

Parivāmaṃsana Sutta

The Discourse on Thorough Investigation

[How dependent arising leads to nirvana]

(Sāmyutta Nikāya 12.51/2:80-84)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2003

Introduction

The Parivāmaṃsana Sutta shows how a thorough investigation of dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*) leads to spiritual awakening. The manner in which the twelve-link dependent arising is presented is also found in a number of other suttas of the Sāmyutta Nikāya: **the Assaji Sutta** (S 22.88/3:124-126) = **the Gelaṇṇa Sutta 1** (S 36.7/4:219-213) = **the Gelaṇṇa Sutta 2** (S 36.8/4:213 f) = **the Dīpa Sutta** (S 54.8/5:316=320). Sections 14-30, which concludes the sutta, mention the arhat’s reviewing knowledge (*paccavekkhana,ñāna*) and constant dwelling (*satata,vihāra*) (SA 2:78). These same passages recur with a different simile (that of an oil-lamp) in **the Assaji Sutta** (S 22.88.22-25/3:126) = **the Gelaṇṇa Sutta 1** (S 36.7.9-12/4:213) = **the Gelaṇṇa Sutta 2** (S 36.8.7-12/4:214) = **the Dīpa Sutta** (S 54.8.30-31/5:319 f).

The oil lamp simile is this: “Just as an oil lamp burns depending on oil and wick, and with the exhaustion of the oil and the wick, it is extinguished through lack of fuel, even so, when a monk feels a feeling ending with the body, he understands, ‘I feel a feeling ending with the body.’ When he feels a feeling ending with life, he understands, ‘I feel a feeling ending with life.’ He understands, ‘With the breaking up of the body following the ending of life, all that is felt, not delighted in, will be cooled right here¹—only physical bodies will remain.’

This sutta presents a good example where dependent arising is presented synchronically, that is, within one lifetime. The diachronic method (spanning over a few successive lives) was introduced in the Commentaries, that is, as the “wheel of existence” (*bhava,cakka*) (eg Vism 17.273-314/576-586). The Suttas however treat the five aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*) both synchronically (within the one and same life) and diachronically (over many lives). The five aggregates are presented in a diachronic manner in such suttas as **the Samādhi Sutta** (S 22.5/3:13-15). They are examined from the standpoint of synchronic conditionality in **the (Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa Sutta** (S 22.56/3:58-61) and **the Satta-ṭṭhāna S** (S 22.57/3:61-65).²

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¹ “Will be cooled right here,” *idh’eva...sīti,bhavissati*. Comy: They will be cooled right here, without having gone elsewhere by way of rebirth, subject to no further occurrence, without the struggle and distress of their occurrence. (SA 2:80).

² See S:B 743 n58, 1065 n81 & also in the Sutta Discovery 2003 series.

The Discourse on Thorough Investigation

(S 12.51/2:80-84)

[80]

1 Thus have I heard.

Preamble

At one time the the Blessed One was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika's Park in Jeta's Grove near Sāvattḥī.

2 Then the Blessed One addressed the monks:

“Bhikshus!”

“Bhante!” the monks answered the Blessed One in assent.

3 The Blessed One said this:

“Bhikshus, when a monk is thoroughly investigating (phenomena), in what way should he thoroughly investigate them for the complete destruction of suffering in the right way?”

“Bhante, our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, [81] has the Blessed One as refuge. It would be good indeed if the Blessed One were to explain its meaning. Having heard the Blessed One, the monks would remember it.”³

Dependent arising

4 “Then, listen, bhikshus, pay close attention to it, I will speak.”

“Yes, bhante!” the monks replied the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said this:

5 (1) SUFFERING. “Here,⁴ bhikshus, when a monk is thoroughly investigating (phenomena), he thoroughly investigates thus:

‘Whatever **suffering** (*dukkha*), in numerous forms and various aspects, such as decay-and-death, that arises in the world—

what is the cause, the arising, the birth, the source of this suffering?⁵

When what exists does this decay-and-death exist?

When what does not exist does this decay-and-death not exist?”

