Link: <https://youtu.be/JrnHJ3X_fTQ>

**FOREWORD**

At a time when Buddhism is spreading fast across the globe, it is our intention to make the general public acquainted with the great teachings of the Lord Buddha.

Whilst listening to a sermon is the ideal way of going forward in the path of Dhamma, some may prefer to read it at their leisure and comprehend the teachings at their own pace and time. Then there may be those who are weak in their faculty of listening, so the only way they can understand it is by reading a text or a Dhamma book.

These transliterations are available for all those who wish to have an understanding of the Lord Buddha's teachings in order to find true salvation.

\*\*This workis a transcription of the sermon held in **2017-12-31**. There may be the odd omission or inclusion inadvertently due to quality issues of the audio or deliberate editing to make the text more readable.

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**KEY WORDS**

Ratrace

Dèvadùtha sùtta / the heavenly messenger

Cause & effect

Fire

Headache

Balm

Acupuncture

Eon

Rat

Trap

Bait

Cheese

**Don't Be a Rat**

2017.12.31

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How do you find solace, how do you find salvation from this Sansàric process, that is the rebirth cycle? How do we put an end to that and say, enough is enough?

**Goals and Ambitions**

We have been going round this circle time and time again and yet, today we still struggle to sustain this livelihood. We did that yesterday, the day before, last year, and it's therefore important, as intelligent people, to take time to reflect on what we have achieved in our lives. This is something you would normally do anyway at your workplace, in your family. Hopefully, people take some time to do this and in various other contexts to try and reflect on what you were able to achieve so far. What were your ambitions, what were your goals, and what how did you fare against those goals and ambitions, what do you want to carry over to the following year, what do you want to do differently, what do you want to continue doing, what new habits do you want to start, what habits do you want to stop, what would you like to do better? All of these are very valid, pertinent and important questions you have to ask yourself if you want to get somewhere.

**Living is a rat race**

In the material world we've always wanted to get somewhere, But, getting somewhere has always been about earning more; building more; learning more; eating more; sleeping more and it's always been a chase. It's always been a rat race. When have we ever been satisfied? Think back about your life for the last ten years; at the end of every year over that period, didn't you look back at the year gone by and think;

 "*Good heavens! where did the year go"?*

You look back and think;

 *'I wanted to do this; I wanted to do XYZ, but I was only able to do X. Y & Z still remain*; *therefore, they need to be carried over to the following year'*.

Perhaps you were more successful in some years and maybe not so much in other years. But ultimately even today you are looking to do something; you are looking to take something over to the following year and perhaps start something new the next year.

**Definition of the 'world'**

Ultimately, we have to come to the realization that we keep building a world around ourselves. We define the world as*, rùpa, vèdana, sannà, sankàra, vinnàna*. *Rùpa* being material form, *vèdana* being feeling or perception, *sannà* being the identification or recognition, *sankàra* being formations and *vinnàna* being consciousness. This is one way we define the world. And then we can look at the world as, *patavi, àpo, thèjo, vàyò, warna, gandha, rasa, òja*. This is, how you see the world as being something solid, fluid, warm or hot; the heat element there, something airy, and also the colour, the smell, the taste and the nutritional element, that an object possesses.

There are some things in the world that we can't really perceive. For example, there are ultra violet rays, there are ultrasounds and the reason we can't perceive these is, because our senses are not sensitive enough. Nevertheless, these things exist and that is one way we define the world. There is a fundamental problem with the world itself. This is what we will try and look at here because in trying to set these goals and ambitions you need to have a yardstick. You need to have for yourself, a way to relieve yourself, when there will be times where the waters are rough. Remember, we are trying to cross this ocean and stop or put an end to this, *sansàra*. But you still have to cross the ocean and to do that your ship will have to sail the waters and as you sail you will come across strong winds; you'll come across gales; you'll come across creatures from the sea who will try to destroy the ship, put a stop to your journey. When these things happen how do you respond; how do you prepare yourself to face these vicissitudes of life?

**The only salvation**

It's always important that we take a moment to reflect personally within our own minds, the fact that the only reason we have this Dhamma today is, because there was that special human being; the perfect one, the unequal one, the unsurpassable one, the unrivalled one, the perfect one; that was The Gauthama Samma Sambuddha; who after many lives and many eons in *sansàra*, attained Nibbàna. He gave us the Four Noble Truths and taught us, that this is the only salvation we have; understand life as it is; don't be deluded, develop the wisdom that we are all capable of, this knowledge, this Dhamma will give you that and that will help us look through and penetrate the veil of ignorance. Once we do that, we will understand the world as it is. We will understand that it's all a ball of fire, it's all an ocean of suffering.

**Role Models**

Look back at the last ten years of your life. What did you do as a young child, perhaps as a teenager, as a middle-aged person or perhaps as an old person? What did you do, trying to build a world around you over that period? Did you not go and research about the various options you had? How do I build this world? What is building a world really mean? What does success mean? Did you not go and speak to your friends, your family, your relations; and ask what success looks like to them? Did you not look at society? Did you not watch television, read the newspapers, go on the Internet to find out how rich people become rich? How did successful businessmen or women get to where they are today? How did the educated get to where they are today? I am sure you would have done all of that.

This is exactly what I did when I was a layperson. At the start of a year, at the end of another, I would always look at the past 12 months gone by; see where I am, see what I was able to accomplish and then look at the following year, and then set myself some targets, some goals, some ambitions. And in doing that I always picked a role model. I picked a role model from various avenues in life. Let's say, you want to become a millionaire, and you're thinking of what is it that I can do next year to help me get there. So, you then research about various millionaires, people who are rich, people who are successful in that way and then look at their life stories. What did they do? Perhaps you might go along to a talk, a seminar and they will give you their experiences. They will talk to you about that their methodologies, the books they read, the programs that they went along to and the behaviours that they incorporated into their lifestyle. And perhaps it could be something as simple as you want to be a better gardener, and then you might go to a horticulturist or perhaps to your local garden center, to find out how to engage in that particular hobby. If that's what you are interested in, you find out about the right crops or the right plants and how to look after them, how you water them and how you put fertilizer.

