

## SUNDRY QUESTIONS ON SELF IN THE SUTTAPIṬAKA

In our book *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*<sup>1</sup> we tried—successfully, we believe—to establish the fact that the *anattā* doctrine preached by the Buddha has no absolute value. This means that notwithstanding all the assertions that certain things, in fact all empirical factors and all conditions short of final liberation detectable in the individual are non-self, the reality of the true self is never denied.

In our study of the problem, we left established two principles of paramount importance, namely that the root-heresy in early Buddhism is the *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* which identifies the self in man with those existential factors and conditions, and secondly that in the interpretation of the Nikāyas one ought ever to keep in mind an exegetical rule of universal application, to wit “All non-Budhists are presumed to profess the *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*”. Even the *bhikkhus* show themselves at times touched by this heresy and are therefore rebuked by the Master.

We intend at present to undertake certain passages which offer a special difficulty and/or were not thoroughly discussed in our book.

### DECLARATIONS ABOUT THE SELF IN THE MAHĀNIDĀNASUTTA

The part of the *sutta* we wish to analyse begins with the following words,

“In how many ways, Ānanda, declares the self one who makes declarations concerning it? Either one who makes declarations concerning the self, Ānanda, declares it endowed with form and limited saying ‘my self is endowed with form and limited’ or... saying ‘my self is endowed with form and infinite’,

---

<sup>1</sup> Mouton Publishers, The Hague-Paris-New York, 1980. All quotations in this article from the Pāli texts will follow the division in volumen, pagination, and marginal numbers of the *Nālandā Editions*, Pāli Publications Board (Bihar Government).

or... saying 'my self is devoid of form and limited', or... saying 'my self is devoid of form and infinite'"<sup>2</sup>.

In every case, those declarations or definitions regarding the self are made in relation to this very existence or a future one, or they declare in every case,

"Not being so, I will make it to be like this"<sup>3</sup>.

Then the opposite cases are taken in hand referring to those who, never trying to make declarations concerning the self, do not declare it to be such as has been described regarding this very existence or a future one, and do not declare their intention of making it to be such as it is not, ending in every case with the words, "The wrong view of the self being endowed with form and limited (or endowed with form and infinite, etc.) does not obsess one who is such as this"<sup>4</sup>. The opinions of those ready to define the self in any of the said ways end with the opposite statement, "The wrong view of the self being endowed with form and limited (or endowed with form and infinite, etc.) does obsess one who is such as this".

The Buddha disapproves of statements such as, "My self is endowed with form and limited", "My self is endowed with form and infinite", etc. But do we find herein a denial of the true self? A negative answer imposes itself on us for the following reasons:

1. The very reference to the "obsession" or "attachment" that urges people to declare the self in so many ways points to the fact that they are moved in so doing by *asmimāna*. Consequently their declarations do not contemplate the true self, only the self identified with the existential factors and the censure passed on them does not affect the true self.

2. Two opposite attitudes of mind have been described in what precedes. The first belongs to those who make declarations con-

<sup>2</sup> D II, p. 51, *Mahānīdānasutta*, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. pp. 51-52, para 24.

<sup>4</sup> The sentence *evaṃ santam* etc. presents some difficulties to a precise grammatical analysis and may be understood in two different ways. We have translated it taking *attānudiṭṭhi* as subject of *anusenti*, *evaṃ santam* being its object, and *rupim* an adverbial adjunct of manner. It may be that the maker of the statement in question is the implied subject of *anusenti*, in which case *attānudiṭṭhim* should be substituted for *attānudiṭṭhi* and *evaṃ santam* could be considered an adverbial adjunct of manner meaning, 'Things being like this'. At all events, *anusenti* conveys the meaning either of an inordinate attachment (if the subject is the maker of the statement) or of an obsession (if the subject is *attānudiṭṭhi*), both being unequivocal signs of the presence of *asmimāna*.

cerning the self, while the second refers to those who would never think of doing so. No doubt can be entertained as to which one of both attitudes finds favour with the Buddha. The fundamental reason is given in a paragraph found just before the passage being discussed,

"In so far, Ānanda, one can be born or grow old or die or fall [from one kind of existence] or be reborn, in so far as [there is] a way [open to] designation, in so far as [there is] a way [open to] explanation, in so far as [there is] a sphere of knowledge, in so far as the round of existences goes on, to that extent the mutual causal relation goes on for that which is individuality together with consciousness making for declarations of a definite character"<sup>5</sup>.

The overall sense of the passage is unambiguously clear. Any declaration of any definite character by means of words becomes possible only when there is a samsaric individuality in mutual dependence with consciousness. Any such declaration implies a consciousness of being one way or another and therefore a definite samsaric individuality. Consequently any such declaration regarding the self implies the identification of the latter at least with *nāmarūpa*. But the true self is not identifiable with any samsaric entity which is impermanent, painful and mutable by its very nature.

3. To say that the self is *rūpī* or *arūpī* is to admit that it is ontologically related—in a positive or in a negative way—to one of the *khandhas*, namely *rūpa*, of which one ought to say "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self".

4. The text itself considers the different declarations regarding the self as *ditṭhis* and more particularly as *attānudiṭṭhis* and are thereby vitiated by the root-heresy, the *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* which erroneously identifies the self with the existential factors<sup>6</sup>.

5. The intent to make the self become what it is not also betrays a mentality that identifies the self with the existential

<sup>5</sup> D II, p. 51, *Mahānidānasutta*, 22. The last words of the text do not offer an easy outcome for the translator's efforts. We have translated them as if we found the word *tesaṃ* in between *viññānena* and *aññamaññapaccayatā*. Another way out of the difficulty could be the substitution of *annamaññapaccayatāya* for *aññamaññapaccayatā*. The translation thus obtained would be, "to that extent that which is individuality making for declarations of a definite character, together with consciousness, is active in a causal relation between the two".

<sup>6</sup> *Attānudiṭṭhi vuccati visativatthukā sakkāyadiṭṭhi* K IV, pt. II, p. 196, Cullaniddeśa, 2, 15, 88; Cfr. "Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism, pp. 201, 240, 241, 370.

factors. The true self is above all becoming and non-becoming. These are attributes of mutable things which for that very reason ought to be declared as not being the self or as being the non-self.

It may be argued against this that in a *sutta* of the *Khandhasamyutta* incorporated in the *Mahāvagga*<sup>7</sup> the selfhood of the *khandhas* is denied owing precisely to their lack of spontaneous self-possession so that it is not possible effectively to say, "Let it be like this for me, let it not be like this for me"<sup>8</sup>. The objector may conclude that such reasoning supposes by contrast the pure self to be possessed of spontaneous self-mastery, a thing disapproved by the Buddha in the passage being the object of our present analysis.

We distinguished in our above quoted book between the existential self and the metaphysical self, maintaining that early Buddhism was in favour of the reality of both. Now we may catalogue the declarations on the self here discussed as belonging either to the self as moral agent or —more fittingly, we believe— as referring to the ontological nature of the self. Here we meet with a case where the basic principles enunciated at the beginning of this article come in useful as solution to the difficulty. In the case of the existential self too, any reference to it that smacks of conceit is rejected as being vitiated by the *sakkāyaditṭhi* which in no way contemplates the pure and true self. We find on the other hand plenty of testimonies where the self, as moral agent, is presented as engaged in an orthodox activity of self-exertion, self-control and self-purification<sup>9</sup>, and in addition to this we find in the Nikāyas multiple manifestations or declarations of the self made either by the Buddha or his disciples not liable in any way to the censure of *asmimāna*<sup>10</sup>. But the pronouncement found here, to wit, "Not being so, I will make it to be like this", is through and through permeated by conceit.

If we choose to relate this declaration with the metaphysical self we must say that nothing being mutable by its very nature may be the essential self or ontologically related to it. It makes,

<sup>7</sup> S II-III, p. 295 f., *sutta* 59. Cfr. Mahāvaga, p. 16, *Mahākkhandaka*, 8, 20-23.

<sup>8</sup> Obviously this does not mean that the Buddha denied all possible control of the *khandhas* by the self as moral agent, otherwise there would be no sense in his exhortations to master the senses and in the exercises prescribed by him for the suppression of a kind of perception and its being substituted by a higher one until complete restraint of perception is reached. Cfr. D I, *Paṭṭhapādasutta*. What the text denies regarding the *khandhas* is an essential freedom and spontaneous self-possession.

<sup>9</sup> See *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, p. 94 f.

<sup>10</sup> See *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, p. 68 f.

therefore, no sense to say of the metaphysical self, "Not being so, I will make it to be like this". In any case, we should keep in mind the exegetical principle that all non-Buddhists—to whom doubtless the declarations in point belong—are reckoned as being led by the conviction that the existential factors are the self or belong to the self.

It is then clear that the Buddha's disapproval of the declarations on the self as endowed with form and limited, etc. does not entail the denial of the reality of the true self, it is only directed against the self of the heretics. Regarding those who are utterly disinclined to make such declarations it is not pointed out that they are so because there is no self at all—such denial is never found in the Nikāyas—, but because they are not in the grip of any asmimanic inclination or obsession. The very fact of saying that they do not make such declarations *concerning the self*, far from denying even implicitly the reality of the self, seems on the contrary implicitly to assert it.

The *Mahānidānasutta* goes on with an exposé of different ways of contemplating the self into which non-Buddhists are bound to lapse. The text refers to the following assertions: "Feeling is my self", "Feeling is not my self, my self is not an experiencer of feeling", "My self is not feeling, neither is it a non-experiencer of feeling, my self experiences feeling since my self has feeling as its property"<sup>11</sup>.

Regarding the first statement, "Feeling is my self", the Buddha distinguishes three kinds of feelings, i. e. pleasurable, painful and neither-painful-nor-pleasurable, and poses the following question, "Of these three feelings, which one do you regard as self?". He continues saying that at the time when one experiences a pleasurable feeling he does not experience either a painful feeling or one that is neither-painful-nor-pleasurable, similar being the case at the time of experiencing any of the other two feelings. He doubtless means to say that in such case one would have a three-fold self.

Besides, one who on experiencing a given feeling says, "This is my self", coincidentally with the cessation of that feeling he will have to say. "My self has vanished". The vanishing of the self can be accepted only in the context of nihilism as applied to the human being, but nihilism is a heresy<sup>12</sup> and the Buddha was not a nihilist<sup>13</sup>. The strength of the argument lies directly on the fact that the self ought to stay always identical, under the penalty, otherwise, of contradiction, since any change in the

<sup>11</sup> D II, p. 53, *Mahānidānasutta*, 27.

<sup>12</sup> D I, pp. 30-32, *Brahmajālasutta*, 84-92.

<sup>13</sup> See *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, p. 269 f.

self will make the latter become another. We moreover know that anything that is mutable by nature is not that of which one may truly say, "This is mine, this I am, this is my self" <sup>14</sup>.

