, gravel, and pebbles, and also shoals of fish swimming

> about and resting, and it would occur to him, 'This pool of water is clear, limpid, and unsullied. Here are these shells, gravel, and pebbles, and also these shoals of fish swimming about and resting.' In the same way—with his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability—the monk directs and inclines it to the knowledge of the ending of the mental fermentations. He discerns, as it has come to be, that 'This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress... These are mental fermentations... This is the origination of fermentations... This is the cessation of fermentations... This is the way leading to the cessation of fermentations.' His heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, is released from the fermentation of sensuality, the fermentation of becoming, the fermentation of ignorance. With release, there is the knowledge, 'Released.' He discerns that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There's nothing further for this world'." — *Mahā-Assapura Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 279)

The Buddha traced the darkness that clouds our mental clarity and vision to the delusion of a 'self'. This delusion as a point of view created a background of ignorance to perpetuate itself. The mind became committed and limited because of ignorance and craving. Here is a case of 'possession' giving rise to 'prepossession', an 'acquisition' resulting in a 'privation'.

Because of this, all the knowledge amassed by the six senses functioning within the narrow range allowed to them by the ego was tantamount to ignorance. There resulted the dichotomy between the internal and external sense-bases, and consciousness was cramped up between a 'here' and a 'there'.

The problem of illumination, therefore, was not dependent on any union or absorption with a Godhead, which is equivalent to merging one 'self' or darkness with another. Rather, the self-created artificial confines of consciousness were penetrated with a flash of wisdom, such that consciousness can develop its innate capacity to be infinite and all-lustrous. The discovery that this potential is already there within the minds of all beings—if only one can develop it—comes as an unexpected revelation to humankind.

> "Luminous, monks, is the mind. And it is defiled by incoming defilements. The uninstructed run-of-the-mill person doesn't discern that as it actually is present, which is why I tell you that—for the

> uninstructed run-of-the-mill person—there is no development of the mind.
>
> "Luminous, monks, is the mind. And it is freed from incoming defilements. The well-instructed disciple of the noble ones discerns that as it actually is present, which is why I tell you that—for the well-instructed disciple of the Noble Ones—there is development of the mind." — *Pabhassara Sutta* (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* I 10)

The Buddha realized that birth and death are inseparable corollaries of the conceit of existence: 'I am'. The law of impermanence, which applies even in the heavenly realms, prevents any notion of immortal existence. Besides, the quest for immortality was only a symptom of the deep-seated fear of death. If only these obsessions could be removed, the problem would disappear.

Hence he advanced a novel solution to the problems of life and death. He pointed out that although immortal existence is precluded by the very nature of manifestation, one could still experience the ambrosia of deathlessness in the here-and-now.

> "Comprehending the property of form,
> not taking a stance in the formless,
> those released in cessation
> are people who've left death behind.
>
> Having touched with his body
> the deathless property, free from acquisitions,
> having realized the relinquishing
> of acquisitions, fermentation-free,
>
> the Rightly Self-awakened One
> teaches the state
> with no sorrow, no dust." — *Itivuttaka* 62

To realize this, one has to recognize fully the truths of impermanence, suffering and not-self, whereby existence, on which both birth and death depend, is made to cease. This approach is so radical that it includes the paradox that systematically well-developed reflection on death will merge in the deathless:

> The Blessed One said, "Mindfulness of death, when developed & pursued, is of great fruit and great benefit. It gains a footing in the Deathless, has the Deathless as its final end. Therefore you should

> develop mindfulness of death." — *Maranassati Sutta* (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* III 303)

Thus instead of trying to stifle death artificially by the fabrication of heavenly immortality, the Buddha let death die a natural death in the sphere of transcendental experience of the deathless attainable in this very world.

> "The exquisite Deathless—ending, dispassion—discovered by the Sakyan Sage in concentration: There is nothing to equal that Dhamma. This, too, is an exquisite treasure in the Dhamma. By this truth may there be well-being." — *Ratana Sutta* (*Sutta-nipāta* 225)

The Buddha's approach was so radical that it even dispensed with the supplicating attitude in the words 'lead me' in the Vedic *mantra* cited above. The Dhamma, as the Suchness of phenomena, has the inherent capacity to 'lead on' (*opanayiko*) by itself, hence no divine grace is required. It is only a question of entering the Stream of Dhamma (*dhammasoto*) which runs counter (*paṭisotagāmī*) to the broader stream of suffering in *saṃsāra*.

