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him. Rāhula diligently complies, and both mother and son pass the days anxiously awaiting Sarvārthasiddha's return (IX.232-250 [Ce 81a6-82a1]).

Finally, Upagupta concludes the chapter and therefore this major section of the *Bhadrakalpāvadāna* by addressing Aśoka in two *mālinī* verses:

Sire, [although] Śuddhodana still yearned [to see] his son's face, he passed the day delighting in his grandson's intelligence, while Gautamī, bereft of those lotuses, her eyes, overcame grief⁶⁷ by listening to the reports of him from every servant in the city.

[Sire, since] you long for that rare, sweet draught, the narrative of the Lord's noble deeds and since, because of the lengthy separation, you desire a speedy reunion [with him for all in Kapilavastu], then harken eagerly to the *Sulalitavṛtta* wherein it is said, 'He who is the vessel for the welfare of the three worlds acquired the Jewel of Awakening.'⁶⁸

67 Here glossing *atiśokā* as *atītaśokā*, '[she who has] gone beyond grief'.

68 *sutamukham abhilāṣi bhūpa śuddhodano 'sau divasam anayad ittham pautraprajñābhītuṣṭaḥ / vigatanayanapadmā gautamī cātiśokā sakalaprabhatebhyas tasya vāritāṃ nīsamya // sukṛtamadhurapāne durlabhe sābhilāṣaḥ sucirataraviyogā<c> chīghrasamyogam icchan / tribhuvanahitapātram prāptavān bodiratnam iti Sulalitavṛttam karnaya protsukvāt // IX.251-252 (Ce 82a1-3). — Sulalitavṛtta = Lalitavistara.*

* * * * *

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF NĀNAVĪRA THERA'S 'A NOTE ON PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA'

Part One

Bhikkhu Bodhi

Introduction

1. Nānavīra Thera's *Notes on Dhamma* was first published in 1963, during the author's lifetime, in a small cyclostyled edition distributed to a select list of recipients. During the following two years the author made a number of corrections and substantial additions to his original text, leaving behind at his death an enlarged typescript entitled *Notes on Dhamma (1960-1965)*. For twenty-two years this version circulated from hand to hand among a small circle of readers in the form of typed copies, photocopies and handwritten manuscripts. Only in 1987 did *Notes on Dhamma* appear in print, when it was issued along with a collection of the author's letters under the title *Clearing the Path: Writings of Nānavīra Thera (1960-1965)*¹.

Even this edition, a print run of 1,000 copies, turned out to be ephemeral. Barely nine months after the book was released, the editor-publisher (who had invested at least five years preparing the material for publication) died under tragic circumstances. Path Press effectively closed down and the question whether the book will ever be reprinted still hangs in the air. But in spite of its limited availability, *Clearing the Path* has had an impact on its readers that has been nothing short of electric. Promoted solely by word of mouth, the book has spawned an international network of admirers — a Theravāda Buddhist underground — united in their conviction that *Notes on Dhamma* is the sole key to unlock the inner meaning of the Buddha's

1 Path Press, Colombo 1987.

Teaching. Some of its admirers have called it the most important book written in this century, others have hailed it as the most outstanding work on the Dhamma to appear since the Nikāyas were first written down on palm leaves at the Aluviāra. For the book's enthusiasts no effort is too much in struggling through its dense pages of tightly compressed arguments and copious Pāli quotations in order to fulfil its author's invitation 'to come and share his point of view'.

Ñānavīra's purpose in writing the *Notes* was, in his own words, 'to indicate the proper interpretation of the Suttas', the key to which he believed he had discovered through an experience that he identified as the arising of the Eye of Dhamma (*dharmacakkhu*), that is, the attainment of stream-entry². His proposition sounds innocuous enough as it stands, until one discovers that the author sees this task as entailing nothing less than a radical re-valuation of the entire Theravāda exegetical tradition. Few of the standard interpretative principles upheld by Theravāda orthodoxy are spared the slashing of his pen. The most time-honoured explanatory tools for interpreting the Suttas, along with the venerated books from which they stem, he dismisses as 'a mass of dead matter choking the Suttas'. The Abhidhamma Piṭaka, the Milindapañha, the Visuddhimagga, the Pāli Commentaries — all come in for criticism, and the author says that ignorance of them 'may be counted as a positive advantage as leaving less to be unlearned'³.

2. Strangely, although *Notes on Dhamma* makes such a sharp frontal attack on Theravāda orthodoxy, to date no proponent of the mainstream Theravāda tradition has risen to the occasion and attempted to counter its arguments. The few traditionalists who have read the book have either disregarded it entirely or merely branded it as a thicket of errors. But to my knowledge none has tried to point out exactly what these errors are and to meet its criticisms with reasoned argumentation based directly on the texts.

2 See *Clearing the Path*, pp.153, 495.

3 *Ibid.*, p.5.

The present essay is an attempt to fill that gap. I will be concerned here with only one note in Ñānavīra's collection, his 'A Note on Paṭiccasamuppāda'. This note, however, is the main pillar of Ñānavīra's distinctive approach to the Suttas; it is the first and longest note in the book and the most consistently radical. The Note sounds a bold challenge to the prevailing 'three-life interpretation' of the twelve-factored formula of dependent arising. The traditional interpretation of this formula, expounded in full detail in the Visuddhimagga (Chapter XVII), has guided followers of mainstream Theravāda Buddhism for centuries in their understanding of this most profound and difficult principle of the Dhamma. Hence a criticism of it that claims to be validated by the Suttas themselves strikes from within at the very core of the orthodox Theravāda commentarial tradition.