As to the second statement, "Feeling is not my self, my self is not an experiencer of feeling", the Buddha argues *ad hominem* in the following way, "But, friend, when nothing at all is felt, is it possible to say 'I am'?" The answer to the question being a negative one, the Buddha concludes, "Therefore, Ānanda, herein one cannot indulge either in saying, 'Feeling is not my self, my self is not an experiencer of feeling' " <sup>15</sup>.

The expression 'I am' introduced here by the Buddha indicates that the utterer of such assertion was under the sway of *asmimāna*, i. e. the conceit 'I am', and therefore affected by the *sakkāyaditṭhi* <sup>16</sup>. Or as we say somewhere else, in this case, the saying that engages our attention is a feeling and a consequent perception and therefore annuls itself, since the supposition underlying here is that feeling and perception are entirely absent. In any case, one who identifies the self with feeling, cannot say, in the absence of the latter, that the self exists. Consequently he can in no way give expression to the utterance 'I am'.

The mode of dealing with the third statement is similar to the preceding one, only the expression used to discard it is more forcefully worded, "If then, friend, feelings would cease totally and in every way without remainder, would it be possible to say 'I am'?" Having obtained a negative answer to the question, the Buddha concludes, "Therefore, Ānanda, herein one cannot indulge either in saying, 'My self is not feeling, neither is it a non-experiencer of feeling, my self experiences feeling since my self has feeling as its property' " <sup>17</sup>.

The holder of this view does not identify feeling with the self, but on the other hand he does not deny that the self experiences feeling, he asserts that feeling is a property of the self. In the language of the Nikāyas this is like saying that feeling is not the self, that it is something belonging to the self (*attaniya*). This is denied in the Nikāyas in so many words <sup>18</sup>.

The final conclusion to all this runs as follows,

"Now when a bhikkhu, Ānanda, does not regard feeling as the self, does not regard the self as non-experiencer of feeling, does not hold the opinion that 'My self experiences feelings, since my self has feeling as its property', he, abstaining from

<sup>14</sup> D II, pp. 53-54, *Mahānidānasutta*, 28-29.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54, para 30.

<sup>16</sup> See *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, p. 222 f.

<sup>17</sup> D II, p. 54, *Mahānidānasutta*, 31.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. S IV, pp. 50-51, *Saṃyatanasāmyutta*, 85.

such considerations, is not attached to anything in the world. Being detached, he is not troubled. Being untroubled, he attains *nibbāna as regards his very self*. He knows, 'Destroyed is birth, lived is the brahma-life, done is what was to be done, there will be no more living in these conditions'. And regarding the bhikkhu whose mind is thus released, if anyone should say, 'The Tathāgata exists after death, such is his view', that is not proper; 'The Tathāgata does not exist after death, such is his view', that is not proper; 'The Tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death, such is his view', that is not proper; 'The Tatāgata, both neither exists nor does not exist after death, such is his view', that is no proper. What is the reason for that? Whatever expression or ways of expression are there, whatever designation or ways of verbal designation are there, whatever knowledge or sphere of knowledge are there, whatever round of existence goes on, from all that the bhikkhu is set free by insight. To say of the bhikkhu who is set free from all that by insight, 'He does not know, he does not see', is not proper..."<sup>19</sup>.

Of all the ways of regarding the self found at he beginning of the quotation, the second one, to wit, regarding the self as non-experiencer of feeling is an orthodox one from our own point of view that maintains the reality of the true self. But we must apply here our exegetical principle. In the context, the holders of such opinion maintain it within the frame of the *sakkāyadi-tt̥hi*. This an enlightened person will never do.

Mark that the Buddha after rejecting all the three heretical ways of contemplating the self states that the bhikkhu free from such considerations is also free from all attachment, is free from all disturbance, *attains nibbāna as regards his very self (pacca-taññeva)*, where the reference to the self cannot be said to be tainted with *asmimāna* as was the case with those whose expressions regarding the self he rejects. That the true self is not ontologically related to the existential factors becomes indisputable when we take it as the Tathāgata, which in the text stands for the true self<sup>20</sup>. The Tathāgata, here the true self, is beyond all possible description either as regards feeling or any other of the existential factors, and this applies to him not only after death but even in this very life. Thus we are told,

"The devas, bhikkhus, together with Indra, Brahmā and Prajāpati, even when looking for him, do not find a bhikkhu so liberated in mind being able to say 'Here has settled the cons-

<sup>19</sup> D II, pp. 54-55, *Mahānidānasutta*, 32.

<sup>20</sup> See *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, p. 268.

ciousness of the Tathāgata'. Why so? I say, bhikkhus, that a Tathāgata is untraceable even in this very life"<sup>21</sup>.

Here we find explicitly stated the equivalence in meaning between the liberated bhikkhu and the Tathāgata. The bhikkhu in question is still alive, but his very self has nothing to do with the existential factors and is therefore untraceable, being free from what could be a criterion of determination and description.

We come, therefore, to the same conclusion arrived at before. The disapproval on Buddha's part of the three ways of considering the self apply to those who hold them impelled by conceit, without implying thereby a denial of the reality of the true self in an absolute way.

### THE SELF AND REINCARNATION IN THE PAYASIRAJAÑASSUTA

Leaving aside for the time being the ontological nature of the self, we turn our attention to what we came to call the existential self trying as well to establish its reality<sup>22</sup>. This *sutta* is particularly interesting, since to all appearances it was composed after the death of the Budrha, thus reflecting the mentality of his immediate followers.

Pāyāsi was a noble man, a high courtier living a comfortable life owing to the gift of a large domain granted to him by King Pasenadi of Kosala. There he ruled as if he were a king. He conceived and evil heretical view to this effect: "Neither is there any other world, nor are there beings reborn without parents [in heaven or in hell], nor is there retribution or fruit of works well done or ill done". He went to see Kumāra Kassapa to argue him into his own view<sup>23</sup>.

We shall insist only on the passages where Pāyāsi's arguments are based on the assumption of there being no soul that after death will transmigrate either to hell or heaven or to any other existence in order to reap the fruit of its deeds.

Pāyāsi sets forth his agnosticism in this matter by means of arguments that appeal not to philosophical reasoning but to sensorial perception. He shows himself to be a convinced materialist in tune with the opulent condition of his life.

<sup>21</sup> M I, p. 185, *Alagaddūpamasutta*, 16.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. the first part of our *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, specially, "The Self and Rebirth", p. 143 f.

<sup>23</sup> This *sutta* is found at D II, p. 236.



*The criminal dying in a tightly closed jar*<sup>24</sup>

Pāyāsi refers in the first place to a criminal thief on whom the death penalty was to be inflicted. Suppose such a man was to be confined in a jar tightly closed and placed on the fire until he was dead. Then the mouth of the jar would be carefully opened to see whether the soul of the man could be seen coming out. The non-appearance of the soul would be a proof against there being another world or retribution and fruit of deeds well done or ill done, since that would prove the inexistence of the subject of retribution.

To dispose of this argument, Kassapa resorts to a reasoning in the line of Tylor's animistic theory, but for the fact that we are not confronted here with the primitive people postulated by this theory but with people living in a highly philosophical culture.

On being questioned by Kassapa, Pāyāsi confesses that when in the presence of his attendants he falls asleep at siesta-time he sees in dreams gardens, groves, countries and lakes and takes pleasure in them, but his attendants do not see his soul coming out of his body to go to those places and coming back to it the moment he awakes. This obviously evinces the fact of the invisibility of the soul and the impossibility of observing its exit from the jar so carefully prepared for the experiment.

This is a mere *agumentum ad hominem*. An orthodox Buddhist could not figure the self coming out of the body all by itself and having sensorial experiences, unless he thought of it as accompanied by a body made of mind and therefore invisible.

*The living body and the corpse*<sup>25</sup>

Pāyāsi continues arguing against the existence of the soul with an argument based on the difference in weight and other qualities between the living body of a criminal before execution and after it. He says that the living body is lighter, softer and more supple, while the dead body is heavier, stiffer and unwieldier.

Kassapa answers with another, according to him, observable fact, making Pāyāsi confess that a red-hot iron ball is lighter, softer and more supple, while the same iron ball, when cold, is heavier, stiffer and less supple. Then Kassapa applies the simile to the noted difference between the living and the dead body.

When vitality, vital heat and intellect concur with the body then the latter is lighter, softer and more supple; separated from

<sup>24</sup> D II, pp. 247-248, *Pāyāsisutta*, 16-17.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 249-250, paras 18-19.

the body, make the latter be heavier, stiffer and more rigid. Kassapa's words reflect the Buddhist mentality which discarded the usage of the term *jīva*, the soul, as meaning the self, while in other shramanic circles, like Jainism it meant both the principle of life and the self<sup>26</sup>.

Buddhism altogether dissociated the self from all commitment to the psycho-physiological processes which were declared dependent on the principles of vitality, vital heat and intellect. It is on vitality that the working of the five senses depends, while vitality and vital heat depend mutually on each other. On the other hand the intellect is the repository of the senses, being affected by the reactions of all of them. The body dies when it is forsaken by the principle of life, vital heat and intellect<sup>27</sup>.

That the body and the intellect are not the self is often-time proclaimed in the Pāli texts<sup>28</sup>. Of the three entities mentioned by Kassapa, the one that could more likely correspond to the *jīva* of other shramanic circles in so far as it stood for the principle of life, would be *āyu*. But in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*<sup>29</sup> we are told that the Buddha, being at the point of death, abandoned his constituent of life or vital principle (*āyusaṅkāra*) with full deliberation. In the *śloka* that follows he is said to abandon something more, viz, the constituent of rebirth. And he does all this while being in love with the inner self (*ajjhaattarato*), where we observe a sharp contrast between the constituent of life and the constituent of rebirth and the self which is all the while the object of undivided attention.

Coming back to Pāyāsi's argument, this seems to be based on the fact that if *jīva* was a reality at all, its absence would entail a lessening in weight while the observable facts seem to reverse the expected conclusion. In the buddhist context just explained, where the principle of life has nothing to do with what in man is

<sup>26</sup> See our articles, *Questions on Self and Perception in the Poṭṭhapādasutta*, Boletín de la Asociación Española de Orientalistas, 1980, p. 72 f. In other shramanic circles, like Jainism, it meant both the principle of life and the self. This rejection however, of the term *jīva* as meaning the self is not an absolute one as will be seen later on in this very article.

<sup>27</sup> M I, pp. 364-365, *Mahāvedallasutta*, 9-10.

<sup>28</sup> See particularly S II-III, pp. 358-360, *Khandhasaṃyutta*, 95, where the body is first compared to a lump of foam; feeling, to a bubble; perception, to a mirage; intellect or consciousness, to an illusion all without essence; while in the metrical part of the *sutta* the body is singled out to be contemplated as essenceless, particularly when abandoned by the vital principle, vital heat and intellect, reduced to a senseless object, a prey for carnivorous animals. Thus will a bhikkhu cast off the fetters and making a refuge for the self (*kareyya saraṇattano*), attain the unailing state (*accutaṃ padamī*). Mark the connection between making a refuge for the self and attaining the unailing state.