6 As he thoroughly investigates, he understands thus:

‘Whatever suffering that is decay-and-death, in numerous forms and various aspects, arises in the world—

this suffering has **birth** (*jāti*) as its cause, birth as its arising, birth as its birth,⁶ birth as its source.

When there is birth, there is decay-and-death.

When there is no birth, there is no decay-and-death.

7 He understands decay-and-death;

and he understands the arising of decay-and-death;

and he understands the ending of decay-and-death;

and he understands the path that conforms to the leading to the ending of decay-and-death.⁷

³ *Bhagavaṃ mūlakā no bhante dhammā Bhagavaṃ nettikā Bhagavaṃ paṭisaraṇā. Sādhu vata bhante Bhagavantaṃ yeva paṭbhātu etassa bhāsitaṃ attho. Bhagavato sutvā bhikkhū dhāressaṇī ti, at Mahā Dhamma,samā-dāna S (M 46.2/1:309 f), Vīmaṃsaka S (M 47.3/1:317), Naḷakapāna S (M 68.8/1:465), Mahā Suññata S (M 122.19/3:115) = SD 11.4; Bālena Paṇḍita S (S 2:24) = SD 21.1, Parivīmaṃsanā S (S 12.51/2:81) = SD 11.5, Candūpama S (S 16.3/2:199), Sammāsambuddha S (S 22.58/3:66), Sall’atthana S (S 36.6/4:208) = SD 5.5, Ānanda S 2 (S 36.16/4:221); A 3.68/1:199, A 8.6/4:158, A 8.83/4:338, A 9.1/4:351, A 10.58/5:106, A 11.20/5:355.*

⁴ “Here,” *idha*, ie *idha dhamma,vinaye*,” in this “teaching and discipline”.

⁵ *Idaṃ nu kho dukkhaṃ kiṃ,nidānaṃ kiṃ,samudayaṃ kiṃ,jātikaṃ kiṃ,pabhavaṃ.*

⁶ “Birth as its birth,” *jāti,jātikaṃ.*

And thus he practises and conducts himself accordingly.

8 This monk, bhikshus, is called one who is practising for the complete destruction of suffering in the right way.

9 (2) BIRTH. Furthermore, when thoroughly investigating (phenomena), he thoroughly investigates thus:

‘What is the cause, the arising, the birth, the source of this **birth** (*jāti*)?’⁸

When what exists does this birth exist?

When what does not exist does this birth not exist?

As he thoroughly investigates, he understands thus:

‘Whatever birth, in numerous forms and various aspects, arises in the world—

this birth has existence (*bhava*) as its cause, existence as its arising, existence as its birth, existence as its source.

When there is existence, there is birth.

When there is no existence, there is no birth.

He understands birth;

and he understands the arising of birth;

and he understands the ending of birth;

and he understands the path that conforms to the leading to the ending of birth.

And thus he practises and conducts himself accordingly.

This monk, bhikshus, is called one who is practising for the complete destruction of suffering in the right way.

(3) EXISTENCE. Furthermore, when thoroughly investigating (phenomena), he thoroughly investigates thus:

‘What is the cause, the arising, the birth, the source of this **existence** (*bhava*)?’

When what exists does existence exist?

When what does not exist does existence not exist?

As he thoroughly investigates, he understands thus:

‘Whatever existence, in numerous forms and various aspects, arises in the world—

this existence has clinging (*upādāna*) as its cause, clinging as its arising, clinging as its birth, clinging as its source.

When there is clinging, there is existence.

When there is no clinging, there is no existence.

He understands existence;

and he understands the arising of existence;

and he understands the ending of existence;

and he understands the path that conforms to the leading to the ending of existence.

And thus he practises and conducts himself accordingly.

This monk, bhikshus, is called one who is practising for the complete destruction of suffering in the right way.

(4) CLINGING. Furthermore, when thoroughly investigating (phenomena), he thoroughly investigates thus:

‘What is the cause, the arising, the birth, the source of this **clinging** (*upādāna*)?’

When what exists does clinging exist?

When what does not exist does clinging not exist?

As he thoroughly investigates, he understands thus:

‘Whatever clinging, in numerous forms and various aspects, arises in the world—

⁷ “[H]e understands the path that conforms...etc.,” *yā ca jarā, maraṇa, nirodha. sārūppa, gāminī paṭipadā taṃ ca pajānati*. Comy: This conformity is in its being similar (to the ending) by reason of its undefiled nature, its purity. (SA 2:77).