**Having a mentor**

Or perhaps, you are taking one of your exams the following year - it could be your O/L, your A/L or your scholarship exams. Generally, what you would do is, go and speak to someone who would have done it at some point in their lives, and then you learn from both their mistakes and also from what has worked for them. So, in building a world around us, this is usually our source of information. And we generally take it as being a reliable source, because you get the practical aspect of it. You could read this in a book. You could watch this on TV. But nothing compares with actually going and speaking with someone and then following in their footsteps. Now, whenever you do that, people will generally tell you about the successful times that they had. They will tell you; this is how hard I worked to achieve this. This is all the hours that I had to put in. This is how much money I had to spend in buying this, that and the other; in investing this amount of money to achieve this particular gain. These are all the people you had to go and talk to, and they would give you that information, if they are generous enough. They would perhaps invite you even to join them in some of the adventures and say;

 *'Why don't you come along and try your hand at it. You know you are welcome to spend a few days with me*',

So, when you associate people of that type, they will give you this information. Now, in relation to, and in comparison, to living a good life as a human being, all of that is great. As I said, these are all the things that I used to do. And there will be people among you, who would have done the same or perhaps who mentor other people. This is probably what you would advise them to do as well. There is nothing wrong with that.

**Having targets**

But, when you begin to realize that,

*'I have been doing this for the last 15 to 20 years and yet today at the end of another year, I'm setting myself new goals, new targets and new ambitions for the following year'. And then you break that down into monthly targets, weekly targets, daily targets and sometimes even hourly targets. This is how you would plan your day. And then you find out all the little things that you need to do, to get these done. So, when you associate those types of people who are successful in a worldly sense, they will give you all this information on how to be successful. But, do they ever tell you that, 'Hey, you know what? I have been successful as far as this conversation is concerned. But it has come to my mind lately that I am not going to take any of these things with me. It has come to my mind, every year I set myself goals and all I am doing there is actually setting myself or giving myself more work to do to get to a certain place; to go traveling, to do things, to build something, to achieve something and I am actually feeling exhausted'.*

**Four requisites**

This is where, when someone actually comes along and says aren't you exhausted? Aren't you tired of building every day? Aren't you tired of starting a business, investing more money? Aren't you tired of trying to construct this universe around you? Have you actually managed to find something that is immune from disease, death or disaster? And when they ask you these questions you begin to ponder, you begin to ask yourself;

*'well, actually this is right. People have been doing all of these things for many years*

*and yet today, I'm setting myself new goals, new targets, new ambitions.*

*When do I get the chance to stop this? When do I get the chance to actually*

*do something once, and then be content with that? Because otherwise it's a*

*constant rat race. I am constantly running off to something''.*

Think about it. Why do we do all of these things? One would say, *''well, it is to survive''*. So, what do you need in order to survive? You need food, you need shelter, you need to be safe, you need somewhere to sleep. Well, shelter covers it pretty much and you perhaps need peace of mind. So, if you have the basics necessities and some medicine if you are feeling ill and of course clothing, that is all you need to survive, and everything else is extra. Everything else is beyond what you need to produce, what you need to gain. So, when someone comes along and gives you that perspective then it is easy for the world to turn around and say, 'well actually, isn't that just being a bit negative? Why not do more if you can do more? Why not build a world around you, if you can? Why not build a second house if you can? Well yes, I've got my own house. I've got one house, I've got one car, why not go and get another?

That is one argument. Yes, you could. Imagine you are building a house in an area that is prone to earthquakes. It has taken you six months to build that house, brick by brick, stone by stone, you painted it, you put in all the furniture and it's looking great both from inside and out. But guess what happens? Along comes an earthquake, and the entire house is turned into rubble and dust. And then you think to yourself,

*''Hmm....tough luck, that's okay*.'' *I've got more money because in that six months I still went and worked. So, I've got more savings and I'm going to start building my house again'*.

And then you build that house again. But guess what? You pick the same spot to build the house. You build that house again, not knowing that another earthquake is about to hit. So a second earthquake comes along, and then you think,

*''Ah! oh well, tough luck'', I'm going to build again'.*

And then you build again then along comes a tsunami or some other kind of natural disaster. And then you build again, and again, and again.

Do you? Really? No, because if you have any sense of intelligence, then you are going to ask yourself, *'well, am I not building this house in the wrong place?* So, you go looking for another place, a better place, where the ground is less prone to earthquakes, where there are fewer natural disasters and where there is a better environment, to build a house. Right? Isn't this why people move homes? They look at crime rates. For example, say a young couple living together has a kid. Now they want to live somewhere, that is closer to a school. Perhaps where there is less crime and then they move. So you are constantly looking for a better place. Now the guy who is building this house then decides,

*'Well, let me go somewhere else and build this house'*.

Then they go somewhere else and start building. And unfortunately, this place is now prone to, not earthquakes this time, but some other kind of natural disaster. Volcanoes. Each time you finish building, there comes a volcano which erupts spilling the lava which burns down the whole house. Then you build another one there, and another one, and yet another one. Do you? No, you go somewhere else again and you keep moving. You keep going elsewhere, you keep going somewhere else trying to find this perfect place to build your house. Well, guess what? That is what we have always been doing in *sansàra.* We have been to the heavens; all six of them, we have been to the Brahma worlds; all twenty of them. We are now in the human world, always trying to find the right place to build our home. But guess what? Along comes a tsunami, along comes an earthquake, along comes a hailstorm, or a volcano erupts. These natural disasters are always coming. You then come to your senses, where at some point in this cycle, where you think;

*Hang on a second. Every time I build something. Sometimes it lasts a few months, sometimes it's a few years, sometimes it's a few days, but all this comes falling down, and it's just rubble and dust at the end of the day. So, do I keep building? When is enough, enough?”*

**Life in sansàra**

This is when the Lord Buddha comes along and says;

