



EVAM ME SUTTAṀ

This is how I heard it

by Patrick Kearney

Mūlapariyāya Sutta: The process of delusion

Introduction

This week we will look at Mūlapariyāya Sutta, the first discourse in Majjhima Nikāya. In Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation this discourse is seven pages long. After this meeting I am hoping we will have a reasonable understanding of the first half page. For while the *suttas* are often brief, they are deep and profound.

Mūlapariyāya Sutta shows us how we create our delusion, and the pain that comes from that delusion. Seeing and understanding this process we can begin to work our way out from our dilemma by deconstructing our delusion. This week we will look at the process of delusion, analysing how the discourse describes the way in which we create our predicament. Next week we will look at the process of liberation through full understanding (*pariññā*), seeing how the discourse describes the way out of our predicament. This will give us a foundation for understanding the Buddha's project, and we can then look at other discourses to see how they treat these fundamental themes.

Bhikkhu Bodhi recommends that the reader pass quickly over Mūlapariyāya Sutta on first reading and come back for an in-depth study after finishing the entire Majjhima Nikāya, because it is "one of the deepest and most difficult suttas in the Pāli Canon."¹ So we are going directly against his advice here. Hopefully we will not regret this decision.

Reading the suttas

The source of all Buddhist traditions, their *mūla* ("root," "foundation," "source") are the texts that make up the four *nikāyas* or "collections" of the Buddha's discourses. These are: Dīgha Nikāya (Collection of long discourses); Majjhima Nikāya (Collection of middle-length discourses); Saṃyutta Nikāya (Collection of connected discourses); and Aṅguttara Nikāya (Collection of numerical discourses). A fifth collection, the Khuddaka Nikāya (Collection of miscellaneous discourses), is regarded as of lesser authority, and its contents may have varied from tradition to tradition. Usually read in translation from the Pāli, the *Nikāyas* are generally regarded as representing the teachings of Theravāda Buddhism. However, the Theravāda ("teaching of the elders") is just one of the schools of Buddhism which draws upon these collections for its inspiration. In fact they come from a time before Theravāda, before Mahāyāna, before any of the schools or sects of Buddhism we currently know. Rather, the discourses that make up these collections are the ultimate source of all Buddhist schools and sects.

Nevertheless, the school that identifies itself most closely with the *Nikāyas* is the Theravāda. Strictly speaking, Theravāda is that school of Buddhism which reads the *Nikāyas* through the lens provided by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa, who in the fifth century A.D. wrote a manual of Buddhist teaching and practice called *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification). This text provides a distinctive and internally consistent interpretation of the *Nikāyas*, and functions as a fundamental doctrinal authority for the Theravāda. Buddhaghosa also edited and translated into Pāli a number of commentaries (*aṭṭhakathā*) on the *Nikāyas*, providing a interpretative framework

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consistent with Visuddhimagga. He did all this for the elders of the Mahāvihāra, an ancient and powerful monastic centre in Anurādhapura, the capital of Sri Lanka. Buddhaghosa's commentary to Majjhima Nikāya is Papanāsudānī. The subcommentary (*tīka*) was written in the 6th century by Bhadantācariya Dhammapāla of southern India.

Orthodox Theravāda Buddhists read the Nikāyas through Buddhaghosa, which means that for them, what the Buddha means in any given text is what Buddhaghosa, and those who follow him, say he means. Nyanaponika Thera would be a good modern example. But there are degrees of orthodoxy, and some contemporary Theravāda monks, such as Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda, will criticise the commentarial interpretations to a greater or lesser degree. Others, such as Ñāṇavīra Thera or Bhikkhu Buddhadasa will reject the commentaries entirely, yet still see themselves as belonging to the Theravāda.

All of which shows us that there is more than one way to read the Nikāyas, and that the way we choose to read them has real consequences for our understanding both of ourselves and of the tradition. Are we reading the Nikāyas as Buddhists? If so, as Theravāda Buddhists? Or as Mahāyāna Buddhists? Or as Western Buddhists? In fact, of course, many people don't read them at all, finding them too alien to relate to. This is hardly surprising, given their distance from us in time, space and culture.

What is a sutta?