At the beginning of his Note, Ñānavīra states that he assumes his reader is acquainted with this traditional interpretation and is dissatisfied with it (§2). Such dissatisfaction, he asserts, is not unjustified, and he proposes to provide in its place what he modestly claims 'may perhaps be found to be a more satisfactory approach'. I too will assume that the reader is already acquainted with the three-life interpretation, and hence I will not recapitulate that interpretation here. While the reader who has personal access to Ñānavīra's Note and can refer to it in the course of this discussion may be able to follow my arguments here more easily, for the benefit of readers who are not so situated I will recount below those contentions of his with which I take issue.

3. My purpose in writing this examination is to vindicate the traditional three-life interpretation against Ñānavīra's critique of it. I propose to show that the approach which he considers to be 'more satisfactory' not only cannot be justified by reference to the discourses of the Buddha, but is in fact contradicted by them. I also intend to establish that, contrary to Ñānavīra's allegations, the three-life interpretation, though not explicitly stated in such terms, is fully in accord with the Buddha's teachings. In my view, this interpretation, far from deviating from the Suttas, simply makes explicit the Buddha's intention in expounding dependent arising.

In making this assertion, I am not saying that the detailed exposition of *paṭiccasamuppāda* (PS) as found in the Pāli Commentaries can in all particulars be traced back to the Suttas. The aim of the Commentaries, in their treatment of PS, is to correlate the Suttanta teaching of PS with the systematic analysis of phenomena and their conditional relations as found in the Abhidhamma. This results in an explanation of PS that is far more complex and technical than anything that can be drawn out from the Sutta texts themselves. I do not think that acceptance of the basic dynamics of the 'three-life' approach entails acceptance of the details of the commentarial explanation, and I also believe that the Commentaries take unnecessary risks when they try to read back into the Suttas ideas deriving from tools of interpretation that appeared perhaps centuries after the Suttas were compiled. All that I wish to maintain is that the essential vision underlying the commentarial interpretation is correct: namely, that the twelvefold formula of PS extends over three lives and as such describes the generative structure of Saṃsāra, the round of repeated births⁴.

Like Nāṇavīra, I take as the sole ultimate authority for interpretation of the Dhamma the Buddha's discourses as found in the four main Nikāyas and in the older strata of the Khuddaka Nikāya. I share with him the view that these books can be considered the most trustworthy record of the Buddha's teaching, and hence should be turned to as the final court of appeal in resolving questions about the correct interpretation of the Dhamma.

4 In this paper I will not be concerned at all with the Vibhaṅga's Abhidhamma Bhājanīya (Chapter VI), which applies the 12 factors of PS to each single mind-moment (*citta*) in the Abhidhamma analysis of consciousness. Although here all 12 factors are shown to be operative at a single moment, this treatment of the doctrine is not put forward as an interpretation of the PS formula intended in the Suttas, as is clear from the distinction the Vibhaṅga itself makes between the Suttanta method and the Abhidhamma method. In its treatment of PS by the Suttanta method, the Vibhaṅga confirms the three-life approach.

Unlike Nāṇavīra, however, I do not hold that all later works, such as the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and the Commentaries, should be rejected point blank as miasmas of error and decay. We must certainly accept the findings of scientific scholarship regarding the dating of the canonical and post-canonical texts, and should recognise that Theravāda doctrine has evolved in several strata through the Abhidhamma, the Commentaries and the later exegetical works. In my view, however, this does not mean that every text that was composed after the age of the Nikāyas must be regarded with distrust or disdain.

Fundamental Attitudes

4. Before I turn to examine certain specific points in Nāṇavīra's Note I wish to focus on one discomfiting consequence entailed by his insistence that his view of PS is exclusively and absolutely correct. The three-life interpretation of PS has been maintained by the Theravāda tradition virtually from the time that tradition emerged as a distinct school. It goes back long before the time of Buddhaghosa's commentaries and can be found already in near-definitive form in the Vibhaṅga of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and the Paṭisambhidāmagga of the Sutta Piṭaka, works dating from around the third century BCE. Further, this interpretation, in its essential outlines, is by no means peculiar to the Theravāda school. It was also shared, with minor differences in details, by the early rivals of the Theravāda, the Sarvāstivāda and Mahā-sāṅghika, which suggests that at least in outline this way of explaining PS already preceded the first schisms. The same three-life division can be found in the works of the great Mādhyamika philosopher Nāgārjuna (e.g., in his *Mūlamādhyamikakārikā*, Chapter 26), and is also held in the present day by the Mahāyāna schools that have inherited the exegetical methodology of ancient Indian Buddhism⁵. In contrast, Nāṇavīra's view of PS, as pertaining

5 Thus the so-called Tibetan Wheel of Life, which probably stems from the old Indian Sarvāstivāda, expressly coordinates a pictorial representation of the 12 factors with a picture of the different planes of rebirth.

solely to a single life, appears to be without precedent in the tenet systems of early Buddhism. Thus, when Nāṇavīra holds that he has correctly grasped the Buddha's intention in expounding PS, this implicitly commits him to the thesis that the entire mainstream Buddhist philosophical tradition has utterly misinterpreted this most fundamental Buddhist doctrine, and had already done so within two centuries after the Master's demise. While it is not altogether impossible that this occurred, it would seem a lapse of astonishing magnitude on the part of the early Buddhist community.

