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(Paṭicca,samuppāda) Vibhaṅga Sutta

The Discourse on the Analysis (of Dependent Arising) | S 12.2/2:2-4

Theme: Definition of the 12 links

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2003

Introduction

The fullest statement of dependent arising is given in **the Sammā Diṭṭhi Sutta** (M 9.21-67), **the (Paṭicca,samuppāda) Desanā Sutta** (S 12.1), **the Kaccā(ya)na,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15) and the (Paṭicca,-samuppāda) Vibhaṅga Sutta (S 12.2). The first text, **the Sammā Diṭṭhi Sutta** (M 9.21-67), gives the most elaborate exposition of the traditional formula with an analysis of each of the twelve factors in the reverse order and applies the four noble truth framework (M 9.21-67/1:49-54).

The second sutta, **the (Paṭicca,samuppāda) Desanā Sutta** (S 12.1), simply states the whole traditional formula in the forward and the reverse modes without comment (S 12.1/2:1 f).

The third sutta, the remarkable **Kaccā(ya)na,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15), is a very short sutta whose central teaching is the standard 12-link dependent arising (which is simply stated), presenting it as the “middle way.” The fourth (our present text), too, gives a comprehensive definition of all the twelve links of dependent arising along with the full traditional formula in both the forward order (dependent arising) and the reverse order (dependent ending). (S 12.15/2:16-17)

Like the Vibhaṅga Sutta, **the Mahā Tapāhā,saṅkhaya Sutta**, too, presents dependent arising in its order of arising¹ and in its order of ceasing.² This formula is an example of dependent arising in a *synchronic* cycle, that is, in the course of an individual’s life (M 38.26-40/1:265-270). **The Bahu,dhātuka Sutta** presents the formula by first making a statement of the general principle of specific conditionality (*idap,paccayatā*), followed by both sequences together (M 115.11/63 f).

The sutta that follows the Vibhaṅga Sutta in the Book of Causality (*nidāna vagga*) of the Sāmyutta Nikāya is **the Dve Paṭipāda Sutta** (S 12.3/2:4 f), where the forward formula (dependent arising) is called “the wrong way” (*micchā,paṭipadā*) and the reverse formula (dependent ending) the right way (*sammā,-paṭipadā*). The seven suttas (S 12.4-10/2:5-11) that follow the Dve Paṭipadā Sutta describe, in identical terms, the enlightenment of the six past Buddhas—Vipassī, Sikhi, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana and Kassapa—and our Buddha Gotama, as the discovery of dependent arising and its ending.³

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The Discourse on the Analysis (of Dependent Arising)

S 12.2/2:2-4

1 [The Blessed One] was residing at Sāvattihī.

2 “Bhikshus, I will teach you dependent arising, I will analyze it for you. Listen, bhikshus, pay close attention to it, I will speak.”

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

3a The Blessed One said this:

“And what, bhikshus, is dependent arising?”

¹ M 38.17-19/1:261-263.

² M 38.20-221:263 f.

³ For other suttas connected with dependent arising and a bibliography, see “Dependent Arising” = SD 5.12.

<i>Avijjā,paccayā</i>	<i>saṅkhārā</i>	With ignorance as condition, there are volitional activities; ⁴
<i>saṅkhāra,paccayā</i>	<i>viññānam</i>	with volitional activities as condition, there is consciousness;
<i>viññāna,paccayā</i>	<i>nāma,rūpaṃ</i>	with consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form;
<i>nāma,rūpa,paccayā</i>	<i>saḷ'āyatanaṃ</i>	with name-and-form as condition, there is the sixfold sense-base;
<i>saḷ'āyatana,paccayā</i>	<i>phassa</i>	with the sixfold sense-base as condition, there is contact;
<i>phassa,paccayā</i>	<i>vedanā</i>	with contact as condition, there is feeling;
<i>vedanā,paccayā</i>	<i>taṇhā</i>	with feeling as condition, there is craving; ⁵
<i>taṇhā,paccayā</i>	<i>upādānaṃ</i>	with craving as condition, there is clinging;
<i>upādāna,paccayā</i>	<i>bhavo</i>	with clinging as condition, there is existence;
<i>bhava,paccayā</i>	<i>jāti</i>	with existence as condition, there is birth;
<i>jāti,paccayā jarā,marāṇaṃ</i>		with birth as condition there arise decay and death,
<i>soka,parideva,dukkha,-</i>		sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.
<i>domanass'upāyasā sambhavanti</i>		
<i>evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k,-</i>		—Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.
<i>khandhassa samudayo hoti</i>		

3b And what, bhikshus, is **decay and death** (*jarā,marāṇa*)?