*"Well guys, guess what I've been thinking? I've realized that I've been doing exactly what you are doing, all this time in sansàra for an infinitely long time I've realized that whenever I built a house, it's always being struck by lightning or tsunamis or some kind of disaster, and when it falls down and then all my hard work, my labour, all the money I invested in it is all gone in vain. So I've decided. That's it. I'm going to stop doing this useless thing. There is no point in doing this. Because every time I build this, not only does it come crashing down and therefore that brings me an immense amount of pain, but also while it's still up and standing, I can't leave it like that. Because, yes, there are the natural disasters. But then there are also thieves, from whom I have got to protect my home from. There is also the paint that changes to a different funny shade every now and then. So I've have to get it painted. Then there are little insects and I've also got to protect my home from the elements. And there are times when electricity stops working, when the water stops running, when the gas stops working, at all these times I have to get involved and fix these things. And when I had five bedrooms, I had to do this in all five of my bedrooms. But guess what when I only had one bedroom, I didn't have that much work to do. And I also thought I can only be in one bedroom at any one time".*

So therefore, here he gives us this really valuable point to think about. Using this metaphor, I am talking about our life in *sansàra* here.

**Burning in the fires**

So, he asks us, you've been to the heavens, I've been to the heavens, I've been to the Brahma worlds, have been to the human world but most of the time I've actually spent in the hells because in trying to build this house it's not always that I've only used materials that I earned through the right means. There were times when I went and robbed somebody. There were times when I saw some bricks lying around in my neighbour´s garden and I thought, ''oh, I can just pick the right moment when he's looking away, then I'll go and pack a bag full of them and bring them over". When I saw that someone else had a lot of money I went and killed that person and took his money and built my house. I did all of these bad things trying to build my house. But unfortunately, every time I built, it was only a matter of time when it all came tumbling down and was all just rubble and dust at the end of the day. So, when I did all of those bad things the consequences of that were, me going to hell and I spent an infinitely long time there, burning in the fires.

**Dèvadùtha Sùtta – The Heavenly Messenger**

There is a 'sùtta' called 'The Dèvadùtha sùtta'; translated to English, that is, 'The Heavenly Messenger'. It is the discourse that the Lord Buddha gave to his monks, where having seen the hells through his own eyes - obviously not through physical eyes but through His wisdom, He gives us in very vivid detail, what the hells are like. He therefore asks us the question,

*"Is this where you want to go?"*

*And He tells us,*

*“If you do bad deeds, the sins, which are the dasa akusal, unfortunately whether you like it or not, this is where you are going to end up."*

And all of those things we just said, killing, stealing what's not yours, lying, slandering, backbiting, all of these are bad things, all these are evil deeds and the consequences of these things we don't realize. But they do come and bite us on the back and when they do bite us on the back, they bite hard and then we suffer.

**All things are conditioned**

So, the problem with building these houses and the problem with building anything, really is that, intrinsically any object has certain qualities, certain attributes. In *Pàli,* we use the terms *'sankatha, paticca samuppanna, kshaya dhamma, vaya dhamma'*. I would like to describe what these terms mean. In the context of anything that is conditioned, they have these qualities. What do I mean by things that are conditioned? Everything but Nibbàna is conditioned.

Let's take a few examples, we discussed the example of where this man builds a house. A house is nothing but a series of conditions coming together and materializing to give the effect that is the house. For instance, if you took a house at its most basic level, you've got four walls, a roof and a foundation. So, if I asked you to build me a house, what you are going to do is put down a foundation, you are going to build four walls on top of it and then you will put a roof over it and you will say, *''Sir, your house is ready''*. Obviously, there'll be things you will do in addition to that, but this is the basic definition of what a house is.

Now, if I give you a piece of paper or a sticker and say, ''can you go and stick this on my house?'' You are going to have to ask me a question. What is the question?

"*Where would you like me to stick this"?*

*"Well, I've told you, I want you to stick this on my house".*

And then again you ask me, ''*yes Sir, but where do you want me to stick it?''*

So you see if a house is a single unit, and if I ask you to go and stick something on my house, then it should be obvious where you are going stick this, because it's on my house. But it isn't obvious, Is it? Because the house is nothing but conditions coming together. It's nothing but a multitude of causes giving rise to this phenomenon that there is a house. There are the four walls, there is a foundation and perhaps a door, maybe some windows and so on and so forth. So, I will have to tell you to actually go and stick it on the wall facing the North, the South, the East or the West or stick it on the main door, on the front door. I change my mind, stick it on the back door, the rear door. Actually, let's put it on the roof. So I'm being very specific now. And then, when I give you that instruction now you can go and do it. Unless you want to be smart or you want to be clever and then you ask me,

*''Okay, you say door, when you say door where do you mean on the door*?''

Are you talking about the handle, talking about the lock of the door, are you talking about the top half of the door, the bottom half of the door, which bit of the door are you talking about? Well, I I've just told you stick it on the door. Now you will have to ask me where exactly because if you stick it in the wrong place I will come in and shout at you.

"*Well, you just said door, so I just assumed it is on this spot".*

*"Well, how can you assume"?*

**Cause and effect**

So, you see, the house is nothing but causes giving you that effect. It is the four walls, the roof and the foundation. So, you can't actually give me a house, all you can give me are the causes that gives a result, that is the house.

Similarly, if I took another example, let's say you've got a headache and you've come to me asking for some medicine and I say, "*well, I've got this balm that you need to apply*", or perhaps like they do in acupuncture, there is a series of needles that you stick on your body and then that cures you. I am not a specialist in acupuncture so this is not technically accurate, but this is just an example. So, for a headache you would stick this needle between your thumb and the index finger. Therefore, if I give you a needle and say this is the treatment for your ailment, go and stick it on your body. You will have to then ask me the question,

*".... Where?”*

And I'll just tell you we'll just stick it on your body. Then you are going to ask me,

".... *Does it matter where or do I stick it anywhere?”*

 Why are you asking me this question, because there is no such thing as the body. The body is just something that transpires. It's just something that we see within our minds, but a body doesn't actually exist. Why? Because you have your arms, your face, your eyes, your nose, your mouth, your ears, your chest, your stomach, your genitals, your legs, your feet, your toenails, your fingernails, your hair, your scalp. All of these things make up your body. So, where is the body? It is nothing but the constituent parts coming together, compounded, should give you this feeling that there is a body, that is in front of you.