5. Of course, the above argument is not in itself compelling, for one might still be prepared to stand behind Nāṇavīra's claim no matter how audacious it may be. So let us now turn to the Note itself and examine his views on PS. For the present we will pass over his opening salvos against the three-life interpretation. Instead, let us move directly into the sections of the Note in which he reveals his own 'more satisfactory approach'. We will return to the criticisms later and see if they truly require us to abandon the traditional understanding of the doctrine.

Nāṇavīra maintains that PS, in its twelve-factored formulation, applies solely and entirely to our existential situation in this present life, without any reference to temporal divisions. It is, in his view, an ever-present existential structure of the unenlightened mind describing the mode of being of the 'uninstructed common person' (*assutavā puthujjana*). Nāṇavīra insists that this interpretation of PS alone offers us a way to resolve the immediate problem of existence in the present itself: 'It is a matter of one's fundamental attitude to one's own existence — is there, or is there not, a *present* problem, or rather, *anxiety* that can only be resolved *in the present*?' (§7).

I fully agree with Nāṇavīra that our interpretation of PS must flow from our 'fundamental attitude to (our) own existence'. It is also clear from the Suttas that the Buddha's motive in teaching PS is to lead us to a present solution of the existential problem of suffering. Repeatedly in the Suttas we see the Buddha teaching PS in order to lay bare the structure of conditions that underlies the origination and cessation of *dukkha*. However, in

order to understand how PS fulfils this function, we should focus on the question: What is the meaning of the *dukkha* that the Buddha's Teaching is designed to liberate us from? Nāṇavīra contends that this *dukkha* is the anxiety and stress that pervade our present existence, and hence he interprets all the terms of the standard PS formula in a way that lends support to this contention. However, if we read the Suttas on their own terms, in their totality, we find that Nāṇavīra's understanding of *dukkha* falls far short of the vision of the First Noble Truth that the Buddha wishes to impart to us. Of course, *dukkha* does include 'existential anxiety', and there are several suttas which define the conditions for the arising and removal of such *dukkha*⁶. An unbiased and complete survey of the Nikāyas, however, would reveal that the problem of *dukkha* to which the Buddha's Teaching is addressed is not primarily existential anxiety, nor even the distorted sense of self of which such anxiety may be symptomatic. The primary problem of *dukkha* with which the Buddha is concerned, in its most comprehensive and fundamental dimensions, is the problem of our bondage to Saṃsāra — the round of repeated birth, ageing and death. And, as I will show presently, these terms are intended quite literally as signifying biological birth, ageing and death, *not* our anxiety over being born, growing old and dying.

A glance at the Suttas would suffice to reveal to us the 'fundamental attitudes' that motivated the Buddha and the early disciples in their own quest for deliverance. We find, for example, that each Bodhisatta, from Vipassī to Gotama, seeks the path to enlightenment with the thought, 'Alas, this world has fallen into trouble, in that *it is born and ages and dies and passes away and is reborn*, and it does not know the escape from this suffering of ageing and death'⁷. When young seekers go forth into homelessness out of faith in the Buddha, they do so because they

6 I have in mind particularly M 138 and S II 15–19. These show how *pari-tassanā*, which might be rendered 'anxiety', arises from clinging (*upādāna*) and ceases with the removal of clinging.

7 S II 5–11.

have realised: 'I am immersed in birth, ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure and despair; I am immersed in suffering, afflicted with suffering. Perhaps one can discern here an end-making to this entire mass of suffering'⁸. Again and again the Buddha stresses the misery of repeated existence within Saṃsāra, again and again he underscores the urgency of escaping from it (see e.g., S II 178-93). And his constant injunction to the monks throughout his ministry was to dwell diligently so that '*having abandoned the wandering on in births, you will make an end of suffering*' (*pahāya jātisamsāram dukkhass' antam karissati*)⁹. These words should leave no doubt that by putting an end to suffering the Buddha means — not release from existential anxiety — but release from the round of rebirths. Insofar as the Dhamma addresses the problem of our present suffering, it does so by situating that suffering in its larger context, our condition of saṃsāric bondage. The present cannot be considered only in its vertical depths. It must also be viewed as the intersection of the past and future, shaped by our past experience and harbouring our future destiny in its womb.

If the Dhamma is to enable us to extricate ourselves from the *dukkha* of repeated birth and death, it must make known the chain of causes that holds us in bondage to this round of repeated birth and death, and it must also indicate what must be done to bring this cycle to a halt. Throughout the Suttas we can find only one basic statement of the causal structure of Saṃsāra, one overarching formulation with many minor variations, and that is the twelvefold formula of dependent arising. If one's aim in following the Dhamma is to gain release from existential anxiety, then the three-life interpretation of PS may seem unsatisfactory and one may turn to Nāṇavīra's version as more adequate. But the task which the Buddha sets before his disciples is of a different nature: namely, to gain liberation from the recurrent cycle of birth, old age and death, that is, from bondage to Saṃsāra. Once one

8 M I 192, 460, 463, etc.

9 D II 121.

accepts this task as one's own, one will see that PS must be looked upon as a disclosure of the conditioned structure of Saṃsāra, showing us how our ignorance, craving and volitional activity keep us chained to the round of existence and drive us from one life to the next.