<sup>29</sup> D II, p. 84, para 39.

the self, Kassapa's rejoinder comes to say that the stiffening and the dead weight of the corpse argue only against the presence within the body of vitality, vital heat and intellect, not in any way against the existence of the soul (*jīva*) in so far as it is held by the opponent to be the self in man.

### *Vivisection*<sup>30</sup>

Pāyāsi has then recourse to an experiment of vivisection performed on the body of a criminal, stripping off cuticle and skin, and flesh, and sinews, and bones, and marrow, turning the body about, beating it, shaking it, to see if perchance the soul is seen coming out of it. It is not seen. On the other hand no one will say that the soul continues staying in the corpse, since any dead body is provided with all the senses but shows no reaction to the objects of sense.

Leaving aside for the time being the argument of vivisection, Kassapa undertakes the discussion of the second part. He describes the behaviour of some silly and rude people who having heard the sound of a trumpet would cox it to emit by itself that pleasant sound, obviously without success.

Applying the simile to the body, Kassapa says that the cause of the body's sensibility and its capacity for movement is precisely its conjunction with vitality, vital heat and intellect, not in any way without them, even as the trumpet needs the trumpeteer to emit the sound. This reflects the Buddhist opinion that the senses, their objects, sensorial consciousness and sensorial contact, forming a complete system with the existential factors, are declared to be that of which one can say, "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self"<sup>31</sup>. There is a passage where the *khandhas*—including the body as the field of action of the senses—are denied personality, this being denoted in twelve different ways, one of which is precisely *jīva*<sup>32</sup>. Consequently for a Buddhist the senses are in no relation to *jīva*, as the self, either in being or in action.

Obviously this does not detract from the moral agent, as representative of the true self on the existential level, being able to exercise its mastery over the senses<sup>33</sup>, a mastery leading finally to their complete restraint<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 250-254, paras 20-23.

<sup>31</sup> Cfr. *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, p. 166 f.

<sup>32</sup> K IV, pt. II, p. 194, *Cullaniddeśa*, 2, 15, 88.

<sup>33</sup> See *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, pp. 62, 111, 117, 142. Such control postulates the reality of the moral agent, cfr. *Ibid.* pp. 142-143.

<sup>34</sup> True, once a specific sensorial contact takes place the corresponding feeling and consciousness are unavoidable, but the moral agent may react against

Pāyāsi's next argument is based solely on vivisection practised on the body of a criminal and not finding any soul in the process. Kassapa answers again with a simile. There was a boy who in the absence of his guru, a fire-tending Jaṭila, and against the latter's advice, had let the fire go out. He had also been told that in case of such mischance taking place he ought to rekindle it again. Taking the piece of wood used for kindling the fire by attrition, he cut it into ever smaller pieces, even pounding the tiny pieces in a mortar and winnowing the resulting powder in the wind seeking all the while for the fire concealed in it. On his master's return, the silly youngster was reproved by him and shown the right method to elicit fire out of wood. The application of the simile is as follows,

"Even so, prince, you are silly and unlearned when trying to search for the other world in an improper way".

Although the text speaks explicitly of a search for the other world, it applies directly to the search for the soul on whose existence depended for Pāyāsi the existence of such a world.

Kassapa's way of arguing reminds us of a passage in the *Samyuttanikāya* offering the simile of the lute whose sound cannot be found however much the lute is cut into pieces. The simile is then applied to the *khandhas*. However minutely investigated one cannot find in them any "I" or "I am" or "Mine"<sup>35</sup>.

Note that, if the text just alluded to has to yield any sense, the "I" and "I am" and "Mine" not found in the *khandhas* cannot refer to the heretical notion of the self, since this notion is obviously founded in the *khandhas*. Nevertheless an illustrious author contends that "all the manifold conceptions of a self can have reference only to the five aggregates, or to any of them, or several of them"<sup>36</sup>.

The expressions "I", "I am" and "Mine" represent here the true self which certainly cannot be found in the *khandhas* and is not one of those "manifold conceptions of the self". For the expression "conceptions of the self" would imply a positive enquiry followed by a positive or negative assertion on the nature of the self, an activity invariably tainted by *asmimāna*, while the Pāli

---

it by means of complete detachment (S IV, pp. 186-187, *Veḍānāsamyyutta*, 6). On the other hand, a complete control of the senses may ward off those same senses from any contact with their objects or lead their activity to the final restraint of *nibbāna* (K V, pp. 444-445, *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, 2, 10, 2, 30). Thus the possibility of eschewing the very condition for the arising of sensorial feeling and consciousness must be admitted, otherwise liberation as *nirodha* would be impossible.

<sup>35</sup> S IV, pp. 175-176, *Salāyatanaśamyutta*, 246.

<sup>36</sup> Cfr. *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, p. 171.

texts speak often of the true self in a direct manner divested of any conceitful search into its ontological nature.

Such asmimanic preoccupation regarding the self and referring explicitly to the *anattā* doctrine, is clear in a passage of the *Saṃyuttanikāya*<sup>37</sup> where both the expressions: "There is a self for me" (*atthi me attā*) and "There is no self for me" (*natthi me attā*) are branded as conceitful or, what is the same, as heretical. If the advocates of the *anattā* doctrine contend that they maintain it without any taint of *asmimāna* we do not see why the same could not be recognized of their opponents.

### *Final reflections*

Let us now reflect on Pāyāsi's arguments and Kassapa's counterarguments.

Pāyāsi's view was set against a vital point of early Buddhism, namely the doctrine of works and their retribution (*kiriya-vāda*). He could not be induced to believe in the existence of another life where karma would yield its fruit for lack of a soul as moral agent and subject of retribution. Kassapa's reasoning is not directed to disabuse Pāyāsi of his believe in the soul being the moral agent and subject of retribution but to expose the flimsiness of his arguments which in no way invalidated its reality, showing thereby that his basic assumption could not stand.

In Pāyāsi's opinion, it was absurd to think of another world without a *jīva* or self that would assure the personal continuity of the individual in the process of transmigration. This basic postulate is not refuted by Kassapa, on the contrary he appears to accept it all through. He turns his efforts to show that all the arguments against the existence of the soul *as self* have no validity at all.

### VAJIRĀ'S VERSES

We undertake now the discussion of the famous Vajirā's verses, which are o *locus classicus* for the advocates of the *anattā* doctrine<sup>38</sup>.

#### *Vajirā's encounter with Mara*

A bhikkhunī called Vajirā, after having eaten what had been given to her in the alms round, retired to a thick forest for

<sup>37</sup> S I, pp. 12-13, *Sabbasavasutta*, 5-6.

<sup>38</sup> Thus these verses are quoted in the *Kathāvatthu*, the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Milindapañha*. The passage being investigated is found in S I, pp. 135-136, *Bhikkhunīsamyutta*, 10.

rest and meditation at the root of a tree. Māra, the Evil One, desirous to frighten her and to distract her from her concentration came up to her and uttered the following couplet,

“By whom is a being (*satto*) produced? Who is the maker of a being?  
How is a being born? How a being ceases to be?”.

The term “being” used by Māra could, absolutely speaking, connote personality. Thus in the *Cullaniddesa* we find this term associated with other words connoting personality like *jīvo*, *puriso*, *attā*, *ahaṃ*, *mama*. All of them are gainsaid as not applying to the existential factors (*khandhas*)<sup>39</sup>. This shows the vacuity of the latter in tune with a text where the world is said to be void of the self (*attā*) or of what belongs to the self (*attaniya*). The text itself explicitly recognizes that the senses (mind included), their objects, their contact with the corresponding objects and the consciousness thence arising are void of the self or of what belongs to the self<sup>40</sup>.

Māra, the Evil One, is the personification of whatever is samsaric and therefore able to see merely the empirical man and to lose sight of the person who has put aside his empirical adjuncts or exercises himself in that direction<sup>41</sup>. Vajirā immediately realized what the real purport of Māra’s words was. That is why she replied,

“What are you referring to when you say “being”? Māra you are in the grip of heretical views (*diṭṭhigataṃ nu te*),  
This is a mere congeries of conditioned factors, no “being” is found here”.

Now the first question may only mean that Vajirā was not entrapped by Māra’s words, but was able to see through them. It may convey, nay we believe it does convey Vajirā’s wonderment at such improper use of the term *satto* in the context. Additionally it also gives to understand that there is a proper way of using the term *satto* which escapes Māra’s comprehension to which we shall refer later on. This gives us the right view point to interpret the verses that follow, which viewed in this way do not contain an absolute denial of *satto* or of *attā* in so far as both may be equivalent. Vajirā goes on,

“Even as by the proper assemblage of parts the use of the word “chariot” becomes possible,

<sup>39</sup> K IV, pt. II, p. 194, *Cullaniddesa*, 2, 15, 88.

<sup>40</sup> S IV, pp. 50-51, *Saṅgāyatanasamṃyutta*, 85.

<sup>41</sup> See *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, p. 278, f. Ch. 13, “Moral transcendence of the Self”.

In the same way, once the existential factors come into existence, the conventional use of the term *satto* becomes possible.

Nay, only pain arises and only pain endures,  
Nothing but pain arises and nothing but pain comes to cease".

In accordance with what was suggested above, Vajirā does not say that once the existential factors come into existence, then and *only then* the use of the term *satto* becomes possible, but simply that given the existence of the *khandhas* the conventional denomination of the term *satto*, as applied to them, becomes possible.

This tells us nothing beyond what we find in so many passages where referring to the *khandhas* we are told one ought to say, "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self" and that therefore to call the *khandhas* "self" will be not only a conventional usage of the term but a heretical application of it.

In addition to this, Vajirā's words leave open the possibility of a proper usage of the term *satto*. That this is so will be substantiated by us below. Before that, we come to comment on Vajirā's last words.

#### *Arisal and cessation of pain*

We see Vajirā emphatically saying that only pain arises, only pain endures, and only pain comes to cease, giving to understand that the *khandhas* are identified with pain. The adherents to the doctrine of absolute *anattā* may see in these words a confirmation of their persuasion that there is only pain in process of becoming, enduring while it lasts and ceasing when it passes away, there being no place left for any self.

No one will find a more general statement bearing on this than *sabbam dukkham*, a universal statement of a seemingly absolute character. But the *sutta* dealing with this topic comes in a series of them which discuss similar universal statements, all of which are headed by a *sutta* explaining what the exact meaning of *sabbam* in all of them is. This *sabbam* embraces primarily the senses (mind included) and their objects<sup>42</sup>. In the *suttas* that follow *sabbam* is declared to be comprehensive of all kinds of sensorial contact, of the feelings dependent on such contacts, of the consciousness resulting from them, etc.