Nikāyas are collections of *suttas*. The Pāli word *sutta* was Sanskritised by Indian Buddhists into *sūtra*, generally translated as “discourse.” *Sūtra* literally means “thread,” but in the brahmanical tradition *sūtra* refers to a string of very brief verses which are meant to be memorised as the basis for teaching. Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras is a good example. The Buddhist *sūtras* are not like this, however, and it has been suggested that *sutta* corresponds to the Sanskrit *sūkta*, which means “something which is well said.” The *brāhmaṇas* (brahmins) described the Vedas as *sūkta*, and it is possible that using this word to describe the Buddha's discourses was a way of claiming his teachings to be on a par with the Vedas.²

In any event, the *suttas* are regarded by the tradition as the ultimate authority for understanding the nature of the Buddha-dharma. They all begin with the words *evaṃ me suttam*, “Thus have I heard,” or “This is how I heard it.” This formula indicates that the following text is the word of the Buddha (*buddha-vacana*), and is therefore authoritative. But we must remember that the *suttas* are not *texts*, for the Buddha and his students never wrote down a word of the teachings. They are *performances*, and the “I” of “This is how I heard it” is the audience of the originating performance, and the performer of the current performance. And since there are no written “texts” to appeal to, how do we know if any given teaching really is the word of the Buddha?

The tradition recognises four “great authorities” (*mahāpadesa*) that can be appealed to in order to establish the authenticity of a teaching. A teaching is authentic if: it was heard from the Buddha; or from a community of elder monks; or from a community of learned monks; or from one learned monk. In all these cases a further test of authenticity must be applied: one is to examine the teaching under question to see if it conforms to what is already known of the *dhmma*. The *dhmma*, of course, is oral in nature and held in the memory of a community or communities, not in libraries, for notice how the *mahāpadesa* assumes that the teaching is *heard*, not read. The appeal here is twofold: to the source of the teaching (from whom did one hear it?), and to its place within an overall structure or pattern of teachings (how does it fit?).

This second criterion refers to the nature of the *dhmma* itself. And it is important to remember that the Buddha did not teach psychology, or philosophy, or science, or religion. He taught *dhmma*, which is not a system of thought but reality itself, the way things are, and a way of life which corresponds to the way things are. The *suttas* are both expositions of doctrines and

prescriptions of how one should live. The knowledge that they pass on, therefore, is more like a skill, like learning to play a musical instrument, than information, like a bus timetable.³ And this teaching was created and has been preserved orally, handed down in a lineage of teacher to student, in particular within the monastic *saṅgha* (community). Only in modern times has the printed book superseded, to some extent, this intimate connection between *sutta*, performance and personal relationship to the monastic *saṅgha*. So the very question, how do we, as lay practitioners of the Buddha-dharma, read the *suttas*, is a modern one. In traditional Buddhism it would not arise, as we would be *hearing* the dharma from members of the *saṅgha*. We would be *hearers* (*sāvakas*), not *readers*.

When we read the *suttas* we are reading what is meant to be performed and heard, an institutionalised memory of an originary event that occurred over 2,000 years ago in India. So it is not surprising that we find difficulties in relating to them. As our course proceeds, we will examine more issues relating to the difficulties of this project we have chosen to undertake.

The title

Mūlapariyāya comes from “*mūla*,” “root;” or “foundation;” and “*pariyāya*,” “going around.” Bhikkhu Bodhi translates *pariyāya* in the sense of *desanā*, so “discussion, instruction, method (of teaching), discourse on representation of”. Here *mūlapariyāya* is “teaching on the root, or foundation.” Bhikkhu Thanissaro translates *pariyāya* in the sense of *vāra*, so “order, succession, turn, course.” (PTS: 433) For him, *mūlapariyāya* is “the sequence of the root” or “the root sequence.” Both these interpretations/translations are based on Buddhaghosa’s commentary.

For the commentary, this discourse is *sabba-dhamma-mūlapariyāya* (“all-phenomena-*mūlapariyāya*), where *sabba* (“all;” “everything”) refers to the “all of personal identity” (*sakkāya-sabba*), the totality of states or phenomena (*dhammā*) that comprise the “five aggregates affected by clinging,”⁴ or the “five clung-to aggregates” (*pañc’upādānakkhandhā*) These five aggregates make up the known universe. When we cling to them, they constitute that which we identify with to be ourselves and the world in which we live. They concern *identity*, which for the Buddha always involves much more than just what we normally think of as a “person,” a being bordered by skin. It includes the entire universe within which that person lives and dies. Hence Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation: “The root of all things.”