Birth, Ageing and Death

6. I now intend to take up for scrutiny what might be regarded as the two planks of Nāṇavīra's interpretation. The two planks to which I refer are his attempts to explain the relationships between those conditions which, in the traditional interpretation, are held to extend over different lifetimes. These are: (i) the nexus of *bhava*, *jāti* and *jarāmaṇa* — becoming ('being', in Nāṇavīra's translation), birth, and ageing-and-death; and (ii) the nexus of *avijjā*, *saṅkhārā* and *viññāṇa* — ignorance, formations ('determinations') and consciousness. I will show that Nāṇavīra's explanations of both these groups of factors fail to draw support from the source that he himself regards as the supreme authority in the interpretation of the Dhamma, namely, the Pāli Suttas. I will also show that, *contra* Nāṇavīra, on both points the Suttas confirm the traditional interpretation, which regards these connections as involving a succession of lives.

7. Let us first turn to Nāṇavīra's treatment of the former nexus (§10 of his Note):

The fundamental *upādāna* or 'holding' is *attavāda*, which is holding to a belief in 'self'. The *puthujjana* takes what appears to be his 'self' at its face value; and so long as this goes on he continues to *be* a 'self', at least in his own eyes (and in those of others like him). This is *bhava* or 'being'. The *puthujjana* knows that people are born and die; and since he thinks 'my self exists' so he also thinks 'my self was born' and 'my self will die'. The *puthujjana* sees a 'self' to whom the words *birth* and *death* apply.

Before we go any further, we should point out that Nāṇavīra does not cite any suttas to support his understanding of *bhava*, *jāti* and *jarāmaṇa*, and in fact there are no suttas to be found in

the Pāli Canon that explain the above terms in this way¹⁰. Moreover, on Nāṇavīra's interpretation it may not even be quite correct to say '*jātipaccayā jarāmaṇam*'. On his view, it seems, one would be obliged to say instead, '*bhavapaccayā jāti, bhavapaccayā jarāmaṇam*'. Since he regards the *puthujjana*'s taking himself to be a self as the basis for his notions 'my self was born' and 'my self will die', it follows that 'being' would be the condition for both 'birth' and 'ageing-and-death'. However, that is not what the Buddha himself asserts.

In many suttas dealing with PS the Buddha defines the above terms of the formula, and if we look at these texts we will see that they differ markedly from Nāṇavīra's explanation of them. The definitions are standardised:

'And what, monks, is ageing-and-death? The ageing of beings in the various orders of beings, their old age, brokenness of teeth, greyness of hair, wrinkling of skin, decline of life, weakness of faculties — this is called ageing. The passing of beings out of the various orders of beings, their passing away, dissolution, disappearance, dying, completion of time, dissolution of the aggregates, laying down of the body — this is called death. So this ageing and this death are (together) called ageing-and-death.

'And what, monks, is birth? The birth of beings into the various orders of beings, their coming to birth, descent (into a womb), production, manifestation of the aggregates, obtaining the bases for contact — this is called birth¹¹.

The above definitions, with their strings of synonyms and concrete imagery, clearly indicate that 'birth' refers to biological birth and 'ageing-and-death' to biological ageing and biological death — not to the *puthujjana*'s notions 'I was born, I will age

10 Nāṇavīra does quote one sutta (S 3:3/I 71) a little further down which he thinks supports his interpretation of *jarāmaṇanirodha*. However, this passage in no way compels acceptance of his interpretation; it can easily be explained in other ways that do not require us to jettison the traditional understanding of PS.

11 D II 305; M I 49-50; S II 2-3, etc.

and die', or 'My self was born; my self ages and dies'. The textual definitions are perfectly straightforward and unambiguous and give no hint that the Buddha had some other idea to convey about the significance of these terms.

Bhava and Rebirth

8. The definition of *bhava* (Nāṇavīra's 'being') offered in the Suttas dealing expressly with PS is nowhere near as transparent as the former definitions, the reason being that the definition of the term is set against the particular cosmology that underlies the Buddha's Teaching. Nevertheless, the Suttas provide no basis for Nāṇavīra's claim that *bhava* means the *puthujjana*'s taking himself to be a self¹².

In the suttas on PS, when the Buddha defines *bhava*, he does so merely by enumerating the three types of becoming:

'And what, monks, is becoming? There are these three types of becoming: sense-sphere becoming; fine-material-sphere becoming; immaterial-sphere becoming¹³.

This definition refers to the three planes of existence in the Buddhist cosmos, and the term '*bhava*' thus would signify concrete individual existence in one or another of these three planes. For illumination as to how *bhava* functions in the PS series, our most helpful resource is the Bhava Sutta, a short exchange between the Buddha and Ānanda:

'It is said, lord, "becoming, becoming". In what way, lord, is there becoming?'

'If, Ānanda, there were no *kamma* ripening in the sense realm, would sense-sphere becoming be discerned?'

'No, lord'.

'Thus, Ānanda, *kamma* is the field, consciousness is the seed, craving the moisture; for beings obstructed by ignor-

12 I am not denying that the *puthujjana* does take himself to be a self, for that is precisely the act that defines him as a *puthujjana*. I am only disputing that this is the correct explanation of *bhava*.

13 S II 3.

ance and fettered to craving, consciousness becomes grounded in a low realm. Thus, Ānanda, there is the production of re-becoming in the future. It is thus, Ānanda, that there is becoming.

'If, Ānanda, there were no *kamma* ripening in the fine-material realm, would fine-material becoming be discerned?'