⁸ PTS omits *jāti panāyam kin nidānam* due to editorial oversight.

this existence has craving (*taṇhā*) as its cause, craving as its arising, craving as its birth, craving as its source.

When there is craving, there is clinging.
When there is no craving, there is no clinging.

He understands clinging;
and he understands the arising of clinging;
and he understands the ending of clinging;
and he understands the path that conforms to the leading to the ending of clinging.
And thus he practises and conducts himself accordingly.

This monk, bhikshus, is called one who is practising for the complete destruction of suffering in the right way.

(5) CRAVING. Furthermore, when thoroughly investigating (phenomena), he thoroughly investigates thus:

‘What is the cause, the arising, the birth, the source of this **craving** (*taṇhā*)?’

When what exists does craving exist?
When what does not exist does craving not exist?

As he thoroughly investigates, he understands thus:

‘Whatever craving, in numerous forms and various aspects, arises in the world—
this existence has feeling (*vedanā*) as its cause, feeling as its arising, feeling as its birth, feeling as its source.

When there is feeling, there is craving.
When there is no feeling, there is no craving.

He understands craving;
and he understands the arising of craving;
and he understands the ending of craving;
and he understands the path that conforms to the leading to the ending of craving.
And thus he practises and conducts himself accordingly.

This monk, bhikshus, is called one who is practising for the complete destruction of suffering in the right way.

(6) FEELING. Furthermore, when thoroughly investigating (phenomena), he thoroughly investigates thus:

‘What is the cause, the arising, the birth, the source of this **feeling** (*vedanā*)?’

When what exists does feeling exist?
When what does not exist does feeling not exist?

As he thoroughly investigates, he understands thus:

‘Whatever feeling, in numerous forms and various aspects, arises in the world—
this existence has contact (*phassa*) as its cause, contact as its arising, contact as its birth, contact as its source.

When there is contact, there is feeling.
When there is no contact, there is no feeling.

He understands feeling;
and he understands the arising of feeling;
and he understands the ending of feeling;
and he understands the path that conforms to the leading to the ending of feeling.
And thus he practises and conducts himself accordingly.

This monk, bhikshus, is called one who is practising for the complete destruction of suffering in the right way.

(7) CONTACT. Furthermore, when thoroughly investigating (phenomena), he thoroughly investigates thus:

‘What is the cause, the arising, the birth, the source of this **contact** (*phassa*)?’

When what exists does contact exist?

When what does not exist does contact not exist?

As he thoroughly investigates, he understands thus:

‘Whatever contact, in numerous forms and various aspects, arises in the world—

this contact has the six sense-bases (*cha saḷāyatana*) as its cause, contact as its arising, contact as its birth, contact as its source.

When there are the six sense-bases, there is contact.

When there are no six sense-bases, there is no contact.

He understands contact;

and he understands the arising of contact;

and he understands the ending of contact;

and he understands the path that conforms to the leading to the ending of contact.

And thus he practises and conducts himself accordingly.

This monk, bhikshus, is called one who is practising for the complete destruction of suffering in the right way.

(8) THE SIX SENSE-BASES. Furthermore, when thoroughly investigating (phenomena), he thoroughly investigates thus:

‘What is the cause, the arising, the birth, the source of these **six sense-bases** (*cha saḷāyatana*)?

When what exists do the six sense-bases exist?

When what does not exist do the six sense-bases not exist?

As he thoroughly investigates, he understands thus:

‘Whatever the six sense-bases, in numerous forms and various aspects, arise in the world—

these six sense-bases have name-and-form (*nāma, rūpa*) as their cause, contact as their arising, contact as their birth, contact as their source.

When there is name-and-form, there is the six sense-bases.

When there is no name-and-form, there is no six sense-bases.

He understands the six sense-bases;

and he understands the arising of the six sense-bases;

and he understands the ending of the six sense-bases;

and he understands the path that conforms to the leading to the ending of the six sense-bases.

And thus he practises and conducts himself accordingly.