The aging of various beings, their growing old, the falling apart of the teeth, the graying of hair, the wrinkling of the skin, the decline of vitality, the degeneration of the faculties—this is called decay. [3] The passing away of the various beings from the various orders of beings, their falling away, breaking-up, disappearance, mortality, death, completion of time, the break-up of the aggregates, the laying down of the body,⁶ [the uprooting of the life faculty]⁷—this is called death.⁸ Thus this is decay and this is death, and [together] they are called decay-and-death.

4 And what, bhikshus, is **birth** (*jāti*)? The birth of various beings into the various orders of beings, their being born, descent into the womb, production, the arising of the aggregates, the obtaining of the sense-bases. This is called birth.⁹

⁴ Comy: When it is said, “With ignorance as condition, there are volitional formation,” the meaning should be understood thus: “It is ignorance and it is a condition; hence ‘ignorance-as-condition’ (*avijjā ca sā paccayā cā ti avijjā,paccayā*). Through that ignorance-as-condition, volitional formation come to be (*tasmā avijjā,paccayā saṅkhārā sambhavanti*)” (SA 2:9 f). Bodhi: “This explanation suggests that the verb *sambhavanti*, which in the text occurs only at the end of the whole formula, should be connected to each proposition, thus establishing that each conditioned state arises through its condition. The twelve terms of the formula are treated analytically in [the **Vibhaṅga S**].” (S:B 725 n1)

⁵ In (**Samuday'atthaṅgama**) **Loka S** (S 12.44), the dependent arising is shown to be broken here when “with the remainderless fading away and ending of that same craving comes cessation of clinging...” the rest of the chain breaks accordingly leading to the ending of “this whole mass of suffering.” (S 12.44/2:71-73)

⁶ “The laying down of the body,” *kaḷebarassa nikkhepo*. The word *kaḷebara* (Skt *kalevara*; BHS *kaḍvara*), which means “body” in the physical sense, is probably cognate with the English “cadaver” which comes from Latin *cadere*, to fall.

⁷ Ce adds *jīvit'indriyassa upacchedo* at the end of the def of death, and which is also found in Be, Ke, Se. “The fact that [SA] does not gloss this expression may be taken as evidence that it was not in the text available to the commentator. The expression is found, however, in the definition of death at Vbh 99,23-24 and is commented upon at VbhA 101,8-12.” (S:B 725 n2).

⁸ Comy: The terms in “The passing away...etc...completion of time,” **death** is expounded according to worldly convention (*loka,sammutiyā*). By the expressions “breaking-up of aggregates” and “the laying down of the cadaver,” death is expounded in the ultimate sense (*param'attha*). For in the ultimate sense, it is only the aggregates that break up: there is no “being” that dies. When the aggregates are breaking up, one says: “A being is dying,” and when they have broken up, it is said, “The being is dead.” (SA 2:13).

⁹ Comy: From “The birth...etc...production,” the teaching is conventional (*vohāra,desanā*); the last two terms are ultimate teachings (*param'attha,desanā*). For, in the ultimate sense, it is only the aggregates that become manifest, not a being. (SA 2:13).

5 And what, bhikshus, is **existence** (*bhava*)? Bhikshus, there are these three kinds of existence: sense-sphere existence, form-sphere existence, formless-sphere existence. This is called existence.¹⁰

6 And what, bhikshus, is **clinging** (*upādāna*)? Bhikshus, there are these four kinds of clinging:¹¹ clinging to sensual pleasures, clinging to views, clinging to rules and rites,¹² clinging to the doctrine of a self.¹³ This is called clinging.¹⁴

7 And what, bhikshus, is **craving** (*taṇhā*)? Bhikshus, there are these six classes of craving: craving for forms, craving for sounds, craving for smells, craving for tastes, craving for touches, craving for mind-objects. This is called craving.