**Take that fire with you**

Therefore, these two examples will hopefully convey that the result is nothing but causes coming together. So, if you want to take the results somewhere, you will have to take the causes with you.

Let's say you are looking at a fire, and I ask you the question, while you are looking at the fire; *''don't you think it's a nice fireplace, and you can see how the flames are looking*

 *as if they're alive, I'd like to have a fireplace like this in my home.”*

And then I will tell you;

 "*Well, why don't you take some of that fire with you?"*

Can you take some of that fire with you? If you try to do that, the only thing you would do is to go and recreate this fire in your home. You are never able to create exactly the same fire but you will try to do something that is as close as possible to what you have observed and what you liked. So, what would you do? You take some wood, you take something that is combustible perhaps a matchbox, may be some fuel and then you build a fire now. All you are doing is just providing the causes that give you the effect that is the fire. You can't take the fire with you but you can create the causes again that gives you that result. But if the logs of wood are wet for instance, that fire is never going to arise.

**Anicca**

Think about the time when you've picked up a matchbox that was wet and you tried to light a fire. No matter how hard you tried it was not lighting. Why? Because you are not able to create the friction that is required. So, if the causes aren't right, you are never, no matter how much you try, going to get the result that you want. This is why we use the word, *'****anicca’***to explain conditioned things around us. Anything that is conditioned will only be visible as that particular thing, that particular person, that particular incident, for as long as the conditions exist. A vehicle will only keep running for as long as a million different reasons, to keep that vehicle running, are in play or in motion. If the engine heats up - and there could be a hundred different reasons why an engine could heat up - it could be because it has run out of water, it could be because some valve is broken, may be the accelerator has stopped working. So again, there could be many reasons why a vehicle comes to a stop. You are only going to keep your body running for as long as all the reasons inside you as a human body, as a person, keep functioning to that extent, that keeps you alive.

**Sankatha**

Anything that is conditioned have these characteristics; *sankatha, paticca samuppanna, kshaya dhamma, waya dhamma*. Let's discuss what these mean. *'Sankatha*' or '*sankrutha'*; **'San'** is the combination of, ***avidyà*** and ***thrushnà***. *Avidyà* is ignorance and *Thrushnà* is attachment or *Tanha.* ***Krutha****'* is an **action;** is to do something; for example, you will have heard the word *Sanskrutha* or *Sanskrit* which is a language. The reason *Sanskrit* is called *Sanskrit* is because it is not a natural language, it is a language that was created. So, *sankrutha* or *sankatha* is something that has been created. Created by what? By the causes that give rise to it. Now I challenge you to think of any object that you can think of; any person that you can think of; absolutely any entity you can think of, that is not a '*sankatha'*, that is also not Nibbàna.

**Why is Nibbàna so good?**

People sometimes ask me, why is Nibbàna so good? What's so special about Nibbàna? Why is it that you are all struggling to attain Nirvàna? The reason for this is, because Nibbàna is not a ‘*sankatha*'. Nibbàna is not conditioned. Because anything that is conditioned will only remain in that state for as long as the causes for that result exist. We used several examples. But Nibbàna itself is not the result of conditions. It is condition-less. So, something that is not conditioned will be like that forever. But Nibbàna is not a place, it is not somewhere like a holiday that you can go to. Some religions talk about a place, as if there is a planet somewhere that you can go and find happiness forever. For example, in the time of The Buddha, when he was a Bodhisattva, his teachers Àlàrakàlàma and Uddakaràmaputta, were able to develop *Jhanas* and through those *Jhanas* they were able to focus on fine immaterial worlds, *Arùpàvachara Brahma Lòka.* In some of these worlds the lifespan is about 84,000 *mahà kalpas*.

**What is an ‘Eon’**

When the Buddha was asked,

 *''Can you give a number as to how long a kalpa or, an eon is?*

He said,

*''Well, I can't really give you a number, because numbers don't quite convey how large an eon is. But I can give you a metaphor.'' And he says, ''If you built a cuboid, a big box, that is 16 kilometers long, 16 kilometers wide, 16 kilometers tall and you fill it with mustard seeds, then think that every 100 years someone comes along and picks one of these mustard seeds and throws it out of the box; the time it takes to empty that box is less than the duration of an eon''.*

**Why did Buddha say, Brahma Worlds are useless?**

So, imagine 84,000 of these x 20. In my head I can't compute that number. It's unfathomable. But this is the longest lifespan of these immaterial worlds. So, we've been there and this is where Àlàrakàlàma and Uddakaràmaputta were. This is what they said, “Go to these worlds and you live forever where happiness is forever. You are not subjected to ailments; you are not subject to disease or death because obviously you don't have a body. So, you can't be subject to ailments, you can't be subject to diseases.” They thought that there was no death there either. But the Buddha was able to look past that and He realized that the people who were born in these worlds also die and then they could become animals, they could go into the hells. This is why He said that is useless as well.

**Nibbàna is not conditioned**

Anything that is conditioned, therefore has the characteristics which is *sankatha, sankrutha,* 'san' being *avidyà* and *thrushnà*; '*kruth'* being coming together of an action. So we have used a few examples to describe that. The problem with being a *sankatha*, is like the problem with hot water. There is nothing wrong with hot water or boiling water, unless you pour it over your head. Sometimes people use it for various things. Perhaps you are feeling a bit cold or maybe you want to make a cup of tea. You use boiling water for that. But what if you pour it over your head? Now that's doing a foolish thing. That's doing the wrong thing with that. So being *sankatha* is not the problem. The problem is that you go and attach yourself to it. That is where kshaya *Dhamma* and *vaya Dhamma* comes. But I will get to that.