This monk, bhikshus, is called one who is practising for the complete destruction of suffering in the right way.

(9) NAME-AND-FORM. Furthermore, when thoroughly investigating (phenomena), he thoroughly investigates thus:

‘What is the cause, the arising, the birth, the source of this **name-and-form** (*nāma, rūpa*)?

When what exists does name-and-form exist?

When what does not exist does name-and-form not exist?

As he thoroughly investigates, he understands thus:

‘Whatever name-and-form, in numerous forms and various aspects, arises in the world—

this name-and-form has consciousness (*viññāna*) as their cause, consciousness as their arising, consciousness as their birth, consciousness as their source.

When there is consciousness, there is name-and-form.

When there is no consciousness, there is no name-and-form.

He understands name-and-form;

and he understands the arising of name-and-form;

and he understands the ending of name-and-form;

and he understands the path that conforms to the leading to the ending of name-and-form.

And thus he practises and conducts himself accordingly.

This monk, bhikshus, is called one who is practising for the complete destruction of suffering in the right way.

(10) CONSCIOUSNESS. Furthermore, when thoroughly investigating (phenomena), he thoroughly investigates thus:

‘What is the cause, the arising, the birth, the source of this **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*)?’

When what exists does consciousness exist?

When what does not exist does consciousness not exist?

As he thoroughly investigates, he understands thus:

‘Whatever consciousness, in numerous forms and various aspects, arises in the world—this consciousness has volitional formations (*saṅkhāra*) as their cause, volitional formations as their arising, volitional formations as their birth, volitional formations as their source.

When there is volitional formations, there is consciousness.

When there is no volitional formations, there is no consciousness.

He understands consciousness;

and he understands the arising of consciousness;

and he understands the ending of consciousness;

and he understands the path that conforms to the leading to the ending of consciousness.

And thus he practises and conducts himself accordingly.

This monk, bhikshus, is called one who is practising for the complete destruction of suffering in the right way.

(11) VOLITIONAL FORMATIONS. Moreover, when thoroughly investigating (phenomena), he thoroughly investigates thus:

‘What is the cause the arising, the birth, the source of these **volitional formations** (*saṅkhārā*)?’

When what exists do these volitional formations exist?

When what does not exist do these volitional formations not exist?’

10 As he thoroughly investigates, he understands thus:

‘Volitional formations have **ignorance** (*avijjā*) as their cause, ignorance as their arising, ignorance as their birth, ignorance as their source. [82]

When there is ignorance, there are volitional formations.

When there is no ignorance, there are no volitional formations.

11 He understands volitional formations;

he understands the arising of volitional formations;

he understands the ending of volitional formations;

he understands the path that conforms to the leading to the ending of volitional formations.

And thus he practises and conducts himself accordingly.

This monk, bhikshus, is called one who is practising for the complete destruction of suffering in the right way.

Three kinds of volitional formations

12 Bhikshus, if a person, drowned in ignorance,⁹ creates meritorious volitional formation,¹⁰ his consciousness fares in merit. If he creates demeritorious volitional formation, his consciousness fares in demerit. If he creates imperturbable volitional formation, his consciousness fares in the imperturbable.¹¹

⁹ “A person drowned in ignorance,” *āvijjā’gato*, lit “one gone to ignorance,” one engaged in ignorance.

¹⁰ “Creates meritorious volitional activities,” *puññam...saṅkhāram abhisankharoti*.

¹¹ Comy: “Meritorious volitional formation” (*puññam saṅkhāram*) is one of the 13 kinds of volition (ie the volitions of the 8 wholesome sense-sphere cittas (*kāmāvacara,cittā*) and the 5 wholesome cittas of the form sphere (*rūpāvacara,cittā*)). “His consciousness fares in merit” (*puññūpagam hoti viññāṇam*) means that the karmic consciousness becomes associated with a meritorious karma, the resultant consciousness with the fruits of merit. “Demeritorious volitional formation” (*apuññam saṅkhāram*) is the twelve kinds of volition (ie in the 12 unwholesome cittas). “Imperturbable volitional formation” (*āneñjam saṅkhāram*) refers to the 4 kinds of volition (ie in the 4 wholesome cittas of the formless realms (*arūpāvacara,citta*)). (SA 2:78).For analysis of these 3 types of volitional activities, see Vbh 135. **The Āneñja,sappāya S** (M 106) explains in detail how consciousness “fares in the imperturbable” (*āneñjūpaga*) (M 106/2:261-266). On the tr of *saṅkhāra*, see S:B General Intro & 727 n7.