The audience

According to the commentary, this discourse was delivered to 500 bhikkhus who were learned *brāhmaṇas* before converting to Buddhism, and who could therefore quickly memorise the Buddha’s teaching. Filled with conceit (*māna*), they were convinced they understood everything the Buddha said, but had in fact entirely missed the point because they were lost in the habitual thought patterns that characterise clinging to theoretical knowledge (*pariyatti*). The Buddha’s purpose in giving this talk was to clear away this delusion, in particular by exposing the real nature of concepts and our relationships to them, and the consequences of these relationships.

Bhikkhu Bodhi points out how understanding the dharma requires us to clear away our habitual misconceptions, which is why he thinks the first discourses of both Dīgha and Majjhima Nikāyas are designed for this purpose. Brahmajāla Sutta of Dīgha Nikāya clears away wrong views, and Mūlapariyāya Sutta exposes the whole process of *mis*-conception that keeps us in bondage. He even claims Mūlapariyāya Sutta to be the most fundamental of the Buddha’s discourses, “the concentrated essence of the teaching.”⁵

Thanissaro Bhikkhus speculates that these bhikkhus had been followers of the Sāṃkhya (“classification”) school, associated with the philosopher Uddalaka (9th century B.C.) who posited a *mūla*, “root” or “foundation,” as “an abstract principle out of which all things emanated and

which was immanent in all things.”⁶ This idea developed over time through a variety of theories about the nature of the ultimate root of existence and the hierarchy of emanations from this pre-existing root. Some of these theories were recorded in the Upaniṣads. The *brāhmaṇas* who converted to Buddhism may have interpreted Buddhist teachings according to their previous ideological conditioning, and so missed the radical nature of what the Buddha was actually saying. This would explain the traditional story of why they thought they understood the Buddha’s teaching without difficulty - why they were conceited. They were domesticating the teaching into their own familiar terms rather than confronting its radical strangeness. And this, of course, is a familiar problem in contemporary western Buddhism.

So the Buddha was laying a trap when he began his discourse by saying “I shall teach you a discourse on the root” (Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation), or “I will teach you the sequence of the root” (Bhikkhu Thanissaro’s translation). The bhikkhus would have been expecting a familiar kind of talk, showing the sequence of emanations from the root that make up our experienced “reality,” all of which assumes the real existence of this root. But what they get is something that blows apart their whole way of thinking. No wonder they weren’t pleased. So we are warned: This teaching is meant to subvert any idea we might have of a firm foundation to our existence.

Four types of person

The discourse examines the nature of human experience from the perspective of four categories of person: the ordinary untaught person (*assutavā puthujjana*); the “trainee,” or “disciple in higher training” (*sekha*); the *arahant* (fully awakened person); and the *tathāgata*, “thus-come,” “thus-gone,” “one in a state of ‘just-this,’” here referring to the Buddha himself.