Therefore, statements such as "all is impermanent", "all is painful", "all is non-self", do not go beyond other statements found in other parts of the Nikāyas. Accordingly, the *anattā* doc-

<sup>42</sup> S IV, p. 15, *Saṅgāyatanasamṃyutta*, 23.

trine, no matter how universal its expression may be, has always a relative value, referring only to what is empirical.

Coming back to Vajirā's words, we quite understand that if "all is painful", then only pain arises, only pain stays while it endures, and only pain ceases when it passes away, for pain is to be found solely in what is impermanent, and nothing but what is impermanent can be said to arise, precariously to endure for some time, and eventually to cease. But we well know that what is impermanent, painful, and mutable by nature is not the self. The true self is not subject to arising, to decay, and to destruction.

We thus conclude that Vajirā's words leave the real *satto* or self untouched. Otherwise, if there is in man nothing more than the impermanent and painful *khandhas* when they vanish man will also vanish and there will be no difference between the profession of absolute *anattā* and the heretical profession of the annihilationists'.

#### *Discreditable usages of the term satto*

We find in the Nikāyas some disreputable usages of the term *satto*. Thus we see in the *Samyuttanikāyā* how to a question of Rādha, "How far, Lord, [one] is called a being (*satto'ti vuccati*)?", the Buddha answers,

"That delight, that clinging, that enjoyment, that craving felt concerning the body (feeling, perception, inner complexes, consciousness), wherein [one] is attached (*satto*) and entangled (*visatto*), by reason of that [one] is called a being (*satto*)"<sup>43</sup>.

Again,

"A being, a being, thus, Lord, the saying goes. Pray, Lord, how far could there be a being or the designation of a being?"

Where there is eye, Samiddhi, where there are visible objects, where there is sight-consciousness, where there are things cognizable by sight-consciousness, where there is ear... where there is tongue... where there is body... where there is mind, where there are mental objects, where there is mental consciousness, where there are things cognizable by mental consciousness, there it is that a being or the designation of a being exists".

The second part of the *sutta* states just the opposite, where those things are not found no being or the designation of a being is possible<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> S II-III, p. 403, *Rādhasamyutta*, 2. Quoted at K IV, pt. I, pp. 20-21, *Mahāniddeśa*, 1, 2, 7.

<sup>44</sup> S IV, p. 35, *Saṅgāyatanasamyutta*, 66.



Finally, in the *Mahāniddeśa*, while commenting on *satto guhāyam bahunābhicchinno*, we are given as synonyms of *satto*: *vi-satto*, *laggo*, *laggito*, *palibuddho*, giving the idea of something entangled, attached, hindered, coming to the conclusion that *satto ti lagganādhivanam*, i. e. *satto* is a designation of adherence or attachment”<sup>45</sup>.

One may go further still and see in such expressions as are used in these contexts, namely *satto ti vuccati*, *sattopaññati* and *lagganādhivacanam* sundry echoes of Vajirā’s *satto ti sammuti*, indicating that in all these cases *satto* is a mere conventional denomination, nothing real.

On the strength of such testimonies as these we would be bound to acknowledge that there is no real being anywhere, the term being constituting a conventional name for a conglomerate of existential factors including the senses and their functions. Moreover if ever *satto* thus used coincided entirely with *attā* the conventionality of the latter would be unavoidable. But there are other texts to consider showing that thus to simplify the problem is to distort it.

But there is another way out of the difficulty. The passage of the *Mahāniddeśa* does not seem to comment upon *satto* as “being” but upon *satto* as an attributive adjective meaning “attached” and qualifying *naro* in the original. Could it not be that such is the connotation of the word whenever found in what we have called disreputable usages of the term *satto*? The assumption would not be far fetched, for the *Mahāniddeśa*, after making such commentarial display on the word *satto*, quotes a text from the Nikāyas where it is said, “That delight, that clinging, that enjoyment, that craving... of the mind applied to the body (to feeling, to perception, to inner complexes, to consciousness), because one becomes attached and entangled therein, for that reason one is called *satto*”. Since the quotation is given to illustrate the commentary on the word *satto*, which is an adjective, it is presumed that the term has the same value in both. This interpretation, if accepted, will dispose of all the passages where *satto* appears in a discreditable context, demanding for *satto* a translation such as “one who is attached” —an adjective substantivally used— and not as “being”.

#### *The term satto used with a general meaning*

The term *satto* is a times used in a general way with the meaning of “people” or “men” without any special connotation. Thus

<sup>45</sup> K IV, pt. I, pp. 20-21, *Mahāniddeśa*, 1, 2, 7.

the Buddha says referring to those who entertain heretical opinions not meeting with his approval,

“And what is the reason for that? There are, Cunda, some people (*sattā*) holding different opinions in this matter. And in what regards this opinion I do not consider anyone comparable to myself, let alone superior”<sup>46</sup>.

Thus also the *Nidanasamyutta* speaks of persons (*sattā*) associating and coming together according to their inward dispositions so that those of base inclinations associate with their equals while the same is done by those bent on goodness and well inclined<sup>47</sup>.

*Satto as the connecting link between existences*

Other texts speak of *satto* as the connecting personal link between the successive stages of transmigration. The clearest testimony of this is found in those passages that describe how by means of the “divine eye” surpassing that of men, the Tathāgata or a bhikkhu of purified mind is able to see beings (*sattā*) deceasing and being reborn according to their karma. The way of speaking marks the difference between the being involved and his body—the repository of the existential factors—using the expression “at the breaking of the body, after death (*kāyassa bheda param maraṇā*)”<sup>48</sup>.

It is true that the expression “appearance of the existential factors” (*khandhānam pātubhāvo*) used in describing the meaning of rebirth does not by itself demand a connecting link between a present birth and a former existence, but this expression is followed by “acquisition of the operational spheres of sense” (*āyatānam paṭilābho*)—requiring an acquisitional agent—and both expressions are connected with the introductory words that speak of “the birth, rise, entrances... of the different beings (*tesaṃ tesaṃ sattānam*) in their corresponding realm or group (*tamhi tamhi sattānikāye*). This perseverance of the being (*satto*) is as well indicated by referring to death as “the discarding or giving up of the body” (*kāyavarassa nikkhepo*) on the part of beings<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> D II, p. 108, *Pāsādikasutta*, 31.

<sup>47</sup> S II-III, p. 131 f., *Nidanasamyutta*, 14 f.

<sup>48</sup> D I, p. 72, *Sāmaññaphaṇasutta*, 97; M I, p. 100, *Mahāsīhanādasutta*, 8; M II, pp. 13-14, *Kandarakasutta*, 15.

<sup>49</sup> M III, pp. 334-335, *Saccavibhaṅgasutta*, 3. See other similar quotations in *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, p. 347. The whole chapter may be consulted. The persistence of the “being” or *satto* through an incalculable number of previous existences, constituting a process without beginning, is a necessary assumption for some of the *sutta* in the *Amataggasaṃyutta* (S II-III, p. 151 f.), for instance, *suttas* 3, 4, 9, 10, etc. Confining ourselves to the last one, we are told that the bones left behind after all the deaths undergone

This condition of link between successive existences attributed to *satto* is consonant with the principle that

“Beings, bhikkhus, are such as have *kamma* as their own, are heirs to their *kamma*, have *kamma* as their matrix, are kinsmen of *kamma* and have *kamma* as their prop. Whatever *kamma* they do —beneficial or harmful— they become heirs to it”<sup>50</sup>.

Obviously the heir has to be previously to his getting the inheritance that corresponds to him. Thus the being that now exists will be an heir to his karma in a future existence.

### *The term satto connected with liberation*

We find the term *satto* connected with efforts leading to liberation and even attaining to it. But the “being” that attains the ultimate aim in liberation cannot be the one dealt with in Vajirā’s pronouncement or in the quotations akin to it given above. All these texts speak of a being which is not a real substantial entity but an accidental complex of psycho-somatic phenomena while liberation consists precisely in the absolute abolishment of those phenomena. Such being the case, liberation would be the being’s destruction, not its liberation. A being like that would have a merely conventional value. But something more than a verbal reality regarding the term *satto* seems to be postulated by the following words,

“This, bhikkhus, is the one-way path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of grief and lamentation, for the bringing to an end of pain and mental uneasiness, for the adoption of the right method, for the realization of *nibbāna*, to wit these four stations of mindfulness”<sup>51</sup>.

We find here a “subjective genitive”<sup>52</sup>, *sattānam*, which preceding in the original all the names of action that follow becomes the active agent of all of them. The names of action are: purification, overcoming, bringing to an end, adoption, realiza-

---

during a kalpa by a single person (*eka puggala*) would form a pile as big as Mount Vepulla.

<sup>50</sup> A IV, p. 338, *Dasakanipata*, 21, 6. In the course of the *sutta* this principle is given repeatedly in a summary form as *yam karoti tena uppajjati*, where both the verbs have one and the same subject, viz, the being whose transit to another existence is at the time being spoken of. See also, “Fastened to *kamma* are beings going round like the wheel-axle pins of a cart” (K I, p. 368, *Suttanipāta*, 3, 9, 253).

<sup>51</sup> D II, p. 235, *Mahāsatiṭṭhānasutta*, 34; M I, p. 76, *Satiṭṭhānasutta*, 2.

<sup>52</sup> V. Perniola, *A Grammar of the Pāli Language*, Colombo, 1958, p. 166.

tion. Hence beings are really purified, really bring to an end grief and lamentation, etc., and really realize *nibbāna*, and the reality of the actions involved postulates the reality of their subject.

Besides, the agent becomes the percipient of the fruits of the corresponding actions. To put it more clearly, with reference to the last action enumerated, beings realize *nibbāna* and therefore are liberated. Moreover, the four stations of mindfulness, which stand in the text in causal relation towards the accomplishment of purification and the rest, do not act by themselves but are consequent to the liberating activity of the beings in question.

To say the contrary would be to subscribe to Makkhali Gosāla's heretical opinion that, "There is no cause, there is no reason for the defilement of beings (*sattānam*); without cause, without reason, beings (*sattā*) become impure. There is no cause, there is no reason for the purification of beings; without cause, without reason, beings are purified". The ultimate reason for this is expressed by him as follows, "There is no action of self, there is no action of another, there is no man's action, there is no [inner] strength, no [inner] potency, no vigour, no exertion on man's part"<sup>53</sup>.

We shall then be able to outline a complete circle of an immanent action which develops in the agent itself and under its initiative and finally devolves upon the same agent. In this respect *satto* acts even as *attā*<sup>54</sup>.

Now if the *satto*, in the context here studied, is the one that strives through the four stations of mindfulness towards the realization of *nibbāna* and the one that attains to it, then it cannot be the *satto* of Vajirā's utterance. This outlook, we believe, ought to serve as a frame for the correct understanding of the following dialogue between a *devatā* and the Buddha,

"Doest thou, Sir, know [the how of] deliverance, freedom and liberating discrimination of beings?"

