

11. Rounds of Becoming

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 15:39

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsbuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato
Sammāsbuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsbuddhassa*

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble, and fully self-enlightened.

So we're actually coming to the end of our chapter on the human condition. And this is actually the last bit of quotation from the scriptures. So I shall read it as usual. Listeners, when you see this word "monks" in the scriptures, it stands for everybody who's listening.

"This *saṃsāra* is without discoverable beginning. The first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. Now there comes a time, monks, when the great ocean dries up and evaporates and no longer exists. But still I say, there is no making an end of suffering for those beings roaming and wandering on, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. There comes a time, monks, when Sinaru, the king of mountains, burns up and perishes and no longer exists. But still, I say, there is no making an end of suffering for those beings roaming and wandering on, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. And there comes a time, monks, when the great earth burns up and perishes and no longer exists. And still, I say, there is no making an end of suffering for those beings roaming and wandering on, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.

"Suppose, monks, a dog tied up on a leash was bound to a strong post or pillar. It would just keep on running and revolving around that same post or pillar. So too, the uninstructed worldling regards form as self, feeling as self, perception as self, volitional formations as self, and consciousness as self. And he just keeps running and revolving around form, and around feeling, and around perception, around volitional formations, and around consciousness. And as he keeps on running and revolving around them, he's not freed from form. Not freed from feeling. Not freed from perception. Not freed from volitional formations. Not freed from consciousness. He's not freed from birth, aging and death. Not freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair. Not freed from suffering, I say."

It's a bit heavy, isn't it?

So here we have some old themes. This business of *saṃsāra* has no discoverable beginning. Really, that's just looking at cause and effect. If you go back on cause and effect, you don't seem to get to a beginning of it. In other religious forms, they try to form a beginning by saying a god started it at some point, but from the Buddha's point of view, there's no discoverable beginning for this. Which is awful, isn't it? It presumes that we've been going round and round like this dog for yonks. Roaming and wandering around, hindered

by ignorance and fettered by craving.

So remember, these are the two points on dependent origination. It begins by this fundamental not understanding, not knowing, which produces for us a misunderstanding. And that's the delusion. What is the delusion? The delusion is thinking that we are human beings in an absolute sense. Conventionally, obviously, we're not apes, or at least most of us aren't. You see some people walking along dragging their knuckles on the floor, but apart from those... So we have this mistake, and what the mistake does is it makes us seek real happiness in the sensual world. There's the desire.

And as you know, this desire leads to acquisition. We have to defend it, and therefore you get the opposite, the aversion, the hatred, and if the enemy is too big, fear. So remember, those are your three fundamental dispositions: acquisition, acquisitiveness, aversion, and fear. And from then, all human misery stems.

And then he gives us three images. There's the ocean, there's the mountains, and the earth. And he just says, well, when all this disappears... we know from science that this earth will disappear. At some point, the sun will... what do they call those big red blowout stars? Supernovae. That's it, we've had it then. We have to make sure that we're already inhabiting another planet. So once we know that the Earth is going to die at some point, and it'll probably die quicker than we think because of our own actions, and the ocean comes and then etc. But still, this doesn't mean that beings don't go on.

So this presumes, remember, there's always a presumption that there isn't just this physical body, there's also the mental body, the *mano-maya-kāya*, the body made by the mind, which is within this body and leaves the body when we die. But remember that that's not to be confused with the *nibbāna-dhātu*, as they like to say in Theravada, the element of *Nibbāna*, or that which is the Buddha within.

We begin to understand what that might be the more we meditate and the more we recognize what the qualities are of the one who's observing, that which is observing.

And then we get this image of the dog on a leash tied round and round, just running and running around a pillar. There's no end to it. The dog doesn't know what's tying him to the pillar. He just keeps running. He thinks that the faster he runs, the more chance there is of escaping. But he doesn't realize that he's tied to this pillar.

So what is this pillar that we're tied to? It's the self. That's the pillar, that's the false pillar that we've driven into our existence, thinking that, well, this is what I am. And therefore, we're always going to run around the demands of the self. And the self is what? Seeking happiness. Seeking happiness in this sensual world.