- An untaught ordinary person (*assutavā puthujjana*) ... perceives earth as earth (*paṭhavim paṭhaviyā sañjānāti*), ... conceives earth (*paṭhavim maññati*), ... conceives from earth (*paṭhavitto maññati*), ... conceives “earth is mine” (*paṭhavim me ti maññati*), ... delights in earth (*paṭhavim abhinandati*). Why? Because s/he has not fully understood it, I say (*taṃ kissa hetu? apariññātaṃ tassāti vadāmi*).
- A bhikkhu/nī who is in higher training (*sekha*), whose mind has not yet reached the goal, and who is still aspiring to the supreme security from bondage, *directly* knows earth as earth (*paṭhavim paṭhaviyā abhijānāti*), ... *should not* conceive earth (*paṭhavim mā maññi*), ... *should not* conceive from earth (*paṭhavitto mā maññi*), ... *should not* conceive “earth is mine” (*paṭhavim me ti mā maññi*), ... *should not* delight in earth (*paṭhavim mā abhinandi*). Why? So that s/he may fully understand it, I say (*taṃ kissa hetu? pariññeyaṃ tassāti vadāmi*).
- A bhikkhu/nī who is an *arahant* ... *directly* knows earth as earth, ... *does not* conceive earth (*paṭhavim na maññati*), ... *does not* conceive from earth (*paṭhavitto na maññati*), ... *does not* conceive “earth is mine” (*paṭhavim me na maññati*), ... *does not* delight in earth (*paṭhavim nābhinandati*). Why? (1) Because s/he has fully understood it, I say (*pariññātaṃ tassāti vadāmi*). ... (2) Because s/he is free from lust through the destruction of lust (*khayā rāgassa vītarāgattā*). ... (3) Because s/he is free from hate through the destruction of hate (*khayā dosassa vītadossattā*). ... Because s/he is free from delusion through the destruction of delusion (*khayā mohassa vītamohattā*).
- The Tathāgata, accomplished and fully awakened, *directly* knows earth as earth, ... *does not* conceive earth, ... *does not* conceive from earth, ... *does not* conceive “earth is mine,” ... *does not* delight in earth. Why? (1) Because the Tathāgata has fully understood it *to the end*, I say (*pariññātantaṃ tathāgatassāti*). (2) Because s/he has understood that delight is the root of suffering (*nandī dukkhassa mūlan ti*), and that with being [as condition] there is birth (*bhavā jāti*), and that for whatever has come to be there is ageing and death (*bhūtassa jarāmaraṇa*). Therefore bhikkhus, through the complete destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up,

and relinquishing of cravings (*sabbaso taṇhānaṃ khayā virāgā nirodhā cāgā paṭinissaggā*), the Tathāgata has awakened to supreme full enlightenment, I say (*tathāgato anuttaraṃ sammāsambodhiṃ abhisambuddho*).

Twenty-four bases of cognition

These objects or “bases” (*vatthu*) of cognition cover the entire scale of experience. They are listed roughly in order from gross (the physical universe) to subtle (*nibbāna*), covering the range of possible universes, and the range of possible experiences. (And this is two different ways of covering the same phenomena.) They are:

- The four primary elements, representing the basic behavioural patterns of the material universe.
- The planes of existence, from the human to the most subtle divine and meditational realms.
- The four classes of (human) sense data - the seen, heard, sensed (smelling, tasting and touching) and mentally known.
- The abstract categories of diversity, unity and totality or “allness.”
- *Nibbāna*.⁷

This list shows us the *universality* of the Buddha’s analysis. It does not matter which aspect of the universe we are speaking of - including *nibbāna*, which transcends the universe - or which aspect of human experience we are speaking of, the same truth applies. The list intersects with the four categories of person analysed in the text, applying each base to each type of person. This intersection of list with list is typical of the *suttas*, and we will discuss this characteristic later in the course.

Perception and the ordinary untaught person

“An untaught ordinary person perceives (*sañjānāti*) earth as earth:” *Saññā* (“perception,” “recognition”) is the recognition of a given sense object as constituting an understandable percept.

Why do you say “perception” [*saññā*]? One perceives [*sañjānāti*], therefore it is called “perception.” What does one perceive? One perceives blue-green, yellow, red, and white. One perceives, therefore it is called “perception.” (S3.87)

Perception classifies and interprets the raw data provided by our senses. The eye merely sees forms, shifting patterns of colour and light. Perception takes these changing patterns and on the basis of past experience interprets them as “man close by,” “woman further away,” “house in the distance,” and so on.

And perception is learned, not given. The *ear* just hears; *perception* is trained to the point where we can communicate, apparently spontaneously, in our native language. But what appears spontaneous and simply given is not; this capacity to use language is the result of long training. And mistakes can be made. Most obviously when we learn a new language, but even when we speak in our inherited language. Here, our *sutta* is suggesting that even our most fundamental perceptions - “Earth!” - are already mistaken. We are already wrong.