8 And what, bhikshus, is **feeling** (*vedanā*)?¹⁵ Bhikshus, there are these six classes of feeling: feeling born of eye-contact, feeling born of ear-contact, feeling born of nose-contact, feeling born of tongue-contact, feeling born of body-contact, feeling born of mind-contact. This is called feeling.

9 And what, bhikshus, is **contact** (*phassa*)?¹⁶ Bhikshus, there are these six classes of contact: eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, mind-contact. This is called contact.

¹⁰ “Existence,” *bhava* here is not an ontological term in the sense that there are cars, tables and houses, or numbers and ideas: the Pali word in this latter sense is *atthi* with its abstract *n atthitā*. *Bhava* is sentient existence in one of the three realms of existence. In dependent arising, it refers to both (a) the active side of life that produces rebirth in a particular mode of sentient existence, ie rebirth-producing karma; and (b) the mode of sentient existence that results from such activity. See **Bhava S** (A 3.76/1:223 f) & S:B 52 (Intro). Comy: In the exposition of existence, *sense-sphere existence* is both karma-existence (*kamma, bhava*) and rebirth-existence (*upapatti, bhava*). Of these, *karma-existence* is just karma that leads to sense-sphere existence. For the karma, being the cause for rebirth-existence in that realm is spoken of as “existence” by assigning the name of the result to the cause. *Rebirth-existence* is the set of 5 karmically acquired aggregates produced by that karma. For, this is called “existence” in the sense that “it comes to be there.” The same applies to the form-sphere and the formless-sphere existences, except that in the formless-sphere, rebirth-existence comprises only the four mental aggregates. (SA 2:13 f). Bodhi: “It should be noted that in interpreting the expression *upādāna, paccayā bhavo*, the commentaries take *bhava* as either *kamma, bhava* or *upapatti, bhava*, since both volitional activity and rebirth are conditioned by clinging; but in the expression, *bhava, paccayā jāti*, they confine *bhava* to *kamma, bhava*, since *upapatti, bhava* includes *jāti* and thus cannot be a condition for it. See Vism 17.258-60/572 f, 17,270/575.” (S:B 726 n4; refs modified).

¹¹ For def of the 4 types of clinging (*upādāna*), see Dhs §§1214-17. In brief, *clinging to sensual pleasures* (*kām’upādāna*) is syn with sensual desire, sensual lust, sensual delight, sensual craving, etc. *Clinging to views* (*diṭṭh’upādāna*) is the taking up of any wrong view except those included in the third and fourth types of clinging. (See Dhs §1215, where the nihilist view is given as an example.)

¹² “Clinging to rituals and vows,” *sīla-b, bat’upādāna*. Here *sīla* can mean “conduct, nature”: see eg the common phrase, *iminā’ham sīlena vā vatena vā tapenā vā brahmacariyena vā devo vā bhavissāmi dev’aññataro vā* (“by this precept or observance or asceticism or holy life, I will become a god or some lesser god”) (eg **Ceto, khila S**, M 16.12/1:102). Here *ritual* refers to a *ritualistic* way of keeping the precepts or making our practice merely as a routine, “observance.” By *vata* is meant some kind of vow, aspiration, prayer, etc, that we do not or cannot really put into practice, or which is not really beneficial. Dhs §1222 says, “Clinging to rituals and vows is the view of recluses and brahmins outside the religion that purification is achieved by rituals and rules...” An example of such a view is “the dog ritual, dog vow” (*kukkura, sīla kukkura, vata*) described in **Kukkura, vatika S** (M 57.2/1:387) = SD 23.11. Cf S:B 726 n5.

¹³ “Clinging to a doctrine of a self” (*atta, vād’upādāna*) is defined by way of the 20 types of identity view (*sak-kāya, diṭṭhi*). See eg **Upādāna Paritassanā S 1** (S 22.7/3:15-18).