13 Bhikshus, when a monk has abandoned ignorance and true knowledge has arisen in him, then, with that very fading away of ignorance and the arising of true knowledge, he does not create meritorious volitional formation, he does not create demeritorious formation, he does not create imperturbable formation.

The arhat's response to feelings

14 When he neither creates nor forms¹² volitional formation, he does not cling to anything in the world. Not clinging to anything in the world, he is not agitated.¹³ Not agitated, he attains nirvana by himself.¹⁴ He understands,

‘Destroyed is birth. The holy life has been lived. What needs to be done has been done. There is (for me) no more of arising in any state of being.’¹⁵

15 If he feels a pleasant feeling,
he understands, ‘It is impermanent’;
he understands, ‘It is not hankered after’;
he understands, ‘It is not delighted in.’¹⁶

If he feels a painful feeling,
he understands, ‘It is impermanent’;
he understands, ‘It is not hankered after’;
he understands, ‘It is not delighted in.’

If he feels a neutral feeling,
he understands, ‘It is impermanent’;
he understands, ‘It is not hankered after’;
he understands, ‘It is not delighted in.’

16 If he feels a pleasant feeling, he feels it in a detached manner.¹⁷

If he feels a painful feeling, he feels it in a detached manner.

If he feels a neutral feeling, he feels it in a detached manner. [83]

17 When he feels a feeling ending with the body, he understands, ‘I feel a feeling ending with the body.’¹⁸

When he feels a feeling ending with life, he understands, ‘I feel a feeling ending with life.’¹⁹

¹² “When he neither creates nor forms,” *anabhisankharanto anabhisañcetaṅgato*. The word *abhisañcetaṅgati* means “he thinks out, plans.”

¹³ “He is not agitated,” *na paritassati*. Bodhi notes that “*paritassati* clearly represents Skt *paritṛṣyati*. ‘to crave, to thirst for,’ and is connected etymologically with *tanhā*. However, in Pali (and perhaps in MIA dialects generally) the verbal stem has become conflated with *tasati* = to fear, to tremble, and thus its noun derivatives such as *paritasanā* and *paritasita* acquire the sense of nouns derived from *tasati*. This convergence of meanings, already evident in the Nikāyas, is made explicit in the commentaries. I have tried to capture both nuances by rendering the verb ‘to be agitated’ and the noun ‘agitation’.” (S:B 265 n137). Here I follow Bodhi. Comy explains that such a one is not agitated with the agitation of craving (*taṅhā, paritassanā*) nor with the agitation of fear (*bhaya, paritassanā*); meaning that he neither craves nor fears (SA 2:78). Comy is silent on *parinibbayati*, which Bodhi thinks refers to *kilesa, parinibbāna*, the total extinction of defilements (see his General Intro S:B 49 f).

¹⁴ “By himself,” *paccattam*, ie through his own effort, not through the power of another. (SA 2:78)

¹⁵ This quote is the arhat’s reviewing knowledge (*paccavekkhaṇa, ñāṇa*), for which, see S:B I n376.

¹⁶ Comy: After the arhat’s reviewing knowledge has been shown, this passage then shows his constant dwelling (*satata, vihāra*). (SA 2:78). From hereon to the end, the text recurs with a different simile (that of an oil-lamp) in **Assaji S** (S 22.88.22-25/3:126) = **Gelaṅṅa S 1** (S 36.7.9-12/4:213) = **Gelaṅṅa S 2** (S 36.8.7-12/4:213) = **Dīpa S** (S 54.8.30-31/5:319 f).

¹⁷ “Detached,” *visaṅṅuto*, alt tr “unyoked.”

¹⁸ “A feeling ending with the body,” *kāya, pariyantikam vedanam*. Comy: This means delimited by the body. As long as the body with its five sense-doors continues, the feelings arising there continue. (SA 2:78).