'No, lord.'

'Thus, Ānanda, *kamma* is the field, consciousness is the seed, craving the moisture; for beings obstructed by ignorance and fettered to craving, consciousness becomes grounded in a middling realm. Thus, Ānanda, there is the production of re-becoming in the future. It is thus, Ānanda, that there is becoming.

'If, Ānanda, there were no *kamma* ripening in the immaterial realm, would immaterial becoming be discerned?'

'No, lord.'

'Thus, Ānanda, *kamma* is the field, consciousness is the seed, craving the moisture; for beings obstructed by ignorance and fettered to craving, consciousness becomes grounded in a superior realm. Thus, Ānanda, there is the production of re-becoming in the future. It is thus, Ānanda, that there is becoming'¹⁴.

Clearly, this sutta is offering a succinct statement of the same basic process described more extensively in the usual twelve-factored formula of PS: When there is *avijjā* and *taṇhā*, ignorance and craving, then *kamma* — the volitional action of a being — effects the production of a new existence or 're-becoming in the future' (*āyatim punabbhava*) in a realm that corresponds to the qualitative potential of that *kamma*. It is for this reason that the Commentaries interpret *bhava* in the usual PS formula as having two aspects that pertain to two different lives: one aspect called *kammabhava*, 'kammically active existence', which refers to the *kamma* with the potential of generating rebirth in one or another of the three realms; the other aspect called *upapattibhava*,

'rebirth existence', which refers to existence produced in one or another of the three realms¹⁵. Although such a distinction is not explicitly drawn in the Suttas, it seems to be implied by such passages as the one just quoted above.

9. Nāṇavīra claims that *jāti* does not mean rebirth (§9), and he is correct insofar as the word '*jāti*' does not by itself convey the sense of 're-birth'. Nevertheless, within the context of PS (and elsewhere in the Buddha's Teaching), *jāti* must be understood as implying rebirth. Insofar as *jāti*, 'the manifestation of the aggregates', etc., results from the formation of a new *bhava* 'in the future' by the *avijjā*, *taṇhā* and *kamma* of the preceding existence, any instance of *jāti* is invariably a rebirth of the same continuum of consciousness. The stream of consciousness of the preceding life, 'grounded' in a particular realm by reason of its *kamma*, springs up in that realm and comes to growth and full manifestation there.

Contrary to Nāṇavīra, throughout the Suttas we often find the word '*jāti*' used in conjunction with the terms '*samsāra*' and '*punabbhava*' to underscore the fact that rebirth is intended. Take, for instance, the Buddha's famous 'Hymn of Victory' from the Dhammapada (v.153):

'I ran vainly through the wandering of many births
Seeking the house-builder. Painful is birth again and again.'

*Anekajātisamsāram sandhāvissam anibbisam
Gahakārakam gavesanto dukkhā jāti punappunam.*

Or: 'A bhikkhu has abandoned the wandering on in births with its re-becoming' (*bhikkhuno ponobhaviko jātisamsāro pahīno*; M I 139). Or the verse of Udāna 4:9:

'For the monk with a peaceful mind,
When he has cut off craving for becoming,
The wandering on in births is destroyed;
For him there is no re-becoming.'

Ucchinnabhavataṇhassa santacittassa bhikkhuno

14 A I 223-4.

15 See Vism XVII,250.

Vikkhīṇo jātisamsāro natthi tassa punabbhavo.

Again, consider the declaration of final knowledge uttered by the arahants: 'This is my last birth; now there is no re-becoming' (*ayam antimā jāti, natthi dāni punabbhavo*; M I 167,173).

The above passages will show us, moreover, that the wedge that Nānavīra tries to drive between *jāti* and *punabbhavābhiniḅbatti* (in §10) is a spurious one. While in some passages the two are set in a conditional relationship to one another (the latter being a condition for the former — see S II 65), they are so closely connected that their meanings almost overlap. In fact, the word '*abhiniḅbatti*' is used as one of the synonyms of *jāti* in the standard definition of the latter. Apparently, when *abhiniḅbatti* is included in *jāti* we should understand *jāti* as comprising both conception and physical birth, while when they are differentiated *abhiniḅbatti* means conception and *jāti* is restricted to full emergence from the womb.

10. Now that we have adduced textual definitions of the terms 'ageing-and-death', 'birth' and 'becoming', let us see how they link up in the formula of PS, as explained by the Buddha himself. The text which elucidates this matter most succinctly is the Mahānidāna Sutta (D 15/II 57-8). To bring out the meaning I quote the relevant passage slightly simplified, without the catechistic format and with the sequence of conditions stated in direct order rather than in reverse order:

'If there were absolutely no clinging of any kind — no clinging to sense pleasures, clinging to views, clinging to rules and observances, clinging to a doctrine of self — then, in the complete absence of clinging, becoming would not be discerned: thus clinging is the condition for becoming.

'If there were absolutely no becoming of any kind — no sense-sphere becoming, fine-material becoming, im-material becoming — then, in the complete absence of becoming, birth would not be discerned: thus becoming is the condition for birth.

'If there were absolutely no birth of any kind — that is, of gods in the state of gods, of celestials in the state of celestials, of spirits, demons, humans, animals, birds and

reptiles each in their own state — then, in the complete absence of birth, ageing-and-death would not be discerned: thus birth is the condition for ageing and death'.