¹⁴ Comy glosses *upādāna* as *dalha-g, gahaṇa* (“tight grasping”) (SA 2:14).

¹⁵ “Feeling” (*vedanā*), according to Boisvert (1995:53), is more than “‘bare sensation’ or ‘anoetic sentience’ [sensing without knowing]” (Jayatilleke 1963:436), since it has some specific content: pleasure, pain, neutral feeling; and that *vedanā* is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, for the arising of craving (the following link in the dependent arising cycle). [On necessary and sufficient conditions, see SD 5.12(5) & 35.1.] **The Kiṭṭagiri S** (M 70) speaks of 2 kinds of feelings: those of the householder (that conduce to unwholesome states), and those of the renunciant (that conduce to wholesome states) (M 70.6-7/1:475): see Boisvert 1995:74-76 for the Sutta text with Comy.

¹⁶ “Contact,” *phassa* (from *phusati*, “it touches”), ie impingement of the sense-object on the sense-organ or sense-stimuli. In fact, Harvey proposes tr it as “stimulation” (1996:93). *Phassa* does not imply physical impact: it is one of the 7 constant mental concomitants (*cetasika*) of consciousness and belongs to the group of formations. It is one of

10 And what, bhikshus, is **the sixfold sense-base** (*saḷ'āyatana*)? The eye-base, ear-base, nose-base, tongue-base, body-base, mind-base. These are called the sixfold sense-base.

12 And what, bhikshus, is **name-and-form** (*nāma,rūpa*)?¹⁷ Feeling, perception, volition, contact, and attention: this is called name. And the four [4] great elements and the material form derived from the four great elements:¹⁸ this is called form. Thus this is name and this is form, and (together) they are called name-and-form.

13 And what, bhikshus, is **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*)?¹⁹ Bhikshus, there are these six classes of consciousness: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, mind-consciousness. This is called consciousness.

14 And what, bhikshus, are **volitional activities** (*saṅkhāra*)?²⁰ Bhikshus, there are these three kinds of volitional activities: the bodily formation, the verbal formation, the mental formation. These are called volitional activities.

the “foods” (*āhāra*), along with feeling, perception, volition and consciousness (see Nyanaponika, *Abhidhamma Studies*, 1949: 47 ff).

¹⁷ “Name-and-form,” *nāma,rūpa*, is a pre-Buddhist term, used in the early Upaniṣads to denote the differentiated manifestation of Brahman, the non-dual reality. This multiple manifestation is apprehended by the senses as diversified appearances and forms, and by thought as diversified names or concepts. In this latter context, the term **papañca** (mental proliferation) is used (see eg **Madhu,piṇḍika S**, M 18 = SD 6.14 Intro 2). In the Buddhist sense, *nāma,rūpa* refers to the physical and cognitive sides of individual existence. In the expression, *bahiddhā nāma,rūpa*, “external name-and-form,” (**Bāla,paṇḍita S**, S 12.19/2:24), “we seem to find a vestige of the original meaning—the world distinguished according to its appearance and names—but divested of the monistic implications” (S:B 48). The easier of the two terms, *rūpa*, refers to the 4 great elements (earth, water, fire, and wind), both internal (as the body) and external (as another’s body and as nature)—see eg **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62.8-12/1:421-423) = SD 3.11; also (**Upādāna**) **Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56.7/ 3:59) = SD 3.7 n (The 4 great elements). But this is only one of the several meanings of the term according to context. Elsewhere *rūpa* means “visible form,” that is, the object of eye-consciousness.¹⁷ “However, the definitions indicate that the *rūpa* in *nāma-rūpa* has the other meaning:¹⁷ it denotes physicality, materiality.” (Bucknell 1999: 321).¹⁷