**Paticca Samuppàda**

Then the second characteristic is, *'paticca samuppanna'*. **'Paticca Samuppàdaya**' is **Dependent Origination.** That is, things don't just arise out of nowhere, things don't fall out of the sky, whether it's human beings, whether it's planets, whether it's this universe or the tiniest micro-organism you can imagine. All of these are a result of 'Paticca Samuppàda' process, the Dependent Origination process.

*Avidyà Paccayà Sankàra,*

*Sankàra Paccayà Vinnàna,*

*Vinnàna Paccaya Nàmarùpa,*

*Nàmarùpa Paccayà Salàyathana,*

*Salayathana Paccayà Passa,*

*Passa Paccayà Vèdanà,*

*Vèdanà Paccayà Tanhà,*

*Tanhà Paccayà Upàdàna,*

*Upàdàna Paccayà Bhava,*

*Bhava Paccayà Jaathi'*

*Jàthi Paccayà Jarà, Marana, Shòka, Paridèva, Dukkha, Dòmanassa, Upàyàsa.*

*Sankàra paccayà vinnàna;* *vinnàna* is formations that give rise to consciousness. *Vinnàna paccaya nàmarùpa*; consciousness gives rise to name and form, and *nàmarùpa paccayà salàyathana;* gives rise to the six sense doors, *salayathana paccayà passa*; that gives rise to contact, contact gives rise to feeling, feeling gives rise to attachment; *tanhà,* *tanhà paccayà upàdàna*; gives rise to close association, *upàdàna paccayà bhava*; that gives rise to existence, and existence gives rise to birth. *Bhava paccayà jàthi;'* ignorance is the cause which gives rise to formations; *sankàra*. And that is okay, but the problem is when birth happens, it doesn't stop there. *Jàthi paccayà jarà, marana, shòka, paridèva, dukkha, dòmanassa, upàyasa.*

**The clock is ticking**

All of these are characteristics of something that has been born. A young baby comes into this world. From the moment it is conceived in the mother's womb, a clock starts. What clock is that? 'Death’. People don't often think about this. Why? Because that is apparently negative thinking. But this not the truth. From the moment the baby is conceived in the mother's womb, the clock starts ticking, the clock to death. Well, the clock was not ticking before the baby was conceived. In his previous birth there was a clock ticking there, but as a '*gundabba',* now having being conceived, the clock starts ticking. Again, that is not a problem to you and me because we don't have those attachments now. But if you have a child, if you perhaps intend to give birth to a child, then you've got to accept the fact that this child is going to be dead one day. Whether you die before this child or the child dies before you, where does it say that, which piece of paper can you go and read that says, 'you are going to die on this day and the child is going to die on this day? We don't know that. So, either you have to bury the child or the child has to bury you. That day is coming. The only question is whether you are ready for that.

**Paticca samuppanna process**

So, the problem with Paticca Samuppàda is the fact that whatever is given rise to, whatever results in birth, is then subject to *jarà-marana. Jarà* being decay. Marana being death. *Vyàdhi* being diseased. You can't name any object, any person that is not subject to this process. As human beings, we are all subject to these. A few years back there was a research. There were 30,000 different diseases contracted by human beings. How many of these 30,000 have you contracted yet? 30,000? Of these 30,000, only one-fourth can be cured. So, three-quarters of that 30,000 are incurable, because science has not found a solution to that yet; haven't found any medicine for that yet. What guarantee can you give to that young child that you are bringing into this world that, they are going to be safe; they are not going to be ill? You can't. Why? Because, they have come through the *paticca samuppanna* process. So, anything that comes with the *paticca samuppanna* process is going to be subject to that. It is like; think about when you send something from abroad, or when you travel overseas, you've got your baggage, you are coming to another country, whether you like it or not your bags will be scanned. If you put contraband that you shouldn't be bringing into that country, you are going to get caught. Likewise, if you come through the *paticca samuppanna* process you have to go through customs. You will be asked questions and if you are bringing in something you shouldn't be bringing; they are going to take it. You will have to surrender it.

Likewise, if you come in through the Paticca Samuppàda process, you will be subject to death, decay, disease, old age, all of these things. There is no other line. You can't escape that process. The only way you can escape is, possibly, if you put a stop to the *paticca samuppanna* process. If you stop flying, if you stop travelling to other countries, no one is going to scan your bags. Right? Simple.

**Anything that is sankatha & paticca samuppanna is subject to kshaya damma**

So, that is the Paticca Samuppàda; Dependent Origination. Characteristics of anything that is *sankatha, kshaya-dhamma*; the word ***kshaya*** means to **deteriorate**. Now there are two meanings to this word deteriorate. In this context, deteriorate is to go bad; is to become worse in some way. For example, if you have a wound on your body, if that is deteriorating that means it is getting worse. If you have a sickness and it is deteriorating then you better go to the doctor, if you haven't been there already. So, anything that is *sankatha*, anything that is *paticca samuppanna,* is subject to this deterioration characteristic. Why? Because that is the nature of anything that is *sankatha* and *paticca samuppanna*; because they are the result of conditions and as you know, every moment these conditions keep changing and as the conditions keep changing the result keeps changing and that is okay. Where is the problem? The problem is only when you go and attach yourself to it. Otherwise, none of these things are problems.

**Who is an Arahant?**

Think about an 'Arahant'. What is the difference between yourself and an Arahant? An Arahant still lives in a world that is *sankatha, paticca samuppanna, kshaya dhamma*; being deteriorating and *vaya dhamma*; being something that takes you down with it; that is destroyed at the end. But an Arahant does not attach himself to these things. If the house is burning it's okay as long as you don't run into the house it. If there's a fire, it's okay that there's a fire as long as you don't go and put your hand into it. It's okay that the iron is hot as long as you don't touch the hot plate. Likewise, it's okay that the world is *sankatha* and *paticca samuppanna*, if you don't go and jump into it. If you don't go and attach yourself to it. So, *kshaya dhamma;* characteristic of deteriorating, as soon as you attach yourself to that object, what you are doing is you are setting an expectation. *'I want this to be this way. I want my mother to be to be free from disease. I want her to live a very happy, long life'*. You now set an expectation. Well, guess what's going to happen? She came through the Paticca Samuppàda; she came through customs. She is going to be scanned, whether you like it or not. If she didn't fly in the first place then okay; no problem. But she flew. She came to the border and now she will have to go through border control. She has come through the Paticca Samuppàda process. She is a result of ***'hèthu-pala'***.