Nānavīra would read this passage to mean: Because the *puthujjana* clings to a belief in self, he goes on being a self (of one or another of the three types); and because he assumes that he is such a self, he thinks 'my self was born' and 'my self will grow old and die' (see Note, §10). If, however, we read this passage in the light of the definitions of birth, ageing and death found in the Suttas, and in the light of the Bhava Sutta (pp.13-14), a very different meaning would emerge, which might be formulated thus: Because of clinging of any kind (not only clinging to a doctrine of self), one engages in actions that have the potential to ripen in one or another of the three realms of becoming. These actions dispose consciousness towards these realms. At death, if clinging persists, the predominant *kamma* steers consciousness towards the appropriate realm, i.e., it grounds the 'seed' of consciousness in that realm, and thereby generates a new existence. This 'production of re-becoming' comes to fulfilment in birth — that is, birth into one of the numerous classes of beings distributed among the three realms of becoming — and once birth occurs, it is inevitably followed by ageing-and-death.

Three Types of Saṅkhārā

11. Now let us turn to the other major plank in Nānavīra's 'Note on Paṭiccasamuppāda', his treatment of the interconnections between *avijjā*, *saṅkhārā* and *viññāṇa* (§§5-6, 11-16). In §5 Nānavīra cites the threefold enumeration of *saṅkhārā* commonly employed by the Suttas when they analyse the individual factors of the PS formula:

'And what, monks, are the *saṅkhārā*? There are these three *saṅkhārā*: body-*saṅkhārā*, speech-*saṅkhārā*, mind-*saṅkhārā*. These are called the *saṅkhārā*'¹⁶.

16 S II 4.

I will leave the word *saṅkhārā* untranslated here in order not to prejudice the discussion. Immediately after citing this passage, in order to supply definitions of the three types of *saṅkhārā*, Nāṇavīra quotes the Cūḷavedalla Sutta (M 44/I 301). This sutta — a discussion between the lay devotee Visākha and his former wife, the arahant bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā — defines three types of *saṅkhārā* bearing exactly the same names as those mentioned in the texts on PS:

'And which, lady, is body-*saṅkhāra*, which is speech-*saṅkhāra*, which is mind-*saṅkhāra*?'¹⁷

'The in-and-out breaths are body-*saṅkhāra*, thinking-and-pondering are speech-*saṅkhāra*, perception and feeling are mind-*saṅkhāra*'¹⁷.

Having juxtaposed the two quotations, Nāṇavīra then criticises the traditional interpretation for maintaining that *saṅkhārā* in the PS formula must always be understood as *cetanā* or volition. To make this claim, he asserts, is to wind up holding that the in-and-out breaths, thinking-and-pondering, and perception and feeling, are respectively bodily, verbal and mental volition — a position that is clearly untenable.

Now both quotations cited above, taken in isolation, are perfectly legitimate. This, however, does not establish that the latter quotation is providing a definition of the same terms intended by the former quotation. While the two triads are expressed in Pāli by the same three compounds — *kāyasāṅkhāra*, *vacīsāṅkhāra*, *cittasāṅkhāra* — Nāṇavīra overlooks a fact of prime importance for determining their meaning: namely, that in the Suttas the contexts in which the two triads appear are always kept rigorously separate. The definition of the three *saṅkhārā* found in the Cūḷavedalla Sutta, and elsewhere in the Canon (at S IV 293), does not occur in the context of PS nor in a context that even touches on PS. This particular definition of the three types of *saṅkhārā* — *kāyasāṅkhāra*, *vacīsāṅkhāra*, *cittasāṅkhāra* — always occurs in the course of a discussion on the attainment of

the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññāvedayita-nirodha*)¹⁸. It is intended to prepare the way for an explanation of the order in which the three types of *saṅkhāra* cease when a monk enters the attainment of cessation.

But that is not all. Not only are the three *saṅkhārā* of the Cūḷavedalla Sutta always rigorously excluded from discussions of PS, but among all the suttas in which the Buddha exemplifies the expressions '*avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā*' ('with ignorance as condition, formations') and '*saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇam*' ('with formations as condition, consciousness'), there is not a single text in which he explains *saṅkhārā* in a way that has any relevance to the three kinds of *saṅkhārā* of the Cūḷavedalla Sutta. The two types of discussions of *saṅkhārā* — the threefold enumeration of the Cūḷavedalla Sutta and the threefold enumeration in the PS context — though employing the same terms, are assigned to completely separate compartments. Nowhere in the Sutta Piṭaka does the one triad extend beyond its own context and bear any explicit relationship to the other context. If the Buddha had intended the *saṅkhārā* that are conditioned by ignorance and that condition consciousness to signify the in-and-out breaths, thinking-and-pondering, and perception and feeling, then one could reasonably expect to find at least one sutta on PS where he exemplifies *saṅkhārā* by way of the Cūḷavedalla triad. However, not a single sutta of such a nature can be found anywhere in the entire Pāli Canon¹⁹.

Lack of textual corroboration is only one problem with

18 Two of these *saṅkhārā* — *kāyasāṅkhāra* and *cittasāṅkhāra* — are also mentioned in connection with the 16 aspects of the practice of mindfulness of breathing. See M III 82-3.

19 I should add here a brief rejoinder to Nāṇavīra's remark at §6 that the traditional interpretation (in its treatment of the *saṅkhārā* factor in PS) 'altogether ignores the Cūḷavedalla Sutta'. It certainly does not. The Visuddhimagga, in its explication of the term '*saṅkhārā*' in relation to PS, mentions the triad of the Cūḷavedalla Sutta, but it distinguishes this triad from the types of *saṅkhārā* that are conditioned by ignorance (Vism XVII,47).