The Pali term *nāma* is often rendered as “name,” which should not be taken literally. According to (**Paṭicca-samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2), *nāma* is an aggregate of mental factors involved in cognitive processes: feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volition (*cetanā*), contact (*phassa*) and attention (*manasikāra*) (S 12.2.12/2:3) [12]. These are called “name” because “they contribute to the process of cognition by which objects are subsumed under the conceptual designations.” (S:B 48). In other words, while *nāma* is centred on the mind (*citta*) and *rūpa* is centred on the four primary elements, “there is no dualism of a mental ‘substance’ versus a physical ‘substance’: both *nāma* and *rūpa* each refer to clusters of changing, interacting processes.” (Harvey 1993:11 digital ed). It should be noted in the Nikāyas that *nāma,rūpa* does not include *viññāṇa* (consciousness), which is actually its condition, and the two are mutually dependent, like two sheaves of reeds leaning against one another (**Nāla,kalapiya S**, S 12.67/2:114; also **Mahā Nidāna S**, M 12.21-22/2:63). See S:B 48 & SD 5.17 Intro (5).

¹⁸ Although the “derived forms” (*upādā, rūpa*, later Pali *upādāya,rūpa*) are mentioned here, their analysis first appears in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka (Dhs 596; Tkp 3, qu at Vism 535; Tkp 89, 109; Vism 444), according to which there are **24 “derived forms,”** namely: (1-5) the 5 sense-faculties (*pasāda,rūpa*): seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching; (6-9) the 4 sense objects: form, sound, smell, touch, taste (touch being identical with three of the great elements, viz earth, fire and air); (10) femininity (*itthatta/itth;indriya*); (11) masculinity (*purisatta/puris’indriya*); (12) physical base of the mind (*hadaya,vatthu*); (13) physical life (*rūpa,jīvitā*); (14) material quality of food (*āhāra,rūpa*); (15) the space element (*ākāsa,dhātu*); (16) bodily intimation (*kāya,viññatti*), (17) verbal intimation (*vacī,viññatti*); (18); physical agility (*rupassa lahutā*), (19) physical elasticity (*rūpassa mudutā*), (20) physical adaptability (*rūpassa kammaññatā*); (21) physical growth (*rūpassa upacaya*); (22) physical continuity (*rūpassa santati*); (23) decay (*rūpassa jaratā*) and (24) impermanence (*rūpassa aniccata*) (Dhs 127; Vism 443; Abhs:SR 159; Abhs:BRS 6.2-5/235-242). **The Abhidhammattha,saṅgha** lists 28 “material phenomena” by adding the 4 great elements (earth, water, fire, air) to the head of the list. See BDict: Khandha & also *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma* (Abhs:BRS 6.2-5). For a useful discussion, see Harvey 1993:3-5 (digital ed); also Karunadasa 1967:38 f & Boisvert 1995:37-42.

¹⁹ See **Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56) = SD 3.7 Intro.

15 And what, bhikshus, is **ignorance** (*avijjā*)?²¹ Not knowing suffering, not knowing the arising of suffering, not knowing the ending of suffering, not knowing the path leading to the ending of suffering. This is called **ignorance**.

16a Thus, bhikshus, with ignorance as condition, there are volitional activities;
with volitional activities as condition, there is consciousness;
with consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form;
with name-and-form as condition, there is the sixfold sense-base;
with the sixfold sense-base as condition, there is contact;
with contact as condition, there is feeling;
with feeling as condition, there is craving;
with craving as condition, there is clinging;
with clinging as condition, there is existence;
with existence as condition, there is birth;
with birth as condition there arise decay and death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.

—Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

16b²²

*Avijjāya tveva asesā, virāga, nirodhā
saṅkhārā, nirodho*

saṅkhārā, nirodhā viññāṇa, nirodho

viññāṇa, nirodhā nāma, rūpa, nirodho

nāma, rūpa, nirodhā saḷāyatana, nirodho

saḷāyatana, nirodhā phassa, nirodho

But with the remainderless fading away and ending of ignorance, volitional activities end,²³