"Yes, friend, I know..."

"And how then, Sir, dost thou know [the how of] deliverance, freedom, and liberating discrimination of beings?"

"By the extinction of delight in existence, by the extinction of perception and consciousness, by the restraint and stoppage of feelings, that is how, friend, I know [the how of] deliverance, freedom and liberating discrimination of beings"<sup>55</sup>.

A distinction is made here between "beings" that are meant to be liberated and those factors whose extinction is instrumen-

<sup>53</sup> D I, pp. 46-47, *Sāmaññaphalasuta*, 19.

<sup>54</sup> See *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, p. 98.

<sup>55</sup> S I, p. 4, *Devatāsaṃyutta*, 2.

tal in bringing about liberation. The factors whose extinction is necessary for the liberation of beings are those which in Vajirā's dialogue with Māra were said to constitute the heretical concept of *satto*, peculiar to one who overcome by the *sakkāyadit̥ṭhi* (*dit̥ṭhigataṃ nu te*), nay more being a quasi personification of it, could not see beyond those factors.

In consequence, the term *satto* as used by Māra and as used in the quotations just given cannot be one and the same, this militating against those who appealing to Vajirā's verses try to establish a universally conventional meaning for *satto* as well as for *attā*.

Within the line of thought being at present pursued the following quotation may be considered,

"Those beings (*sattā*) living in the world of form, as well as those in a formless world,

Ignorant of complete restraint, are bound to come to a new existence.

But those who having full knowledge of form, are not settled in what is formless,

Released in complete restraint, are persons (*janā*) who leave death behind"<sup>56</sup>.

The structure of the passage postulates the synonymous value of *sattā* in the first couplet and *janā* in the second. But in the first half *sattā* stands for what we have called the connecting personal link between different existences, while *janā* stands, in the second half of the passage, for the person that breaks away from the thralldom of continuous births and deaths by means of complete restraint. This restraint that in the passive sense means cessation does not mean cessation of the being but of what prevented it from attaining liberation. The beings here concerned do not cease as such, they are simply liberated.

It would be absurd to think that those beings were annihilated right away on coming to be "those who discard death or leave it behind" (*maccuhāyino*). It is well known that the Buddha vehemently rejected the accusation of being an annihilationist. With feelings of heart-felt indignation he repudiated such accusation as being a baseless ill-intentioned calumny. He flatly assured his audience that he never taught the "annihilation, destruction, perishing of the essential being (*sato sattassa*)", that he then and always had simply taught the annihilation of "pain"<sup>57</sup>.

A clear distinction is here drawn between what is annihilated and what is not. What is annihilated is "pain", which virtually

<sup>56</sup> K I, p. 385, *Suttanipāta*, 3, 12, 353-354.

<sup>57</sup> M I, p. 185, *Alagaddūpasamasutta*, 16.

coincides with what in Vajirā's utterance is said to be a mere collection of psycho-somatic phenomena not deserving the designation of *satto* as lacking any trace of substantiality, with the significant addition that only pain arises, only pain endures while it lasts and only pain ceases when it is restrained. What is not annihilated is the true being, which by the sheer law of opposition ought to be considered something substantial, not just a conventional entity.

The Tathāgata himself is called "the best of beings" in,

"Regarding all beings (*sattā*) [be they] footless, bypeded, quadrupeds, with many feet, endowed with form, formless, perceptive, non-perceptive, neither-perceptive-nor-non-perceptive among them [all] (*tesam*) a Tathāgata, an arahant fully enlightened is reckoned best"<sup>58</sup>.

*Tesam* in the text is a partitive genitive "used to indicate a whole of which a part is mentioned"<sup>59</sup>. This part, the best, is the Tathāgata. But the Tathāgata, as such, in as far as he is the best of beings, does in no way coincide with the *satto* of Vajirā's colloquy with Māra. Regarding the Tathāgata one ought to say that he is utterly freed from what in Vajirā's teaching is said to be a being only from the conventional point of view. Thus we read,

"The body of the Tathāgata, bhikkhus, stands before you with all that leads to a new becoming having been destroyed. So long as the body will stand, gods and men see him, after the dissolution of the body, beyond the end of life, gods, and men do not see him"<sup>60</sup>.

Herein the Tathāgata, the best of beings, is contrasted with his body, whose *raison d'être*, as far as a new becoming is concerned, has been nullified. The body is the support and the field of action of all the other *khandhas* which were denied by Vajirā the rank of "being". The body and all its accompaniment is veering to its destruction, not so the Tathāgata who, after the disappearance of his body, will cross the boundary of empirical reality without being destroyed, since the Buddha was not a nihilist, one who taught the annihilation of the essential being.

Once the boundary of empiricity has been outstripped by him, the Tathāgata is no more visible or comprehensible to gods and men. Hence we come to the conclusion that the being which is the Tathāgata transcends all modes of being and that is why of the Tathāgata, after death it may not be said that he is, that he is not, that both he is and he is not, that both neither is nor

<sup>58</sup> K I, p. 241, *Itivuttaka*, 3, 41.

<sup>59</sup> V. Perniola, *A Grammar of the Pāli Language*, p. 167.

is not. That of the Tathāgata after death it may not be said "He is" does not imply the complete obliteration of the Tathāgata, the denial of his reality, as this would be sheer annihilationism. It means that none of our categories of being will be applicable to him, since all these categories will be valid only on the empirical level already surpassed by the Tathāgata. The same will apply to not being, being and not being at the same time, neither being nor *Satto and attā*

### *Satto and attā*

We wish now to confront two texts, one speaking of *satto* and another one speaking of *attā*. This confrontation will confirm our point of view. The first one comes in a context that gives a detailed explanation of the Four Noble Truths,

"How is it, your reverences, that, when one does not have his own will, that also is pain? A wish like this, your reverences, arises in beings liable by nature to birth (*jātidhammanāṃ sattānaṃ*), 'Alas indeed, would we were not by nature liable to birth, and birth were not to happen to us'. But this is not to be had for the wishing"<sup>61</sup>.

The passage goes on speaking of beings that are by nature liable to old age, to sickness, to death, etc. If beings are "by nature" liable to birth, to old age, etc. one would say that they are of necessity subject to those phenomena and then the notion of being will coincide with the one mentioned in Vajirā's verses. But a second reading of the texts suggests that the term *satto*, as used in it, has a denotation wider than that. The first hint in this direction is given us by the fact that such beings are able to conceive the wish to be freed from birth, old age, etc. Even if we are told that this is not to be had for the wishing, it is not so that such a wish cannot be fulfilled.

We have adduced some evidence confirming the possibility of beings being purified to such an extent as to attain *nibbāna* which is the *accutaṃ padam*, discarding any new decease and rebirth, and the *amatam padam*, where no death can overtake the liberated being. This is not to be had for the wishing, for it requires to generate desire, to display a constant effort, to curb and impel the mind through different stages of purification, until the apex of perfection is reached. All the while, the agent of all those actions and the percipient of their fruit is none other than the being

<sup>60</sup> D I, p. 40, *Brahmajālasutta*, 147.

<sup>61</sup> M III, p. 336, *Saccavibhaṅgasutta*, 3.

who at the beginning experienced himself as liable to birth, old age, death, etc. and conceived the wish to be rid of them.

We find a similar usage of the term *attā* found in a context that speaks of the ariyan and unariyan quests. Referring to the latter,

Someone, bhikkhus, being by nature liable to birth because of self (*attanā jātidhammo*) seeks what is likewise by nature liable to birth, one who is by nature liable to old age because of self (*attanā jarādhammo*) seeks likewise what is by nature liable to old age..."<sup>62</sup>.

In this text, *attanā* may indicate either the cause of man being by nature liable to birth, etc. or limitation as when one is said to be kṣatriya by caste (*jāṭiyā*). In both cases the self spoken of is involved and even identified with those properties predicated of the man in question.

If no other usages of the term *attā* were available we could be justified to think that *attā* in the Nikāyas is only a conventional name for the empirical factors which are by nature liable to birth, old age, etc. But while describing the ariyan quests the vicious circle of being liable to those accidents is broken,

"Herein, bhikkhus, someone, being by nature liable to birth because of self (or as regards self), realizing the peril in what is by nature liable to birth, seeks the unborn, the unsurpassed security, *nibbāna*..."<sup>63</sup>.

This again shows that the self in man is not identified with what is by nature liable to birth, etc. and can aspire to complete freedom from birth etc. in *nibbāna*. That this is so can be proved by other usages of *attā*, of *attanā* in particular, as in *brahmabhūtena attanā viharati* found in several contexts as a recapitulation of the attainment of *nibbāna*<sup>64</sup>.

### Conclusion

We come then to the conclusion that the term *satto* is not used uniformly throughout the Nikāyas. Hence, picking up one of the divers usages of the term and trying to give it a universal value will constitute the fallacy of hasty generalization. In addition to this, every text has its own context and the sense of a given term depends primarily on the text which in its turn cannot be adequately understood without its context.

<sup>62</sup> M I, p. 210, *Pāsarāsisutta*, 5.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212, para 6.

<sup>64</sup> See *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, p. 115 f.



The term *satto* may be used in a general way, apart from the question whether it may or may not refer to the essential part of man. It may also be used as expressing the intervening personal link between existences. It may connote the real man, as moral agent, who strives for purification and final liberation. It may stand for the very substance of man, whose eventual disintegration can never be accepted if the blame of annihilationism is to be avoided. It may, finally, have a heretical meaning when the term *satto*, as meaning the substance in man, is applied to what in man is not that substance and does not belong to it. To sum up, the term *satto* may display all the meanings conveyable by the term *attā*.

### SELF IN THE ALAGADDŪPAMASUTTA

This *sutta* exemplifies in itself the process of enlargement undergone by many other *suttas* of the *Majjhimanikāya*. The very title indicates that the original *sutta* extended only as far as the paragraph where the simile of the snake is given: in order to illustrate the contrast between people who do not grasp the Buddha's teaching in a proper way, thus finding it harmful, and other people grasping it properly and deriving profit from it. This fact is illustrated by the contrast between people who know how to get hold of an *alagadda*, a black variety of cobra snake, without suffering any harm, and those not having the skill to grasp it, thus allowing it to recoil and bite.

To this original *sutta* was added a short *sutta* of kindred spirit inasmuch as it deals also with the teaching (*dhamma*) insisting this time in its usefulness or non-usefulness, illustrating again the point by means of a simile, the simile of the raft. The title of this short *sutta*, when forming an independent unity, doubtless was *Kallūpamasutta*.

After that we find strung together, without any apparent logical connection, several questions on self and non-self which fill the lengthiest part of the *sutta*. The *sutta* ends with a catalogue of different degrees of profit that may ensue from a proper teaching of *dhamma*, thus connecting, to a certain degree, with the first part of the *sutta*. But the first part of the *sutta* spoke not only of profit but also of harm, while the final part gives particulars only of the profit to be derived. Besides, the first part of the *sutta* referred to a proper grasping of the *dhamma*, while the final part speaks directly of a proper teaching of it.