And this takes us to this whole business of what we think the self is. So remember there are four positions. And he has it nicely written here at the back. So, people regard the self as form. So, I am my body. That's the materialist position, isn't it? I am my body. And it gives an example of a flame of an oil lamp and its colour are indistinguishable. So, the flame and the colour are the same. So, a materialist will say, well, I am my genes. Full stop.

And then somebody says, well, the self as possessing form. So it's more the image of a tree possesses a shadow. So the real me is my mind, my heart and mind. But the body is not my real me. It's something I possess, but it's not me. And then there's the form which is in self. So it takes the formless mind as a self within which form is situated. So I am this mind of mine, this heart-mind of mine, and within that you find this body. Again the image is of a scent in a flower. The scent is in the flower, but then we think well, the flower is not the scent.

And then the self is in form in the sense of a jewel in a casket. So it's situated within the body, but it's not the body.

So we've got all these different ideas of a self, as to who we are, as to what we identify with. And that becomes the pillar. And then we keep running around the demands of this self.

And he goes through his usual way of describing the human being, which are these five *khandhās*. So the *khandhās* are these five aggregates, these heaps. It's just a way of looking at a human being to see where the problem is. There are many ways that you can split up the human form, but the way the Buddha does it is to show us where the problem is.

So the first one is the body itself. There's a whole thing that we call the body, both the physical part of our body and the way the mind experiences the body, through feeling, sensation. So for instance, the nail on my finger here... I don't know it, do I? I don't even feel it grow, I don't know anything about it. But I do know it by the sense of touch, and the fact that I can see it. But I don't actually know the nail in itself, do I? Strange. Do you think? I keep going on about, this is my body.

And then there's feeling. All these feelings, they're me. They tend to be easier to identify with. So when I've got a pain, that's me.

Then there's the perceptions. So perceptions lead to a lot of thoughts. So what I perceive, I believe, is actually true. And through our science, we might even come to the conclusion that what I see is actually the way it is. So when I see a tree, I believe that that's the way it is. But in fact, if I take another position, I see the tree differently. And other people see the tree differently. But I'm of the opinion in myself that when I look at a tree, that's the way it really is.

And then there's volitional formation. So these are what we would normally call our emotional thought life. And we identify with that strongly. I'm not feeling well. This is my opinion.

And there's consciousness. So the consciousness there is that I am that which cognizes and which can grasp things. It's a discriminative consciousness. So I am that.

So all these identities are part of this idea of who I am, which is this pillar. And I'm just running and running around this pillar, this self. And just like the dog, I don't see it. I don't see the problem.

Not until you become instructed. So we've all been instructed that there's absolutely no excuse for keep

running around this pillar for heaven's sake. But until we do, then at least, as soon as we do realize where the problem lies, then at least we don't run around so manically. We still try and make a break for it and just find ourselves running around when we get lost in our indulgences and get caught up in hatred and all that. But at least when we wake up we think, hold on, I'm just running around this pillar again.

And he says there won't be... you're just not freed. Won't be freed from birth, aging and death. Now remember this birth, aging and death is the birth, aging and death of the self. The Buddha does not suffer from the birth, aging and death of self. He's liberated from that. His body dies and the Buddha within remains, goes who knows where. It doesn't have a lodging. It doesn't have a state. But it's understood in Mahāyāna Buddhism that there is also the *sambhoga-kāya*, the body of delight, which is the angelic body. It's still there. But it's not fooled by it.

So remember, whenever you hear in the scriptures this business of birth, aging, and death, it's always about the self, the idea of a self. And it's happening all the time. It doesn't happen when you're asleep. When you're asleep, there's no birth, aging, and death of a self. And when you wake up, you say, oh, here I am again. You say that every morning, don't you? Ding-a-ling-a-ling, oh, I'm here. Here I am again. And every time we go through the dependent origination, there's a self. So we're not always doing it. But every time we do it, there's a process of being born as me, and whatever me is doing comes to an end, and then there's a death.

And because of that, there will continue to be sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair. That's terrible, isn't it? There will be no freedom from suffering, I say.

So that brings us to the end of this section. And next week, which is my last Tuesday before Noreen comes, I'll just pull it all together, just this whole business on this section, which tends to be, shall we say, meditating on the dark side of life.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and that you will, by your constant endeavour, cut the leash around that post sooner rather than later.

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