**Who said that Nibbàna is far away?**

If she is the *'palaya'* there are *'hèthu'* too. There are causes that has given rise to this result and therefore she is going to be subject to disease, decay and death. And if you set an expectation, certainly you have an attachment to that, then you are going to suffer along with that. When people don't understand the Dhamma, what people tend to do is, when building that house, all they want to do is, to build the best house in the neighborhood. *"I want this to be the prettiest house in the neighborhood; the biggest house in the neighborhood"*. Therefore, it doesn't matter whether I go and steal what I need from someone else, because I don't have the resources. Or perhaps you go and destroy something, someone else's house.

Think about all the fairy tales you used to read. When someone wasn't able to be the best, become the prettiest, become the most handsome, what did they do? They went and caused harm to the other person. Think about Snow White. When that Wicked Witch wanted to be the prettiest and the fairest of them all and she thought that was what she was and then someone else comes along. Guess what? You've got a competitor and you can do one of two things. You either become prettier and fairer; if you can't do that, then go and kill the other person. Fairy tales are good enough for us to attain Nibbàna. But you've got to be able to penetrate through the colour; think of it as more than just a story. Who says Nibbàna is far away? A young child who understands this philosophy can sit watching Snow White and at the end of watching the cartoon will understand Nibbana or realise Nibbàna.

**Vyàpàda**

So, *sankatha, paticca samuppanna, kshaya-dhamma, vaya-dhamma*; *vaya* is to reduce in quality. Perhaps you have heard the word, *vyàpàda* which is one of the hindrances. *Vayà* is something that is characteristic of taking someone to a bad place, and in the context of the Buddha Dhamma, a bad place is generally to be understood as a hell. Anything that is conditioned has the potential to take someone to a bad place - if they do what? If they attach themselves to it and then go and cause harm and damage to other people or their possessions. But if you don't do that, then again that's okay. So it's okay that the world is *sankatha, paticca samuppanna, kshaya-dhamma* and *vaya-dhamma*.

But the problem is not that because you can't change that. The Buddha never gives a problem that you can't solve. That is not the Buddha's way. He gives you a problem and says,

*"Here's the problem; here's the cause for that problem; here's how you solve that problem and here's the path to solving that problem".*

What's the point in giving you a problem that you can't solve? Pointless. The Buddha doesn't do that. He doesn't tell us that,

"*All the problems in the world are sankatha, paticca samuppanna, kshaya-dhamma and vaya-dhamma, so, I don't know what to do with it".*

That is not what He says. He says,

"*Well, that is the world. Understand that the world is like that. But protect yourself. Attachment is what brings you the suffering that comes along with it. So if you stop attachment; if you find the reason why you attached yourself;*

 ***which is your delusion******that keeps the ignorance that you have***

*(Comment; Meaning of this phrase is not very clear to me)*

 *that says. “Oh, this thing is of much value”; then if you can understand, penetrate through that and realize “no, this thing is only going to bring me suffering at the end of it”.*

Then you step away.

**Rat in a trap**

Recently when I was reflecting on this, I felt like a rat that's caught in a trap. Imagine you being a rat caught in a rat-trap. Say the house owner has been wanting to catch the rodent that's been eating all his food, eating the furniture, so he sets a trap. What does he do? He puts in a bait and the bait is sometimes a piece of cheese, or he uses bits of coconut. So, what you do is, you hang this bit of coconut in the trap and then the rat comes looking for food, looks at this cheese or this bit of coconut and thinks... *"That's some nice food, I'd like to have a bit of that"*, goes in, takes a bite of that and snap! the cage is shut. I'm not talking about a trap that actually kills the mice, I'm talking about a trap that actually traps the animal in the cage. Now if you were the rat that's in the cage, imagine it's about 1 o'clock in the morning. This person set this trap just before they went to bed, say around 11 o'clock. A couple of hours later the rat is stuck in this cage. The person will come along at 6 o'clock in the morning. It's now 1 o'clock you have five hours in that cage. Plenty of time to reflect. Plenty of time to think about, "*what did I do to myself*?” Now, because you are in that cage, you are unable to get out of the cage. You are completely subject to whatever this person wants to do to you. So, if this person wants to come and gas you to death; could he not do that? He could do that. If he wants to come and chop your head off; could he not do that? He could do that. If he wants to come and burn you alive; could he not do that? He could do that. If he brings a sharp knife with him, he could slice you up bit by bit until you were dead; could he not do that? He could do that. If he wants to put you in a bag and slam the bag left right and centre until you are dead, he could do that as well or he could just go and throw that cage into the ocean and then you are going to suffocate and die.

**The fate of rat stuck in the trap**

Well, I feel that I am a rat stuck in a cage. I've got time to reflect. This person will come along. Who is this person I'm talking about? *Màra;* death. My death is coming. So, I've got plenty of time to reflect. But I don't know when he will arrive. So, my heart's pounding away. I don't know if you have had the opportunity to hold in your hands, a little bird that might have been stuck somewhere and you want to free this bird. When you hold it in your hands you can feel his little heart pounding away. Why? Because this bird is petrified. It is thinking, *"I'm going to die now. This person is going to kill me."* If you have ever had that opportunity, you know not to cause any harm, and of course, to set the bird free.

The other day when we were in the monastery, there was a bird that came and got stuck in one of the mosquito nets that we use. I went and took the bird in my hand. As I held the bird, I could see it trying to get out of my grasp. I could feel his little heart pounding away like nothing I felt before. And then I could almost sense how much fear this animal has within it. Because, it is completely under my control now. I could do whatever I like with this animal. I could squash it to death if I wanted to. Could I not?