Thus by means of loosely connected further additions, a discourse that should have been of middle length, as belonging to the *Majjhimanikāya*, became as extensive as those contained in

the *Dīghanikāya*, which, as indicated by its very name, is supposed to collect the longer discourses.

*The self and the world*

We are interested at present in making a detailed analysis of the part that deals with questions on self and non-self.

Quite abruptly the Buddha introduces an exposition of the different ways of looking at things in the case of an uninstructed common man and of a learned noble disciple. Regarding the former, the Buddha mentions six heretical positions (*chayimāni diṭṭhithānāni*). We are told that such a man regards as "This is mine, this I am, this is my self", the following items: (1) material shape, including the body, (2) feeling, (3) perception, (4) the inner complexes, (5) whatever is seen, heard, sensed, thought, acquired, looked, for, pondered over by the mind, and finally (6) the heretical opinion of eternalism worded as, "The world and the self are one and the same thing, this, that I am, shall become after death permanent, stable, eternal, unchangeable by nature, and just like this I shall be identical with what is eternal"<sup>65</sup>.

The first five items are none other than the five existential factors, only the fifth one, *viññāṇa*, has been amplified by the specification of its particular functions. The Nikāyas speak so frequently of it, that there is no need to dwell again on the aberration which identifies the five existential factors with the self. It will be wiser to insist on the sixth item, namely the eternalist view that the unlearned common man takes as being his, as being his very self.

This eternalist view is based on a equation of the world with the self. How could this equation arise in the first place? Heretical though the opinion is, we may see how can it be rationalized from the Buddhist point of view as to the constituent elements of *loko*, the world. The fundamental difference between the orthodox and the heterodox positions in this matter will be that the former will consider the world void of the self or of what belongs to the self, while the latter will identify the so called world and the self.

In the *Samyuttanikāya* it is said that the world is to be had where there is sense of sight, visible forms, visual consciousness, ideas apprehended by visual consciousness; where there is sense of hearing, sounds, auditory consciousness, ideas apprehended by auditory consciousness. A similar treatment is given to the rest of the senses—mind included—and their field of action. On the

<sup>65</sup> M I, pp. 180-181, *Aṭṭadūpamasuta*, 10.

contrary, there is no world and no such designation as "world" is possible where none of the entities just enumerated exist<sup>66</sup>.

Somewhere else we are given a kind of conditional connexion between making and end of pain, which means liberation, and going to the end of the world. The former is impossible without the latter. On the other hand we are told that it is not by traversing the physical world that one will come to know, see, and attain to, the end of the world. In the discipline of the Noble One the designation of "world" applies to being conscious of the world and to be conceited about it. It is by means of the senses—mind included—that one becomes conscious of the world and becomes conceited about it. Hence in order to make an end of the world, such as will lead to the end of pain and liberation, it is peremptory to restraint all consciousness of the world and to eradicate all conceit that feeds on it<sup>67</sup>.

Conceit is possessiveness regarding things interior or exterior, looking for things and grasping and cherishing them as if they were part of one's own being, as if one could not do away with them without tearing his own identity asunder. Such is the mental disposition of those who regard the above particularized items as "This is mine, this I am, this is my self". In the last item the sense of possessiveness and personal identification is extended in general to the world, building at the same time an image of a self which is meant to become eternal, thus projecting this self-conceit into eternity.

As to the wording of the eternalist opinion, the first phrase *so loko so attā* ought to be rendered as "the world and the self are one and the same thing", on the analogy of such phrase with other ones such as *sa vedanā so vedayati*, which means that feeling and the one who experiences it are one and the same thing, this being opposed to *añña vedanā añño vedayati*, "feeling is one thing and the experiencer is another thing"<sup>68</sup>.

This identity of the world with the self is quite conceivable if, as said above, the world here is not the physical universe but the senses, their objects and the apprehension of the latter by the former followed by consciousness of such apprehension in the form of perception. True enough, though the senses are something sub-

<sup>66</sup> S IV, pp. 35-36, *Salayatanasamyutta*, 98.

<sup>67</sup> S IV, pp. 86-90, *Salayatanasamyutta*, 116. Similar ideas found at S I, p. 60, *Devaputtasamyutta*, 26, where we are literally told that it is within this conscious body measuring a few feet, in contrast with the expanse of the universe, that we find what is called "world" as well as the arising of the world, the cessation of the world and the way leading to such cessation. Repeated at A II, pp. 50-51, *Catukkanipata*, 5, 5.

<sup>68</sup> S II-III, p. 22, *Nidanasaṃyutta*, 18. See also *taṃ jivāṃ taṃ sarīraṃ* opposed to *aññaṃ jivāṃ aññaṃ sarīraṃ* (D I, p. 159, *Poṭṭhapādasutta*, 19).

jective and easily identifiable with the self, the objects of sense do not stand identifiable in the same manner since they form part of the physical universe. But the objects of sense, as such, i. e. as apprehended by the senses and subjectivized by the intellect in perception are as apt to be identified with the self as are the senses themselves. There is nothing to hint that early Buddhism, as expounded in the Nikāyas, detracted in any way from the autonomous reality of the external world, but by saying that, over and above the physical reality of the world, the term *loko* denoted the personal relationship of the individual with this world through the medium of the senses, early Buddhism laid what might be the foundation of the later *Yogācāra* system.

The eternalist view that is engaging our attention is heretical on two counts. First of all because it identifies the self with things alien to it, secondly because it speaks of the self thus identified as becoming, after death, permanent, unchangeable, lasting, eternal. This seems to imply that the self identified with the world is not permanent, unchangeable, etc. in this life and that it is to become so only after death, a thing that could not happen without a change in identity.

A problem of expression is now left to consider. One may say that the body, feeling, etc. are his self, but how can anyone say that "an opinion" is his self? He might be able to say of it "This is mine", but how can he say of it, "This I am"? And nevertheless this is what the text apparently states. The solution to the difficulty is found in the item just preceding this one, where we are told that the unlearned common man thinks as being self whatever is thought and pondered over by the mind, such being any view that the thinker or ponderer may hold.

#### *Disturbance and non-disturbance*

In contrast with the uninstructed common man, the learned noble disciple refuses to consider everyone of those six items as, "This is mine, this I am, this is my self". The paragraph ends with the expression, "Thus looking at things he is not disturbed about what does not exist"<sup>89</sup>.

Obviously, what does not exist is here the self as identified with the body and the rest. But in the phrase *asati na paritasati* the word *asati* does not deny the self in an absolute way it only excludes any self of the said type.

The reference to disturbance gives occasion to a certain bhikkhu to question the Buddha thus, "May there be, Lord, disturbance about what exteriorly (*bahidhā*) does not exist?". The Bud-

<sup>89</sup> M I, p. 181, *Alagaddūpamasutta*, 10.

dha answers in the affirmative and gives as examples of such kind of disturbance: brooding over the loss of something heretofore possessed and the inability to secure some desired object. The opposite case is then described of people who not missing anything lost or not yet obtained do no fret about it.

The possibility is immediately discussed of there being any disturbance about what interiorly or subjectively (*ajjhattam*) does not exist. There may happen to be that kind of disturbance in the case of an eternalist when he listens to the teaching of the Tathāgata or one of his disciples. The teaching is directed "to the total uprooting of all bias and prejudice, of all prepossession and obstinacy as regards heretical positions, to the calming down of all inner activities, to discarding of all samsaric adherences, to the extinction of craving, to dispassion, to restraint, to *nibbāna*".

On hearing this preaching, one possessed of the eternalist view should feel as if the ground on which he stood was pulled off from under his feet, thinking, "Then what, shall I be annihilated? Shall I perish altogether? Shall I not become (*bhavissāmi*) any more?". The opposite instance follows of a man who not having any eternalist leaning on hearing the same preaching is not afraid of being annihilated, of perishing altogether, of not becoming any more. Thus there are respectively two conditions, namely disturbance or non-disturbance regarding what interiorly or subjectively does not exist<sup>70</sup>. These two opposed positions can shed a great amount of light on early Buddhism's mental attitude regarding *attā* or the self.

The conclusion drawn in the first place at hearing the Buddha's doctrine is correct and non-correct at the same time though from different points of view. From the point of view of the eternalist, the conclusion is in accordance with the facts. He has a wrong view that, as indicated above, he identifies with his self, therefore the preaching directed to the complete uprooting of all wrong views is suitable to impress him with the conviction that such preaching is directed to his own annihilation or destruction, to his not going to become again. He furthermore identifies his self with the inner activities and the rest of the *khandhas*, whose complete restraint is demanded by the Buddha's teaching and training.

His eternalist view is of necessity steeped in conceit which radically is a passionate appropriation of what is non-self as being part of one's own essential nature, this goes counter to discarding all samsaric adherences, to extinction of craving, to dispassion, to *nibbāna*. The fear of extinction is therefore justified in one who

<sup>70</sup> M I, p. 182, *Alagaddūpamasutta*, 13.

having the mentality just described hears the Buddhist doctrine, since the extinction that is *nibbāna* contemplates precisely the extinction of those things he considers his self and therefore the basis for his hope of an eternal and immutable existence after death. The verb *bhavissami*, used in the utterance of his fears, indicates that for such a man the eternity of being to which he aspires is no more than a new way of *bhava*. But early Buddhism admits the possibility of *bhava* this side of *nibbāna*, not in the realm beyond. The liberated one is beyond all becoming and it is therefore impossible to say of him that he is or that he is not.

On the other hand it may be said that the conclusion drawn by an eternalist on hearing the Buddhist doctrine gives expression to an unfounded fear. The Buddha emphatically denied preaching the annihilation of the essential being. *Nibbāna* does not mean extinction of the whole man but only of those things that hinder liberation. The true self in man, his essential being, the *Tathāgata* is never extinguished. Consequently it is but natural that a man not adhering to the eternalist view should not experience any fear, at hearing the Buddha's preaching, since he did not identify his self with those things to be completely and utterly restrained in *nibbāna*.

The fear alluded to in both the cases is said to refer to a thing that interiorly does not exist. This non-existent thing is not the eternalist opinion itself, since it does exist in the mind of the unlearned common man, although it is absent from the learned disciple's mind. The same applies to the fear of annihilationism since it is present in the first case and absent in the second. What is truly absent from the Buddhist point of view is the possible annihilation of the true being —of the self— which nevertheless gives rise in the first case to an unfounded fear, a fear inexistent in the second case.

*"You ought to... but..."*

In what precedes we saw trouble and disturbance brought about by things that did not exist either interiorly or exteriorly. The disillusionment came about in the first case owing to the impermanence and perishability of things. Following this line of thought the Buddha proceeds exhorting his bhikkhus in the following way,

"You ought to take hold of a possession, bhikkhus, the possession of which is permanent, stable, perennial, immutable by nature, that would stay like this unto what is eternal".