Experience is like a field, within which we can always distinguish different aspects or poles: the sense sensitivity which registers the data provided by the sense object; the sense object itself; and the knowing or awareness of the object. For example, for the experience of “seeing” to take place, there must be a healthy, functioning eye (sense sensitivity), something to see (sense object), and “eye-consciousness,” the actual visual awareness itself. And then, as we have seen, there is the

activity of “perception,” recognising the sense data as “this” or “that.” But we do not experience in such a simple, straight-forward way. We are not content with a simple recognition of what is going on, but project into this field, somewhere behind the sense sensitivity a much more complex entity - ourselves; the one who is experiencing “this.” We also project a complex of ideas, beliefs and values onto the experienced sense object - this world that is alternatively cruel or kind, meaningful or meaningless. The construction of the experiencer and her familiar world is always going on, and it proceeds through conception (*maññanā*). Because our already existing delusion (*avijjā*), this field of experience appears as a confrontation between a persisting subject, the experiencer of experience, and a world of solid and stable things. And this imagined (“conceived”) persisting subject, or “self,” then relates to the world as something to be defended against, possessed and manipulated - all in a futile attempt to convince itself of its own reality.⁸

David Loy sums up the game we all find ourselves in - or rather, the game whose expression we are - in this way:

The basic difficulty is a sense of *lack*, which originates from the fact that our self-consciousness is not something self-existing but a mental construct. Rather than being self-sufficient, the sense-of-self is more like the surface of the sea: dependent on depths it cannot grasp because it is a manifestation of them. Buddhism makes this point by deconstructing the sense-of-self into sets of interrelating physical and mental phenomena; consciousness is only one factor, an effect of certain conditions and a cause of others. Problems arise when such a conditioned consciousness seeks to ground itself, that is, wants to become unconditioned and autonomous, which is to say *real*. If consciousness is ungrounded it can try to realize itself only by trying to objectify itself. I strive to become real by becoming *something*. Then the Oedipal project can never be completed because there is a contradiction in the very attempt: the ego-self is the effort of awareness to objectify itself in order to grasp itself - which it can no more do than a hand can shake itself or an eye see itself. The sense-of-self that arises is a fiction, a mental construct which is delusive insofar as, in grasping at it out of the need to ground ourselves, what-is-grasped is confused with what grasps.⁹

Our fundamental *delusion* is that we are real – a belief the Buddha called *sakkāya diṭṭhi*, the “view of the reality of the person,” or “personality view” (Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation). This is the view that “I” am real, and therefore both substantial within myself and separate from everything and everyone else. Our fundamental *fear* is that we are not real. We are terrified of the absence that lies at the core of our being, and will do anything to keep our basic intuition of this dimly sensed abyss at bay. We do this by our fundamental *project*, which is to become real, to establish an identity - to become *someone*, someone solid and enduring who will be around when we wake up tomorrow morning. Preferably someone happy and satisfied, but we will settle for someone miserable and frustrated, so long as it is *someone* – real. And so we busy ourselves with projects, hoping to fill our lives to the extent that we can cease to notice the black hole at the core of existence.

Conception

“Having perceived earth as earth, s/he conceives earth:” the fundamental error develops, with the introduction of *maññanā* (“conception”). From the root *man*, “think,” *maññanā* refers to a distorted form of cognition that projects onto sense data characteristics they do not possess. It does so on the assumption of a perspective which is fictitious - the perspective of someone who is conceiving this experience; the perspective of self. On the basis of that assumption it constructs the sense data into something solid that will confirm this initial assumption of self. Self confirms the reality of the world; the real world confirms self. To “conceive earth” is to take an experience and conceive or imagine it into *something* - something that does not actually exist - experienced by *someone* - someone who does not actually exist.

The tradition says this process of conception operates through three forms of activity: craving (*taṇhā*), conceit (*māna*) and views (*diṭṭhi*). And it further develops through the “proliferating tendencies” or simply “proliferations” (*papañca*).¹⁰ And so we “conceive earth” - and any other aspect of experience. How do we do this? In Dhātuvibhanga Sutta (The exposition of the elements) (M140) the Buddha says:

Bhikkhu, “I am” (*asmi*) is a conceiving; “I am this” (*ayam aham asmi*) is a conceiving; “I shall be” is a conceiving; ... Conceiving is a disease, conceiving is a tumour, conceiving is a dart. By overcoming all conceivings, bhikkhu, one is called a sage at peace. And the sage at peace is not born, does not age, does not die; he is not shaken and is not agitated. For there is nothing present in him by which he might be born.¹¹