**Face the 'Màra'**

So that is why I feel like a rat stuck in a cage. I am in a cage. *Màra* is going to come and get me any time he wants and then he could kill me in whichever way he wants. He could chuck a stone or a rock over my head, crush my skull and kill me. Have you not seen people die like that? What about people who've had unfortunate deaths on the roads? Crushed like a piece of paper, flat as a piece of paper, because a massive container truck fell over this person's car. Or they could drown at sea. They could burn to death. There are 101 different ways in which one could die but they never know how the end will come. But that death is coming. It could be a natural death. Perhaps the owner set this trap and he completely forgot about it. Well, you are still going to die. You've got some time to reflect.

**What one should be reflecting** **on**

The question is what do you do in this time that you've got to reflect. Do you think,

*'Okay, I'm now stuck in a trap. But what am I going to eat tomorrow and when I am out of this trap where would I go on holiday? I wonder what my kids are up to right now? Why they haven't eaten yet? Perhaps I should go and make something as soon as I am freed from this trap. All those little twigs that I brought along to make myself a little nest, make myself a little home. I wonder if they're getting wet in the rain right now. I forgot them all inside'*.

Is this what this poor rat is going to be worried about. No. This poor animal's heart is pounding away, not knowing how it's going to meet with death. Because death is coming, it is only a matter of time. So, if I am the rat stuck in this cage what should I be thinking about? I should be thinking,

*"Well, how did I get into this trap in the first place? It wasn't the cage that bothered me. Because this is how my great grandfather died as well. My great-grandfather got trapped in a cage. So did my grandfather. So did my father. They all got stuck in cages, in traps, that were set by people. So I knew that the trap was dangerous. Every time I saw a trap, I should walk a million miles away. I should run away from it. But oh! that bit of cheese. Now that was lovely. That bit of cheese I could never look away from. Oh, no! give me a bit of cheese and you could get me to do anything for you."*

**I was fooled by a bit of cheese**

Well, guess what you've done to yourself? Now, that bit of cheese tricked you. That bit of cheese was what got you into this trap. Because you did a walkabout and saw this bit of cheese and thought,

*'Mm that's delicious. I need to go get hold of this rùpa, vèdana, sannnà, sankàra, vinnàna'.* *'I need to get myself some of that*. *I should take some of this. I'm going to enjoy some of this'*.

That *rùpa, vèdana, sannnà, sankàra, vinnàna* completely fooled you. It fooled me. This is why in my previous birth I thought,

*'Oh! What if I could be a human being? I could enjoy all the sights, the sounds, the smells, the tastes, the physical contact all the rùpa, vèdana, sannnà, sanàra, vinnàna. What a beautiful world full of all these things. Oh, how I wish I could be born again and enjoy all of these things.’*

That was the ignorance that I had inside of me. And guess what? Today, I'm stuck in a trap, I'm in a cage. *Màra* could come and get me anytime now. I have no escape from this.

From my own personal experiences, how many headaches have I had from the time I was born. If all of those headaches you've ever had, all came at one point in time, just imagine all the headaches you've ever had put together into just one moment, your head would explode. All the mosquito bites you've ever had, if all of those mosquitoes came and bit you in one moment, you wouldn't be able to tolerate that pain. All the times where you knocked yourself somewhere, where you've had a bad tummy, where you ate something funny or your eye started to ache, you had an itch somewhere, if all of those things came to you at one point you wouldn't be able to tolerate it at all. The problem is, you don't realize that. Because all of these things come every once in a while, and it is always, *'it's just another headache I'll take a Paracetamol. That'll go away'*.

But we've been doing that for a very long time and this is what we do every day. We don't realize that it is this *rùpa, vèdana, sannnà, sankàra, vinnàna.* It was that bit of cheese that got me into this place and into this trap in the first place. Because, I was fooled by it.

**Lure of the cheese**

But you see, the really subtle point I am trying to make here is, it is not the trap that you need to be worried about. It is not the trap that you need to be scared of. Then what is it? The cheese. It is the cheese you need to be worried about. It is the cheese that you need to be scared of. When you can sense *rùpa, vèdana, sannà, sankàra, vinnàna* or in other words see sights, hear sounds, feel tastes, smells and texture when you can feel these things, from the moment I realize that, actually I am nothing but a rat stuck in a cage. All I see around me is fire. If ever I see something that looks pretty, I am thinking it is fire. Would I want that for myself? No. If I am looking at some food, I am thinking, *'that's a nice bit of chocolate. I'd like to have that*'. Before that, what I am seeing is fire. Would I put that in my mouth? No. But without realizing this, I'm thinking, *'chocolate, I'd like a bit of chocolate'*. What am I doing? I am creating the causes that will give rise to another body that takes me round in *sansàra* again. What if, while I'm having that bit of chocolate, I die with this attachment that I have to that taste? Well, guess what? You are going to be born again with another tongue. A tongue doesn't come along by itself. It will come along with the body. It will come along with eyes, with ears, with the mouth with this body. Ask yourself this simple question. If you were able to exist and enjoy the sights, the sounds, the taste; but didn't have this body to worry about, would you not opt for that? Would you not choose that? Of course, you would. Why? Because you wouldn't be sick. You won't have to suffer all the pain, you wouldn't be too cold, you won't be too hot, because you wouldn't have a physical body to worry about.

**Life in the Brahma worlds**

But you could still see all the sights, you could hear all the sounds. This is what life is like in the Brahma worlds. I am not saying, go to Brahma worlds and enjoy life there. That's futile too. But at least it's better than life here. The reason we keep coming back as human beings is because we are still attached to the sense of touch and the sense of taste and the sense of smell. Whenever we smell something nice, we want to go and smell more of it, not realizing that's the cheese that's going to get me into this cage; into this trap. When you taste something you think, *'I would like a little bit more of that. Not because I am still hungry and I want some more food. But because I like that taste'.* You're not realizing that's the cheese that will get you into the trap. That's the cheese that your dad got trapped into. That's the cheese that got your grandfather trapped into. Well, why are you going into that same trap?