¹⁹ “A feeling ending with life,” *jīvita, pariyantikam vedanam*. Comy: This means delimited by life. As long as life continues, the feelings arising at the mind-door continue. (SA 2:79).

He understands, ‘With the breaking up of the body following the ending of life, all that is felt, not delighted in, will be cooled right here—only physical bodies²⁰ will remain.’

18 Bhikshus, just as a person would remove a hot clay pot from the potter’s kiln²¹ and place it on level ground so that its heat would dissipate right there, leaving only earthenware,²² even so, bhikshus, when a monk feels a feeling ending with the body, he understands, ‘I feel a feeling ending with the body’;

when he feels a feeling ending with life, he understands, ‘I feel a feeling ending with life.’

He understands, ‘With the breaking up of the body following the ending of life, all that is felt, not delighted in, will be cooled right here²³—only physical bodies will remain.’

Nature of the arhat

19 What do you think, bhikshus, can a monk whose cankers are destroyed create meritorious volitional formation, or create demeritorious volitional formation, or create imperturbable volitional formation?”

“No, bhante.”

20 Or when there are no volitional formations at all, with the ending of volitional formations, would consciousness²⁴ appear?”

“No, bhante.”

21 “Or when there is no consciousness at all, with the ending of consciousness, would name-and-form appear?”

“No, bhante.”

22 “Or when there is no name-and-form at all, with the ending of name-and-form, would the sense-bases appear?”

“No, bhante.” [84]

23 “Or when there are no sense-bases at all, with the ending of sense-bases, would contact appear?”

“No, bhante.”

24 “Or when there is no contact at all, with the ending of contact, would feeling appear?”

“No, bhante.”

25 “Or when there is no feeling at all, with the ending of feeling, would craving appear?”

“No, bhante.”

26 “Or when there is no craving at all, with the ending of craving, would clinging appear?”

“No, bhante.”

27 “Or when there is no clinging at all, with the ending of clinging, would existence appear?”

“No, bhante.”

²⁰ “Physical bodies,” *sarīrāṇi*, sg *sarīra*. Comy glosses it as *dhātu, sarīrāṇi*, “bodily elements,” ie bones (*aṭṭhika, kaṅkala*, SAPṬ).

²¹ **The pot simile.** Comy: The potter’s fiery kiln represents the three realms of existence; the potter is the meditator; and his rod the knowledge of the path to arhathood. The level ground represents Nirvana. The time when the potter removes the hot clay pot from the kiln and places it on the ground is like when the meditator, having attained the supreme fruit of arhathood, removes his individual form from the four realms of misery and places it on nirvana’s plain through the attainment of fruition. Just like a clay pot (is not baked at once or is broken at once), even so the arhat does not attain (final) nirvana on the same day as he attains arhathood. He lives on for 40 or 50 years striving to sustain the Buddha’s Dispensation. When he reaches his last thought-moment, with the break-up of the aggregates, he attains the nirvana-element without residue. Then, as with the potsherds, only inanimate bodily remains are left behind. (S 2:80 f). See Intro for the lamp simile.

²² “Earthenware,” *kapallāṇi*, also “pot, bowl, pan”. S:B (see also 766 n140) has “potsherds” which does not seem to fit here although Comy uses it in the sense of “potsherds” here (SA 2:80).

²³ “Will be cooled right here,” *idh’eva...sīti, bhavissati*. Comy: They will be cooled right here, without having gone elsewhere by way of rebirth, subject to no further occurrence, without the struggle and distress of their occurrence. (SA 2:80).

²⁴ “Consciousness,” *viññāṇa*, ie rebirth-consciousness (*paṭisandhi, viññāṇa*, SA 2:81) .

28 “Or when there is no existence at all, with the ending of existence, would birth appear?”

“No, bhante.”

29 “Or when there is no birth at all, with the ending of birth, would decay-and-death appear?”

“No, bhante.”

30 “Excellent, bhikshus! Excellent, bhikshus! Thus it is, bhikshus, not otherwise! Have faith in me in this, bhikshus, be resolute! Have neither uncertainty nor doubt here! This is the end of suffering!”

— evaṃ —

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