The realization of the goal of Nibbāna here-and-now (*sandiṭṭhiko*), represented by truth, light and deathlessness, does not put the liberated one so out of alignment with the world that it prevents all mediation. In the principle of Dependent Origination, the Buddha discovered a safeguard against the conflicts that arise when there is an unbridgeable gap between different levels of experience. The *Kālakārāma Sutta* in particular portrays how cautious the Buddha was regarding this concern. Nor is it the case that realization of the transcendental sphere of experience has put his sense faculties out of alignment. The only real difference is that lust, hatred and delusion no longer affect their functions. His synoptic understanding of reality enables him to live in the world although not being of the world. In this respect the 'Nibbāna element with residual clinging' (*saupādisesā nibbābadhātu*) becomes significant.

> "And what, monks, is the 'Nibbāna element with residual clinging'? Herring, monks, a monk is an Arahant whose influxes are extinct, who has lived out the holy life, accomplished the task, laid down the burden, reached his goal, whose fetters of existence are fully extinct and who is freed through right knowledge. His five sense-faculties still remain, which being undestroyed, he partakes of the pleasant and the unpleasant and experiences the pleasurable and the painful. The

> extinction of lust, hatred and delusion in him is called the 'Nibbāna element with residual clinging'." — *Itivuttaka* 38

Though the emancipated one apparently comes back to the world of sense experience, the bliss of Nibbāna is still the same inward peace (*ajjhattasanti*) and appeasement (*upasama*). Like other aspects of transcendence, this is not easily appreciated by the world. That there could be a form of bliss in the absence of desires seems equally paradoxical. And yet radical reflection might reveal that in fact, it is not desire that is blissful, but its appeasement. Desire, like hunger or thirst, is a form of stress and tension, a malady; and even in our normal life, only its appeasement brings happiness. The tragedy of conditioned existence is that the appeasement brought for the price of the desired object is short-lived, for like a fire, desire flares up again with renewed force.

Because of this, the Buddha did not recognize satisfaction of desire as actual appeasement. On the contrary, he saw it as a vain attempt to extinguish a fire by adding more fuel to it. The principle underlying the attempt to appease desires nevertheless reveals that desires in themselves are not blissful. Desirelessness as the appeasement of all desires would be the supreme bliss, and in fact, this is Nibbāna.

> Ven. Sāriputta … said to the monks, "This Unbinding is pleasant, friends. This Unbinding is pleasant."
>
> When this was said, Ven. Udāyin said to Ven. Sāriputta, "But what is the pleasure here, friend, where there is nothing felt?"
>
> "Just that is the pleasure here, my friend: where there is nothing felt." — *Nibbāna Sutta* (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* IV 414)

Unfortunately Nibbāna, 'cessation' or 'emptiness'—the most widely known epithets for the *summum bonum* of Buddhism—have acquired a stigma of being too 'negative' in their connotations. Despite the obvious canonical evidence, there is a hesitation to recognize that it essentially signifies 'extinction'—what a dismal word! There is something traumatic in the impact of the so-called 'negative' definitions, so we usually leave the word Nibbāna untranslated. The tendency to recoil from the 'negative' aspect of Nibbāna becomes more marked when it is defined in the Suttas as the destruction of lust, hatred and delusion, and then even the Commentary is apologetic.

If, as discussed above, desirelessness is the supreme bliss, perhaps Nibbāna could vindicate its reputation and be considered a 'positive' happiness. Since the totality of existence is illustrated by the simile of a fire, Nibbāna as its extinction is also the experience of appeasement and tranquility. It is therefore associated with the idea of cooling down:

> "Having become hungerless, extinguished and grown cool even here and now, I proclaim *parinibbāna* (perfect extinguishing) through freedom from clinging." — *Aṅguttara Nikāya* V 65

This 'perfect extinguishing' or appeasement requires no 'fuel' at all; it can be enjoyed free of charge.

> "Those who, devoted, firm-minded,
> apply themselves to Gotama's message,
> on attaining their goal, plunge into the Deathless,
> freely enjoying the Liberation they've gained.
> This, too, is an exquisite treasure in the Sangha.
> By this truth may there be well-being." — *Ratana Sutta* (*Sutta-nipāta* 228)

With the appeasement of fabrications (*saṃkhārūpasma*) the magic show of consciousness ends for the emancipated one, well before its scheduled end: at death. The magic has lost its magic for him, and never again will he waste his time and money on such empty shows. He has seen through the wily tricks of the magician and gained an unshakable conviction (*aññā*) of the emptiness of the show. Instead of the impermanent bliss of ignorance enjoyed by the frenzied worldly audience, he enjoys gratis the tranquil bliss of emancipation, the supreme Noble Appeasement (*paramo ariyo upasamo*): "There is no bliss higher than peace." — *Dhammapada* 202

> "Through many a birth in *saṃsāra* I ran
> Seeking the house-builder in vain
> Pain it is to be born again and again.
>
> O! house-builder, thou art seen
> Thou shalt build no house again
> Shattered lie all thy rafters
> Thy rooftop is torn asunder.
>
> Mind attained fermentless state
> Reached is craving's end." — *Dhammapada* 153-4