**Look at your elders**

This is why we need to look at our fellow beings, our elders. Look at their lives. Look at the lives that they are spending today. Have they surpassed the physical pain that they have to endure? No. They are still suffering. With old age comes ailments, disease and pain. They still have to suffer with all of these things. If you come back again with this body and live to that age, you are also going to suffer. So, whenever you see these things; the sights that you think you like and you want to go and see it again, it could be a flower, it could be a cartoon; it doesn't matter what it is, whether you are a young child who likes your cartoon, well, it makes no difference whether you are young or old. Attachment to a cartoon can bring you back into *sansàra.* Is it worth it?

**Prathyavèkshàva**

This is why, when as monks we have this practice where we do *'Prathyavèkshà'* before we eat, before we don robes, before we use a shelter, before we take medicines. *Prathyavèkshà* is when we reflect on, '*why am I taking this; why am I taking this food; this food is not to satisfy my taste buds, this food is not to make me look prettier, more handsome, not to build parts of my body so that I look more attractive. It is none of those things. It's only to practice this path of becoming an Àrya, of becoming an Arahant'*. So if you can do that, then whether it's a bit of chocolate or it's a bit of grass makes no difference to you. If you can sustain yourself on that food, that's all that matters to you.

**Your actions will bring vipàka**

When you hear a song, what if you go and listen to it? Now you are doing an action and that action is going to bring you *vipàka*; *results*. And that result could be rebirth. Is it worth coming back into *sansàra* because of a song? Is it worth coming back into *sansàra* for a bit of chocolate? If you are going to be suffering from hundreds of different diseases, think if you've had smallpox, if you had chickenpox, if you had mumps. How much did you suffer from headaches? When you burnt your fingers, when you got hurt, when you bit your tongue; my goodness, when you got cut, got yourself caught in the zipper, how painful was that? All of these are personal experiences that most people would have had. But, when that happens you think, ‘*I don't want this again'*. But then as soon as you see a bit of chocolate, *'oh, chocolate, chocolate, chocolate; pizza, pizza, pizza',* and then your mind fools you. Then you become the rat. You become the rat that gets fooled by a bit of cheese and then without knowing you walk into that trap. The door shuts. Now you are under the control of *Màra*. Now the *Màra* can come and do absolutely anything he likes to you because you are now in his trap.

**The four states of mindfulness**

Isn't this why The Lord Buddha say,

*'always be within* ***sathara sathi pattàna' (the four states of mindfulness)****.*

This is why He says,

*'This is the land of the Father, 'Piyàgè bhoomiya'.*

 He says *'Piyàgè bhoomiya',* here *Piya* is the father and he refers to himself as the father; *bhoomiya*  being the land. If you always live within the land of the father and this land is the *sathara sathi pattana*; where you constantly reflect on how you use your body. Why am I walking; why am I sitting; why am I lifting my arm; why am I pointing my finger; why am I putting this food in my mouth; *Prathyawèkshà*, remember? Why am I taking this medicine? When someone else takes some food does your tummy start to rumble? Well, if it does, then there's a problem. Because they are trying to put out their hunger and now you are becoming hungry, just because someone else is taking their food. Then you should be getting a headache when you see someone else take Paracetamol. That doesn't happen. So something is really wrong with you then. That's how our minds work. And that's the cure we are trying to find a solution for.

**Don't be a fool**

So, reflect on how you use your body, reflect on how your thoughts come and go. Is it things that bring you *ràga, dvèsha, mòha*; desire aversion and delusion? What about your *vèdanà*; your feelings, do you feel *sukha vèdanà*; good feeling; *dukkha vèdanà*, bad feeling or neutral feeling, which is *adukkhama-sukha vèdanà*.

The Lord Buddha says,

*Look at good feeling as painful. Because it's the good feeling that you go and attach yourself to'*.

You see this is why, I said The Lord Buddha never gives a problem and says, *'here's a problem, tough*'. He only presents a problem with the solution to it. This is why he says,

*' If it is a good feeling. Be careful. It's going to hurt you, if you attach yourself'*.

Just like He says,

*'This is the bit of cheese. Be careful. Don't become a fool'.*

If the rat was able to just walk past a bit of cheese ignoring it or looking at it and thinking, *"aha! this is that cheese that got me last time, this time I'm not going to get caught, this time I'm not going to become a fool, I'm not going to be a fool and fall into this trap*".

No trap is ever going to catch that rat if the rat thought this way. But if the rat is going to be fooled by that cheese then it is completely under the control of *Màra.*

**Stop being a rat**

So, the sights, the sounds, the tastes that you experience; the smells and the physical contact that you experience, think about, *'if I go after these things, do I want more of it'*? When you hear something, do you want to go and listen to it? Seeing and looking are two different things. Seeing is a result. Looking is an action. Hearing is a result. Listening is an action. Tasting is the same. Unfortunately, there are no two words for that. You can taste something, when something goes into your mouth or you are just eating food and then you are tasting it. But that could be just a result of something. But what if you actually deliberately want to go and taste it. Now that is an action.

Likewise. you can feel things. If you are sitting on the floor or on a chair, you can feel that pressure. Or you can feel that it's a certain temperature in your room. But what if you go and volitionally, deliberately go and feel something? When you do any of these things what you're saying is, *'oh, I feel that taste is a good thing; I want to go after it'*. You are saying that sights are pleasurable, so I want to see more things. I want to hear more things. And when you do that whether you like it or not, you are creating the causes to bring you back into this *sansàra*. If any of these objects come to your consciousness at the moment of your death, guess that you are going to fall back into that cage.

So, I have now shared with you what the cage is like; what got you into that cage; how do you stop getting into that cage and the steps towards self-liberation. If that's not the Four Noble Truths then tell me what is. So, stop being a rat and reflect on how your mind works.



**2017-12-31 BBE 014 Don’t be a rat**

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