The Buddha spoke of our project to become someone in terms of the movement from the conceit “I am” (*asmimāna*) to self, which always manifests as “I am this” (*ayam aham asmi*). “I am” is the sense we have of someone here undergoing this experience. Even in deep meditation, when we have ceased to hold onto the phenomena that arise and cease in our awareness, we have this background sense that there is someone here experiencing this, someone who is no longer holding on. This sense of something or someone separate, distinct, from the experience is *māna* (“conceit”), so the Buddha speaks of the conceit “I am” (*asmi māna*). But “I am” contains a problem: *what exactly am I?* This dim sense of “I” has no content, because actually it does not exist. And so we seek to find some phenomenon, some aspect of experience to pin onto “I am,” to pin it down to something specific - “I am *this*.” So “I am” functions also as the desire “I am” (*asmichanda*), an urge to exist as someone or something specific, graspable, *real*.

And so we construct an identity based on specific identifications: “I am male/female;” “I am young/old;” “I am good/bad;” “I am happy/in pain;” “I am successful/a failure;” and so on. Any content will do, so long as for the moment I can believe it. This completed movement “I am this” matures into the view of the reality of the person, or “personality view” (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), the conviction that I really exist as a substantial and separate entity within a substantial and separate world. But of course, to be convincing, this entity has to survive over time, and so there naturally arise the various views regarding eternalism (*sassata-vāda*), manifesting as “I will be,” and annihilationism (*uccheda-vāda*), manifesting as “I will not be,” or “I will cease to be.” All of which views, of course, presuppose “I” - which actually does not exist. And so all these views are false.

Let us look briefly at the three activities of craving (*taṇhā*), conceit (*māna*) and views (*diṭṭhi*). Craving (*taṇhā*) appears as the need to appropriate things as the property of the self, so that I can be convinced of my own identity as proved by my possessing something, and so that this identity can feel secure through its possessions, *real* as the owner of “this.” Even the self is a possession - “my-self.” This is the process of “mine-making” (*mamaṅkāra*), which culminates in the move, “This is mine” (*etaṃ mama*).

Conceit (*māna*) appears as judgements and comparisons where we rank ourselves as superior, equal or inferior to others. So the idea “I am better than others” is conceit; and so too is the idea “I am worse than others.” Both are expressions of the fundamental conception “I am special - because I am different - because *I am*.” Even “I am the same as others” is conceit, because it too is based on the conception of separation - that “I am” ... *something*. This is the process of “I-making” (*ahaṅkāra*), which culminates in the move, “I am this” (*eso’ ham asmi*).

View (*diṭṭhi*) appears as ideas about the nature of oneself and one’s world, which confirm for us the solidity and reality of the world within which we think we live, and which also confirm for us the reality of the self, the one who is thinking these ideas. We can see this process clearly in meditation. When we are distracted by thought during meditation, who are we thinking about? We think about ourselves (“I am ... *this*”) and our world (“*This is mine*”). Even when we think of others we think of them in terms of “I” and “mine:” my friends; my family; my country; my world; and so on. Even if there is no specific thought of “I” or “mine,” the scenarios we play out in

our minds are meaningful only in the context of this fundamental assumption. And as we think, we construct ourselves as the one starring in this particular soap opera. Or, as the philosopher Daniel Dennett puts it:

We don't tell our stories; *they* tell us. Our human selfhood is the product of our narratives, not their source - although we abstract a self; we posit a centre of narrative gravity.¹²

And so our conceptions create a sense of self. This too is the process of "I-making" (*ahankāra*), which culminates in the move "This is my-self" (*eso me attā*). It is this final move which is *sakkāya ditṭhi* ("view of the reality of the person").¹³

The fourfold pattern

Our sutta analyses conception in terms of four modes: to conceive *x*; to conceive in *x*; to conceive from *x*; and to conceive "x is mine." Each mode represents some kind of relationship. Here we will look at the way Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda have interpreted these modes. First, Bhikkhu Bodhi:

- "S/he conceives *x*:" This is a relationship of *identity*, where the person identifies with the phenomenon. For example, we often identify with an emotion, especially a strong emotion: "I am angry," meaning "I am the one who is angry," and we find the emotion hard to abandon because, even if it is painful it confirms our reality as long as it continues.
- "S/he conceives in *x*:" This is a relationship of *inherence*, where the person identifies herself as contained within the phenomenon. For example, "I am Australian; I am of this land." Or the phenomenon as contained within her. For example, "I am the leader of this group; I represent them." Again, the pay-off is a confirmation of one's sense of reality.
- "S/he conceives from *x*:" This is a relationship of *contrast*, where the person identifies himself as separate from the phenomenon - "I'm not like *that*!" or as produced from the phenomenon - "She is my mother" - or as producing the phenomenon - "He is my son."
- "S/he conceives "x is mine:" This is a relationship of *possession*, where the person identifies the phenomenon as his. For example, "This is my body;" "This is my life;" and so on.¹⁴

Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda pays particular attention to the role of *language* in the first three modes of this fourfold analysis. Each of the first three modes of conception has what is conceived - "*x*" - in a particular declension: "S/he conceives *x*" has *x* in the accusative case; "S/he conceives in *x*" has *x* in the locative case; "S/he conceives from *x*" has *x* in the ablative case. This grammar has particular significance for Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda, because we "imagine" or "conceive" concepts through structures of language, and create an imagined correspondence between the grammar of language and that of nature.¹⁵

Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda sees the patterns of language as crucial to the patterns of *maññanā* ("conception"). We conceptualise through language, and language creates a meaningful universe for us. Indeed, could we function as humans without language? And, as he points out, this *sutta* was addressed to learned *brahmaṇas* well versed in the Vedas - people who had already absorbed a distinctive philosophy of language and took it for granted as a means of understanding reality. The Buddha is suggesting here that reality is available only *beyond* language. Bhikkhu Bodhi sees Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda's emphasis on language as far-fetched, and regards this structure as *psychological* rather than *grammatical*. But is there necessarily a contradiction between these? Or are the deep structures of language and those of the meaning-making mind so closely connected that they can be seen as different sides of the same coin?

We can see the centrality of language in the Indian approach to creating meaning by looking at the key technical term *nāma*, most commonly found in the compound *nāma-rūpa*, "name-&-form,"

sometimes translated as “mind-&-body” or “mentality-materiality.” The Sanskrit and Pāli word *nāma* is cognate with our “name,” and is derived from the verb *namati*, “to name.” This term was pre-Buddhist, and was used in the context of the process of differentiating between things, and so developing a perception of a diverse and meaningful world. *Nāma* occurs alone in the Ṛg Veda, the Upaniṣads and the Brāhmaṇas. It was paired with *rūpa* in the Śathapatha Brāhmaṇa, which says that *nāma* is whatever one knows by its name (in the sense of “it is called so-and-so”) and *rūpa* is whatever one knows by its form (in the sense of “it looks like such-and-such”). Here, *nāma* (“name”) arises from speech (*vāc*), and is the process of differentiating between things by conferring names. This indicates its conceptual nature, since it is bound up with language. *Rūpa* (“form”) arises from the eye (*cakṣus*), and is the process of differentiating between things by visible appearance. It therefore includes both the physical (in that the physical world is visible) and that which is visible but not physical, such as dreams and apparitions.¹⁶

The Buddha borrows from this tradition in his use of the term *nāmarūpa*. He says:

And what, bhikkhus, is name-&-form (*nāma-rūpa*)? Feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), intention (*cetanā*), contact (*phassa*) and attention (*manasikāra*): this is called “name.” The four great elements (*cattāro mahābhūta*) and the form derived from the four great elements: this is called “form.” Thus is name and form; this is called “name-&-form.” (S 2.3-4)

Nāma is a complex of mental activities - and notice that it includes *saññā*, perception, that we have already seen in our *sutta* (“S/he perceives earth”). What always distinguishes *nāma* is intentionality. The word “intentionality” comes from *intendere arcum in*, which means “to aim a bow and arrow at ... ,”¹⁷ and in its basic sense it refers to the idea that knowing, consciousness or awareness always has an object, and therefore a *direction*: when there is knowing, there is always some *thing* which is known, the reference or object of knowing, towards which knowing or awareness is *directed*. Knowing is always knowing-of. So *nāma* has the characteristic of being directed toward an object; or we could say that *nāma* is the process of reaching out to an object. *Nāma* is a way of describing how the mind reaches out to the sensed universe in order to construct a meaningful world, and this process is inextricably bound up with language. To have a human sense of a self within a meaningful world requires language. Or, without language there is no meaning.

Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda points out that the monks who were the audience of this *sutta* were lost in conceit because of their theoretical knowledge (*pariyatti*) which was grounded on their background as experts in the three Vedas, in a tradition where language and word-play were paramount. The structure of language is particularly important in a tradition wedded to linguistic forms of ontological speculation.¹⁸ The *sutta* aims to expose the real nature of concepts, and especially the fact that since concepts are never the reality to which they point, all concepts miss the point - their direction is off - and so all concepts are wrong. It follows that no concepts are worth clinging to - including the concept that no concepts are worth clinging to. And the Buddha, in explaining *all* concepts as *just* concepts, mere social conventions, is throwing a spanner into the works of the basic means of *ātman* (“self”) speculation through his use of language.

Delight

“S/he delights in earth.” “Delight” (*nandi*) is an aspect of craving (*taṇhā*). Craving can be defined as the restless desire for something else to be happening. It is the fundamental “thirst” at the core of our being, the urge to reach out and take hold of something that can fill the black hole at the core of our being. Because this absence can never be filled - be turned into a “something” - our thirst is inexhaustible. Craving has three aspects: craving for sense pleasures, craving for existence, and craving for non-existence. Notice how what we would normally consider desire - wanting things, power, love, and so on - are only one aspect of craving. Two out of the three

aspects of craving are purely psychological, and have to do with identity – the desire to be, or not be, someone. And so craving is always bound up with conceit and views.

Delight is the satisfaction (*assāda*) we find in our attempts to satisfy desire. It is the pay-off, without which we would not bother. But this satisfaction contains its own dynamic, for it triggers another round of craving in the form of the restless desire to repeat the action – “If something feels good you want to do it again.” Delight indicates addictive desire, which by its nature is never satisfied because its satisfaction always sets up another desire. Hence the characteristic nature of craving (*taṇhā*) is the restless desire for more; always for more. For example, the desire to smoke a cigarette, when satisfied, sets up yet another desire, so it locks us into a perpetual round of seeking a satisfaction that is constantly being promised, but never quite arrives. And so we are locked into a perpetual round of seeking and never finding. The Buddha says, “renewal of becoming in the future is generated through the delighting in this and that on the part of beings who are hindered by delusion and fettered by craving.” (M43: Mahāvedalla Sutta) And later in Mūlapariyāya Sutta the Buddha says “Delight is the root (*mūla*) of suffering.”

The opposite of delight is *nibbida*, “disenchantment,” which is the experience of finally having enough. Disenchantment is associated with contentment, which in turn is the result of non-addictive desire. Non-addictive desire can be satisfied, because its satisfaction dissolves itself in its completion. For example, the desire to give up smoking, when satisfied, is dissolved, for its satisfaction dissolves the situation that led to it. Addictive desire never results in contentment; non-addictive desire does result in contentment.

Nibbida, disenchantment, is the crucial turning point, the place where we turn from *saṃsāra* to *nibbāna*, from that which is not dharma and which therefore can never satisfy, to dharma, which can satisfy. We will examine how Mūlapariyāya Sutta treats this process next week.

Conclusion

We seek to ground the self, and we do so through the use of concept. We seek to become *someone*, and we do so because we are driven by a deep and powerful desire to confirm ourselves to ourselves and those around us. We want to be happy, of course, but above all we want to *be ... something or someone*, and we are prepared to settle for misery if only we can feel firmly grounded in it.

But we can't, because there is no firm ground on which to stand. All our strategies to ground the self fail, because the self actually does not exist. The result is suffering. As Sāriputta explains:

The ordinary untrained person ... regards form as self, or self as possessing form, or self as in form. He lives obsessed by the notions: “I am form, form is mine.” As s/he lives obsessed by these notions, that form of hers changes and alters. With the change and alteration of form, there arise in her sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. (S3.3)

The same is true of the other aggregates, of all those aspects of experience with which we try to ground ourselves, with which we identify and seek to possess. But because our pain is not something already given, an inevitable part of nature, there is something we can do about it. There is a way out of suffering. This way is largely concerned with our relationship to concepts, and this will be explored further in Mūlapariyāya Sutta.

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