This seemingly is a straightforward exhortation implying that the obtention of such possession is somehow possible. But the Bud-

dha immediately cautions his bhikkhus with this disillusioning question,

“But do you, bhikkhus, see by any chance such possession, the possession of which would be permanent, stable, perennial, immutable by nature, that would stay like this unto what is eternal?”<sup>71</sup>.

The Buddha gets a negative answer from his bhikkhus and confirms their opinion saying that he fully shares with them in it. This incitement to aspire to a possession of something everlasting and therefore not subject to loss and the ensuing questions hinting at the impossibility of such possession being obtained join in logical sequence with the disturbance connected with the loss of something cherished or the impossibility to get what one wishes to have.

The truth of the matter is that there is absolutely nothing not being the self or being the non-self endowed with the characteristic of permanence and immutability.

The second kind of disturbance mentioned above referred to interior things which do not exist connected with the eternalist view. With this background in mind, the Buddha says,

“You ought to cling, bhikkhus, to such a clinging to a theory on self, by clinging to which there would not arise for him who so clings pain, lamentation, grief, mental uneasiness, tribulation”.

This is, again, impossible, as confirmed by the question immediately following,

“But do you, bhikkhus, see by any chance such clinging to a theory on self by clinging to which there would not arise for him who so clings pain, lamentation, etc.”<sup>72</sup>.

Once more the bhikkhus give a negative answer with which the Buddha expresses his conformity. There follows a similar dialogue regarding “reliance on mere theory by relying on which there would not arise for him so relying pain, lamentation, etc.”<sup>72</sup>.

The Buddha's feelings regarding speculative views are often expressed. Thus, for instance, he speaks of,

“The thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the restlessness of views, the turbulence of views, accompanied by pain, vexation, unrest, fever of attachment”.

<sup>71</sup> M I, p. 182, *Alagaddūpamasutta*, 13.

<sup>72</sup> M I, p. 182-183, *Alagaddūpamasutta*, 13.

In addition to this, such opinions are marked as,

“not conducive to disgust, to detachment, to restraint, to higher wisdom, to illumination, to *nibbāna*”.

Regarding himself he says that, “Speculative view has been cast off by the Tathāgata”, coming finally to the conclusion,

“That is why the Tathāgata, by the destruction of all conceits, of all vain imaginings, of all proclivity to the conceit of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, by detachment, by restraint, by renunciation, by rejection, is emancipated without any grasping”<sup>73</sup>.

If speculative views are such as here described by the Buddha, then there is definitely no relying on mere theory which may keep the individual safe from pain, lamentation, grief, mental uneasiness, tribulation. If, furthermore, a speculative view explicitly centres upon the self, then it will more directly be a cause of pain. Such speculative view will betray an undue mental absorption in the self, but a self that it is not there true one, since it is a conceitful self identified with the very psychological components of such mental absorption. We well know that what is non-self is so for being impermanent and painful. Therefore there is no theory on self by clinging to which there would not arise for him who so clings pain, lamentation, etc.

All theories on self, as viewed by early Buddhism, are self-contradictory, since while vouching to approach and describe the self, they do really deal with the non-self. Beside, such theories, viewed in their psychological entity, as perceptions, fall into the category of what is non-self. Consequently they are non-self and represent in their imaginings the non-self.

### *No self at all?*

After denouncing the impossibility of avoiding pain by clinging to a theory on self and by relying on it, the *sutta* goes on to explain what we have just indicated of the inner contradiction inherent in any theory on self. The Buddha’s dialogue with his bhikkhus continues in the following way,

“But, bhikkhus, there being self, would there be for me what belongs to self?”.

“Yes, Lord”.

“Or there being, bhikkhus, what belongs to self, would there be for me self?”.

“Yes, Lord”.

<sup>73</sup> M II, p. 179, *Aggivačchagottasutta*, 3.



“But there not being in truth and in reality either self or what belongs to self, is it not so that he speculative opinion that says, ‘The world and the self are one and the same thing, I myself shall become after death permanent, stable, perennial, immutable by nature, I shall stay like this unto what is eternal’, would not this doctrine be pure and absolute folly?”

“How could it be otherwise, Lord, this doctrine cannot but be absolute and utter folly”<sup>74</sup>.

Before proceeding further, let us observe the expressions *attanīyam me ti assa* and *attā me ti assa*, occurring in the two first question of the dialogue. If in the place of *me* we had *mayi* the general import of the passage as a whole would point to an absolute denial of *attā*. The passage would then avow that there is no self *in man*. But the dative *me* turns our attention to something alien to the speaker in which nothing is found being self or belonging to self.

Those two first questions and the introductory words to the third question ought to be interpreted within their own context. The background for them is the theory on self (*attavāda*) which has been declared immediately before unable to prevent the arising of pain and which in the third question is declared by the Buddha to be absolute and utter folly. Narrowing down still more what should be brought into focus here, we may say that the key to the interpretation of the passage lies in the phrase, “The world and the self are one and the same thing”.

This identity being true the unavoidable consequence would be that things constituting the world would at least be *attaniya*, i. e. belonging to the self. But we know that the world is void of the self or of what belongs to the self<sup>75</sup>. Therefore the statement that the world and the self are one and the same thing is self-contradictory.

We have insisted on taking into consideration the whole context, because, otherwise, the words “there not being in truth and in reality either self or what belongs to self” might be given an absolute value and be interpreted as denying altogether and in every way the reality of the self. As they stand in the context, the two first questions and the introductory words to the third question refer to the world, where no self is to be found or what belongs to the self.

The validity of our interpretation finds support in the dialogue immediately following which is meant to illustrate and confirm the point just advanced that no self and therefore nothing belonging

<sup>74</sup> M I, p. 183, *Alagaddūpamasutta*, 14.

<sup>75</sup> S IV, p. 50-51, *Salāyatanaśamyutta*, 83; S IV, p. 264, *Cittasamyutta*, 7; M I, p. 367, *Mahāvedallasutta*, 13; M II, p. 58, *Aneñjasappāyasutta*, 5.

to the self is found in the world. It is a standard dialogue found in many parts of the Nikāyas. In its material form — mainly the body —, feeling, perception, inner complexes and consciousness are declared to be impermanent, and therefore painful, and therefore non-self or something of which no one can say, "This is mine, this I am, this is my self".

Once the five existential factors are thus regarded by means of higher wisdom, the noble disciple feels disgust for them, feeling disgust he becomes detached from them, through detachment he is liberated and knows for certain that he is liberated<sup>76</sup>. The implication of liberation being attained through complete detachment from the existential factors, *precisely because they are not the self*, the implication, we say, is that through such detachment the isolation of the self from the non-self is brought about.

We ought to keep in mind that this standard dialogue is adduced in the context to confirm the absurdity of the heretical view that begins by identifying the world with the self. This means that the world is nothing beyond the existential factors. If then this dialogue does not deny the reality of the true self, as shown by the sequence of ideas, then also the true self is not negated by the immediately preceding part of the *sutta*.

#### *The conceit "I am"*

The *sutta* goes on describing the condition of a bhikkhu so liberated saying that in him and for him: ignorance, the cycle of rebirth, craving, the five fetters and the conceit "I am" are "abandoned, destroyed to the very root, turned into a stump of palm-tree never to sprout again, of a nature never to arise in the future"<sup>77</sup>.

These five things discarded by one who is liberated by true discernment between the self and the non-self are interconnected. We are mainly interested in the last one, the conceit "I am" (*asmimāna*). This is founded on ignorance which radically consists in taking for the self what is non-self<sup>78</sup>.

<sup>76</sup> M I, pp. 183-184, *Alagaddūpamasutta*, 14-15.

<sup>77</sup> M I, p. 184-185, *Alagaddūpamasutta*, 15. In accordance with the method followed in the composition of many *suttas* of the *Dīghanikāya* and the *Majjhimanikāya*, which consists in the loose connection of elements taken from other contexts, this passage describes how a bhikkhu turns out to be one who has lifted up the barrier, has filled the trenches, has pulled out the pillar, has removed the bolt, has laid down the burden. This passage appears at A II, p. 346, *Pañcakanipāta*, 8, 1 and *Ibid.*, p. 347, *Pañcakanipāta*, 8, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Cfr. "Herein, bhikkhu, the unlearned common man regards the body as the self or the self as having a body... Thus this consideration 'I am' has not been discarded by him... But in the case of a learned ariyan disciple, ignorance is dispelled, wisdom arises. And on account of the fading away of

The cycle of rebirth is active as long as this conceit continues having effect<sup>79</sup>.

As regards craving, there are two kinds of craving, namely for becoming and for not-becoming<sup>80</sup>, both being upshots of conceit which delights in busying the mind with fancies of becoming this or that or with thoughts of not-becoming this or that, not for the sake of liberation but through a selfish weariness of existence. The intertwining of craving, the fetters and conceit is stated in,

“Inasmuch as craving is left aside by a bhikkhu, destroyed to the very root ...He is said to be a bhikkhu who has destroyed craving, has undone the fetters, and by the perfect comprehension of conceit has made an end of pain”<sup>81</sup>.

Even as there are two kinds of desire for not-becoming, one being inspired by conceit and the other conceived under the rightful urge to win release, so too there are two opposite ways of considering the self. One is permeated by the heretical identification of the self or “I” with the existential factors leading to a morbid preoccupation with self while the other pays attention to the self or “I” in a straightforward, healthful manner, only in the context of liberation<sup>82</sup>. This shows that the censure passed on the conceit “I am” does not mean an unqualified censure on any and every kind of “I” or self.

### *Untraceability of the Tathāgata*

What comes next begins with the words, *evam vimuttacittam bhikkhum* notwithstanding the fact that in what precedes no mention is made of a liberated mind<sup>83</sup>. The first part of the passage now under scrutiny runs as follows,

ignorance and the arising of wisdom, it does not occur to him, ‘I am’, or ‘This I am’, etc. (S II-III, p. 278, *Khandhasamyutta*, 47).

<sup>79</sup> “The sage who has left behind all conceits is said to be at peace. The sage who is at peace, bhikkhus, is not born, does not grow old, does not die, is not troubled, has no longings”. (M III, p. 331, *Dhātuvibhaṅgasutta*, 26).

<sup>80</sup> A III, p. 144, *Catukkanipāta*, 10, 11.

<sup>81</sup> A II, p. 263, *Catukkanipāta*, 26, 4.

<sup>82</sup> For the difference between the conceited ‘I’ and the ‘I’ free from conceit, see *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, pp. 236-237.