17 M 44/I 301.

Ñāṇavīra's proposal to read the Cūlavedalla triad of *saṅkhārā* into the interpretation of the PS formula. Another objection, even more formidable, can be brought against this suggestion, namely, that it leads to incoherence. For the *saṅkhārā* of the PS formula must depend upon ignorance as their necessary condition and must cease with the cessation of ignorance, but the three *saṅkhārā* of the Cūlavedalla Sutta do not meet this requirement. These *saṅkhārā* are not necessarily dependent upon ignorance and do not cease with the ceasing of ignorance. Although the arahant has completely eradicated ignorance, he continues to breathe in and out (except when in the fourth *jhāna* and higher attainments), to think and ponder (except when in the second and higher *jhānas*), and to perceive and feel (except when in the cessation of perception and feeling). But, what does cease for the arahant with the cessation of ignorance are volitional formations — *saṅkhāra* understood as *sañcetanā*. Whereas the non-arahant's bodily, verbal and mental activities are constructive forces conditioned by ignorance that sustain the round of rebirths, the arahant's activities are kammically extinct. They no longer sustain the continuation of the round, no longer project consciousness into any new mode of becoming.

12. In analysing the teaching of PS, the texts use the two terms *cittasaṅkhārā* and *manosaṅkhārā* as though they were interchangeable. This is not typical of the Suttas, which usually reserve *citta* and *mano* for separate contexts. When the texts define *saṅkhārā* in the PS formula, they do so by enumerating the three types of *saṅkhārā*: *kāyasaṅkhārā*, *vacīsaṅkhārā*, *cittasaṅkhārā*; yet they do not take the further step of defining these terms as such. Then, when they exemplify the function of *saṅkhārā* in PS, they employ the triad of *kāyasaṅkhārā*, *vacīsaṅkhārā*, *manosaṅkhārā*. The Pāli Commentaries identify the two triads, taking them as alternative expressions for the same thing; both are understood to refer to bodily volition, verbal volition and mental volition (*kāyasañcetanā*, *vacīsañcetanā*, *manosañcetanā*). Ñāṇavīra takes issue with this identification, holding that the two triads must be distinguished. He admits that the second triad is to be identified with *cetanā*, but insists that the terms used in the first triad have to be understood by way of the explanation given in the

Cūlavedalla Sutta.

This assertion, as we have seen, does not receive confirmation from the Suttas. The original source on which the Pāli Commentaries base their identification of the two triads is the Vibhaṅga of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. In that work, in the Suttanta Bhājanīya (Sutta Analysis) section of its Paṭiccasamuppāda Vibhaṅga, we read:

What are the *saṅkhārā* that are conditioned by ignorance? Meritorious *saṅkhāra*, demeritorious *saṅkhāra*, imperturbable *saṅkhāra*; body-*saṅkhāra*, speech-*saṅkhāra*, mind-*saṅkhāra*. . .

Therein, bodily volition is body-*saṅkhāra*; verbal volition is speech-*saṅkhāra*; mental volition (*manosañcetanā*) is mind-*saṅkhāra* (*cittasaṅkhāra*). These are called the *saṅkhāra* conditioned by ignorance²⁰.

Ñāṇavīra may refuse to acknowledge the authority of the Vibhaṅga and insist that he will not relinquish his view unless a sutta can be brought forward confirming this definition. This attitude, however, would appear to be an unreasonable one. Even though the more elaborate conceptions of the Abhidhamma may be products of a later age than the Suttas, the Suttanta Bhājanīya sections of the Vibhaṅga can make a cogent claim to antiquity. Evidence suggests that this portion of the Vibhaṅga is extremely old, dating from perhaps the third century BCE, and thus represents the understanding of the Buddhist community from a period not long after the Buddha's Parinibbāna. It would even be plausible to maintain that this body of material was originally an old commentary on basic Suttanta terminology going back to the very first generation of the Buddha's disciples; it is not specifically Abhidhammic in character and may have been absorbed into the Abhidhamma Piṭaka owing to the lack of any other suitable repository for it.

In any case, in the absence of direct clarification of the issue

20 Vibhaṅga, §116 (Burmese script ed.).

in the Suttas themselves, the Vibhaṅga becomes the most ancient source to which we can turn for help in clarifying PS terminology. There we find the triad of *kāyasāṅkhāra*, *vacīsaṅkhāra* and *cittasaṅkhāra* explained in a way that confirms the exclusive identification of the *saṅkhārā* factor in the PS formula with *cetanā*. This lends weight to the view that this second link should be taken as *kamma* and its relation to *viññāṇa* as that of the kammic cause from the preceding existence.

The Meaning of 'Saṅkhārā'

13. I intend to examine very briefly all the suttas that help shed light on the *saṅkhārā* factor in the PS formulation, as found in the Nidāna Saṃyutta, the Buddha's short discourses on dependent arising. But first a few words should be said about Nāṇavīra's general understanding of the word '*saṅkhārā*'. He maintains that this word has a univocal meaning relevant to all the contexts in which it occurs. The meaning he assigns to it is that of 'something upon which something else depends' (§11); hence his rendering 'determinations'. The Suttas themselves do not offer a single etymological derivation of the word with unrestricted application. The well-known derivation — *saṅkhataṃ abhi-saṅkharontī ti tasmā saṅkhārā ti vuccanti* (in Nāṇavīra's terminology, 'They determine the determined, therefore they are called determinations') — applies specifically to *saṅkhārā* as the fourth of the five aggregates, not to *saṅkhārā* in all usages. In this context they obviously signify *cetanā*, volition, understood as a constructive force, and thus an active derivation is appropriate.