with the ending of volitional formation, consciousness ends,

with the ending of consciousness, name-and-form ends,

with the ending of name-and-form, the sixfold sense-base ends,

with the ending of the sixfold sense-base, contact ends,

²⁰ “Volitional formation,” *saṅkhārā*. This word is resolved as *saṃ* (= con, “together”) + *karoti*, “he does, he makes.” The noun has both the active and passive senses: as such, *saṅkhārā* are both things that put together, construct and compound other things, and the things that are put together, constructed and compounded. In the Nikāyas, *saṅkhārā* occurs in a number of major doctrinal contexts: see SD 17.6 Intro. As the 2nd factor of dependent arising, as here, *saṅkhārā* are the karmically active volitions responsible, in conjunction with ignorance and craving, for the producing rebirth and binding one to the wheel of existence (eg **Saṅkhār’upapatti S**, M 120). This kind of *saṅkhārā* gives an active synthetical explanation of how an individual existence arises, while as an aggregate (*khandha*), they apply in a passive analytical way. As such, it is here rendered as “**volitional formation**” to distinguish it from the passive “formations” discussed in **Kāma, bhū S 2** (S 41.6/4:293). This latter set is used only in the context of the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, and never used in connection with dependent arising. See S:B 44-47 & 727 n7 (Abhidhamma aspects). See Brahmavaṃso 2003b:56 f.

²¹ “Ignorance,” *avijjā*. Bodhi: “Although in the popular accounts ignorance is often identified with idea of self, the definitions here show that the view of self is an aspect of clinging, which is itself conditioned by craving, while the latter is in turn conditioned by ignorance [see **Avijjā S**, A 10.61/5:116 = SD 31.10].” (S:B 728 n8).

²² **The Dukkha S** (S 12.43) ends with a brief formula comprising the last 4 links, beginning with *Tassa-y-eva tanhāya asesavirāganirodhā upādāna, nirodho...* (S 12.43.16/2:72 f).

²³ Payutto (1994) remarks: “Generally speaking, the word ‘cease’ [or ‘end’] means to do away with something which has already arisen, or the stopping of something which has already begun. However, *nirodha* in the teaching of Dependent Origination (as also in *dukkhanirodha*, the third of the Noble Truths) means non-arising, or non-existence, of something because the cause of its arising is done away with. For example, the phrase ‘when *avijjā* is *nirodha*, *saṅkhārā* are also *nirodha*,’ which is usually taken to mean, “with the cessation of ignorance, volitional impulse ceases,” in fact means that ‘when there is no ignorance, or no arising of ignorance, or when there is no longer any problem with ignorance, there is no volitional impulses, volitional impulses do not arise, or there is no longer any problem from volitional impulses.’ It does not mean that ignorance already arisen must be done away with before the volitional impulses which have already arisen will also be done away.” (1994:107-108) In this context, he suggests that the reverse (cessation) cycle of dependent arising might be better rendered as: “being free of ignorance, there is freedom from volitional impulses...,” or “when ignorance is gone, volitional impulses are gone...,” or “when ignorance is no longer a problem, volitional impulses are no longer a problem.” (1994:107). See **Kaccā(ya)-na, gotta S** (S 12.15) SD 6 Intro (3).

*phassa,nirodhā vedanā,nirodho
vedanā,nirodhā taṇhā,nirodho
taṇhā,nirodhā upādāna,nirodho
upādāna,nirodhā bhava,nirodho
bhava,nirodhā jāti,nirodho
jāti,nirodhā jarā,marāṇaṃ
soka parideva,dukkha,-
domanass 'upāyasā nirujjhanti
evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k,-
khandhassa nirodho hoti*

with the ending of contact, feeling ends,
with the ending of feeling, craving ends,
with the ending of craving, clinging ends,
with the ending of clinging, existence ends,
with the ending of existence, birth ends,
with the ending of birth, there end decay-and-death,
sorrow, lamentation, physical pain,
mental pain and despair.

—Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.²⁴

— evaṃ —

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²⁴ Comy: By “ending” (*nirodha*) in all these phrases nirvana is meant. For all those phenomena end in dependence on Nirvana, and therefore the latter is spoken of as their ending. Thus in this sutta, the Blessed One teaches The rounds of existence (*vatta*) and the ending of The rounds (*vivatta*) by 12 phrases and brought the discourse to a climax in arhathood (SA 2:18).