<sup>83</sup> Curiously enough the preceding part of the *sutta*, taken, as indicated above, from A II, p. 346, *Pañcakanipāta*, 8, 1 and 8, 2, mentions explicitly *cetovimuttiphala* and *bhikkhu cetovimutto hoti*, and the *suttas* are entitled respectively, *Pañhamacetovimuttiphalasutta* and *Dutiyacetovimuttiphalasutta*. This is a further proof of the method followed in the composition of this type of *suttas*. The composer was conscious that the preceding passage, in its original setting, dealt with liberation of mind, but he neglected to make it clear when making the transcription.

"The devas, bhikkhus, together with Indra, Brahmā and Prajāpati, when looking for him, do not find a bhikkhu so liberated in mind being able to say: 'Here has settled the mind of the Tathāgata'. Why so? I say, bhikkhus, that a Tathāgata is untraceable in this very life"<sup>84</sup>.

I. B. Horner translates the words expressing what cannot be expected of the searchers as, "This is the discriminative consciousness attached to a Tathāgata"<sup>85</sup>, as if the reading was *nissitam thatāgate*. But *nissita* usually connotes an attachment to outward things, to what in other contexts is termed *para* or non-self (*anattā*), implying thereby an involvement in becoming. As in,

"One who is not attached (*nissito*) does not move [from one existence to another], while one who is attached, full of grasping, does not go beyond *saṃsāra*, beyond becoming (*bhava*) here or in another world"<sup>86</sup>.

As seen in this text, the condition of being *nissita* has *upādāna* as its result (cfr. *nissito upādiyam* in the text), which is the immediate root-cause of *bhava* in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula<sup>87</sup>.

Since the Tathāgata of the text under discussion is still alive, we may surmise that his *viññāṇa*, potentially at least, is in exist-

<sup>84</sup> M I, p. 185, *Alagaddūpamasutta*, 16.

<sup>85</sup> *Middle Length Sayings*, I, London, 1976, p. 179. The original reads, *idaṃ nissitam tathāgatassa viññāṇam*. As to the demonstrative *idaṃ*, coming at the beginning of the sentence, the sense most fitting is that of "This here" or "Here is".

<sup>86</sup> K I, p. 385, *Suttanipata*, 3, 12, 351; Cfr. also: *Ibid.* p. 427, Stn., 5, 5, 80, and M III, p. 347 f. *Anathapiṇḍikovādasutta*, 3-4, where we read, "Wherefore, householder, you should train yourself thus: 'I will not grasp after the sense of sight, and my consciousness (*viññāṇa*) will not be attached (*nissita*) to the sense of sight'. The same applies to the sense of hearing, to the sense of smell, to the sense of taste, to the sense of touch, to the mind, to the objects of those senses, to all kinds of sensorial consciousness, to all the varieties of sensorial contact. to the feelings resulting from those contacts, to the elements: earth, water, air, fire, ether and the element of consciousness, to the existential factors, to the sphere of infinite space, to the sphere of infinite consciousness, to the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, to this world or another world, to whatever is heard, sensed, cogitated, obtained, or looked after, or pondered by the mind. We therefore find here a complete catalogue of things that in different parts of the Canon are said to be non-self. The enumeration stops short of the *vimokkha* consisting in the complete restraint of perception and feeling, of which we never find it stated to be non-self. About the particularity of the last *vimokkha*, see *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, p. 412 under the term *vimokkha*.

<sup>87</sup> See also, *na tannissitam hoti viññāṇam na tadupadano; anupadano. Ānanda, bhikkhu parinibbāyati* (M III, p. 60, *Aneñjasappāyasutta*, 10).

tence, but since it is not attached to anything in the world is as it were non-existent<sup>88</sup> for lack of any determination<sup>89</sup>.

The conclusion of all this is that "a Thatāgata is untraceable (*ananuvijjo*) in this very life". The word *ananuvijjo* in addition to untraceability may connote also "inexistence"<sup>90</sup>. Since the Tathāgata has done away with whatever was not the self, including *viññāṇa* —the most likely candidate to selfhood for a non-Buddhist— some people conceived the Tathāgata as empty of all reality. This would be sheer annihilationism. That is why the Buddha immediately adds,

"Some *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* untruly, falsely, mendaciously, baselessly, calumniate me who say and teach that, saying, 'Gotama, the *samaṇa*, is a nihilist, he teaches the annihilation, destruction, perishing of the essential being (*sato sattassa*)' When I do not teach so, when I do not say so, the reverend *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* untruly, falsely, mendaciously, baselessly, calumniate me saying, 'Gotama, the *samaṇa*, is a nihilist, he teaches the annihilation, destruction, perishing, of the essential being'. Both previously and at present, I teach pain and the cessation of pain"<sup>91</sup>.

This means to say that the Buddha teaches the suppression and annihilation of what is painful and therefore non-self in man. The essential being, the true self is never annihilated. Since the Buddha is not a nihilist he never denies the reality of the essential being, the self.

After such a sharp rebuke to those who accused the Buddha of being a nihilist, the Buddha feels it proper to say that he is never elated for the praises proffered by his admirers or disappointed by the abuse heaped on him by his detractors.

*What is not yours*

The final element used in the composition of the *Alagaddūmapamasutta* is a short *sutta* independently given in the *Saṃyuttanikāya* under the titles: *Natumhakasutta* and *Dutiyanatumhakasutta*<sup>92</sup>. It is introduced with the word *tasmātiha*, "where-

<sup>88</sup> Not like the body of which is said, "The body of the Tathāgata, bhikkhus, stands before you with all that leads to a new becoming having been destroyed. So long as the body will stand, gods and men will see him. After the dissolution of the body, beyond the end of life, gods and men do not see him". (D I, p. 147, *Brahmajālasutta*, 147).

<sup>89</sup> See M I, p. 318, *Mahātanhāsankhayasutta*, 5.

<sup>90</sup> Cfr. *natthi na santi na samvijjanti nupalabbhanti* (K IV, pt. I, p. 207, *Mahāniddeśa*, 1, 10, 92).

<sup>91</sup> M I, p. 185, *Alagaddūpamasutta*, 16.

<sup>92</sup> S II-II, pp. 267-268, *Khandhasamyutta*, 33-34.

fore", suggesting that what comes is a consequence of what has been previously said.

In this part of the *sutta* the bhikkhus are exhorted to leave aside what is not theirs, that is to say, the existential factors: body, feeling, perception, inner complexes, consciousness. The Buddha adds that this rejection will be for their welfare and happiness for a long time to come (*dīgharattam*), meaning doubtless "for ever", as the complete rejection of the *khandhas* will bring about liberation.

The simile that follows is meant to illustrate the fact that the *khandhas* to be put away are not their own. The Buddha imagines that someone comes to the Jeta grove, where he was with his bhikkhus, and starts gathering and burning all that could be set on fire: grass, timber, branches and foliage. Then he asks his bhikkhus whether it would occur to them, 'Tis man is gathering us or burning us, or doing with us as he wishes'. On being questioned for the reason of their negative answer, the bhikkhus reply, 'Because [all] that, Lord, is not either [our] self or something belonging to [our] self'. The Buddha concludes, 'Even so, bhikkhus, what is not yours, put it away...', repeating the doctrine imparted before introducing the simile.

Obviously, the *attā* or self of the simile has a general meaning, including therefore the body, the only part of man that could be consumed by the fire. But when applying the simile to the *khandhas*, the *attā* or self implied by the personal pronoun *tumhākam* —used in his character as possessive pronoun— can be none other but the constituent of man's intimate essence, what he truly and exclusively is. Whatever else is found in man does not really belong to him and should be discarded if he seriously wants to be liberated.

The word *tumhākam*, "yours", even when used in a negative sentence, implies a subject of possession different from the *khandhas*, otherwise the Buddha would tell his bhikkhus to consider the *khandhas* as not belonging to them when they themselves were nothing but the *khandhas*. Things being so he would appear to be a supporter of the nihilist opinion so forcefully repudiated in the previous passage.

Besides, if nothing is left after discarding the *khandhas* who could be the beneficiary of such giving up when the bhikkhus are told that such rejection —the object of his exhortation— will be for their welfare and happiness? Again the enclitic *vo* in *taṃ vo paṇīnam dīgharattam hitāya sukkāya bhavissati*, will have no real meaning if nothing but the *khandhas* is involved in this liberating process of rejection. Finally, if the *khandhas* are rejec-

ted, precisely for not being the self, it becomes clear that what is intended to be preserved in complete freedom is the self.

### *Preaching of dhamma and its fruits*

The *sutta* ends with the following declaration of the Buddha,

“Thus, bhikkhus, *dhamma* has been well praeched by me, unfolded, laid open, made clear, having torn all its wrappings”<sup>93</sup>.

This obviously expresses an open, sincere, transparent exposition of the doctrine (*dhamma*), not leaving any room for the distinction proposed later on of an esoteric and an exoteric teaching on the Buddha’s part<sup>94</sup>.

The fruit drawn from this teaching of the doctrine may be manifold. Some become Arahants, whose *āsavas* are destroyed, who are fully perfected, have done whatever was to be done, have laid down the burden, have attained their purpose in life, have utterly destroyed all bonds of becoming, have attained perfect knowledge, and are liberated. It is said of them that “their track cannot be determined”.

This impossibility emerges from the fact that whatever can be an element of determination, by all empirical standards, has been abolished. But it so happens that whatever concurs to make such determination or definition possible and has been abolished is precisely whatever is non-self. This, in addition, has been abolished for no other reason than for being non-self, a fact that, by opposition, leads to the assertion of the true self. It is well known that the true self, stripped of all erroneous relation to the non-self, is something absolutely indefinable<sup>95</sup>.

The *sutta* continues describing five more classes of men whose profit from hearing the clear teaching of the doctrine (*dhamma*) goes on gradually decreasing. The last one mentions those who conceiving enough faith in, and enough love for, the Buddha are bound for heaven.

But the teaching given in the last part of the *Alagaddūpamasutta*, which has been here analysed, if well understood and practised, should lead to higher achievements than the entrance into heavenly bliss. It should lead either to immediate liberation, as is the case with the Arahants, or with some delay, as apparent in the other cases, namely: those who are beings of spontaneous

<sup>93</sup> M I, p. 187, *Alagaddūpamasutta*, 18.

<sup>94</sup> Cfr. *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>95</sup> About this indefinability see what we have to say on “Transcendence of the Self” in *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, p. 276 f.

uprising bound to attain *nibbāna* in that uprising; or those who will return to the world only once before they are liberated; or the "stream-attainers", free from the downfall, secure, and bound for awakening; or those who strive after *dhamma*, strive for faith and are also bound for awakening. Heavenly rewards are merely a result of charity (*dāna*) and virtue and morality (*sīla*), these being the elementary contents of the buddhist *dhamma*<sup>96</sup>.

All this comes to show that the description of these six classes of men is another independent element more or less artificially used in the composition of the *Alagaddūpamasutta*.

Bilbao.

JOAQUÍN PÉREZ-REMÓN M. A., Ph. D.

---

<sup>96</sup> See *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, p. 38.