The Pāli Commentaries offer two derivations of the word '*saṅkhārā*'. One is active (as given above), the other passive (*saṅkharīyantī ti saṅkhārā*). Thus the Commentaries hold that the word can signify either things that actively produce other things, or things that are produced by other things. Which meaning is relevant depends on the context. In the two contexts of PS and the fourth aggregate, the active sense is relevant, as in both cases the *saṅkhārā* are volitions. However, in such statements as '*sabbe saṅkhārā anicca*', etc., the Commentaries explain that *saṅkhārā* should be understood as *saṅkhata-saṅkhārā*, that is, as conditioned things.

According to the Majjhima Nikāya Commentary, the passive sense also pertains to two of the three *saṅkhārā* of the Cūḷavedalla Sutta: (i) the in-and-out breaths are body-*saṅkhārā* because they are determined by the body, made by the body, produced by the body; (iii) perception and feeling are mind-*saṅkhārā* because they are determined by the mind, made by the mind, produced by the mind²¹. In contrast, (ii) thinking-and-pondering, as speech-*saṅkhārā*, play an active role: they are determinants of speech²².

The commentarial recognition of a twofold derivation of the term '*saṅkhārā*' seems to be confirmed by the texts. For instance, the Cūḷavedalla Sutta explains:

'In-and-out breaths, friend Visākha, are bodily, these things are dependent upon the body, that is why the in-and-out breaths are bodily *saṅkhārā*. . . Perception and feeling are mental, these things are dependent upon the mind; that is why perception and feeling are mind-*saṅkhārā*'²³.

21 Commentary to Cūḷavedalla Sutta. The Pāli reads: *Kāyena saṅkharīyati karīyati nibbattiyatī ti kāyasāṅkhāro; cittaena saṅkharīyati karīyati nibbattiyatī ti cittasaṅkhāro*.

22 *Vācaṃ saṅkharoti karoti nibbattetī ti vacīsaṅkhāro*. I here follow the reading of the Burmese-script Sixth Council edition, which has the support of the Sub-commentary, rather than the Sinhala-script Hewavitarne edition, which reads this sentence as a passive, parallel to the definitions of the other two types of *saṅkhārā*. Apparently the latter reading, which is at variance with the sense of the sutta text, is a scribal error. The PTS edition was not available to me.

23 M I 301: *Assāsapassāsā kho āvuso Visākha kāyikā ete dhammā kāyapaṭibaddhā, tasmā assāsapassāsā kāyasāṅkhāro. . . saññā ca vedanā ca cetasikā ete dhammā cittaṭṭhā, tasmā saññā ca vedanā ca cittasaṅkhāro ti*.

It should be noted that Nāṇavīra, in translating '*paṭibaddha*' as 'bound up with', does not capture quite the precise nuance of the Pāli. As used in the texts, '*paṭibaddha*' generally signifies that the thing which it qualifies is subject to or dependent upon the thing to which it is joined in the compound or otherwise related: see in this connection M I 384; II 223; A V 87; Dh 284. Thus when it is said that *assāsapassāsā* (in-breaths and out-breaths) are *kāyapaṭibaddhā dhammā* (things bound to the body), this means that they are sub-

In contrast, Nānavīra's insistence on assigning an exclusively active sense to *saṅkhārā* compels him to apply the old Procrustean bed of exegesis to several passages that do not easily submit to his interpretation. For example, in his separate note on *Saṅkhārā*²⁴ he attempts to explain how the reference to *saṅkhārā* in the Mahāsudassana Sutta (D 17/II 169ff.) can be interpreted in line with his view of *saṅkhārā* as active determinations. In this sutta the Buddha, after describing all the rich endowments and possessions of King Mahāsudassana, a king of the distant past, concludes with a homily on impermanence: 'See, Ānanda, how all those *saṅkhārā* have passed, ceased, altered. So impermanent, Ānanda, are *saṅkhārā* . . . this is enough for weariness with all *saṅkhārā*, enough for dispassion, enough for release'. Nānavīra discerns a cryptic message concealed in this passage thus: 'Those things [the possessions, etc.] were *saṅkhārā*; they were things on which King Mahāsudassana depended for his very identity; they determined his person as "King Mahāsudassana", and with their cessation the thought "I am King Mahāsudassana" came to an end'. There is nothing in the sutta itself to support this interpretation, and the text (as well as others of similar character) reads so much more naturally if we take *saṅkhārā* simply to mean conditioned things of the world. Moreover, other suttas can be found which include the same final exhortation on dispassion, yet which provide absolutely no ground for seeing the term *saṅkhārā* there as determinants of anyone's personal identity (see e.g., the Anamatagga Saṃyutta, S 15/II 178ff.).

TO BE CONCLUDED

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ordinate to and dependent upon the body, not that they are determinations for the body. Consider, in contrast, the explanation of why 'thinking-and-pondering' are called speech-*saṅkhārā*: 'First having thought and pondered, afterwards one breaks into speech; that is why thinking-and-pondering are speech-*saṅkhārā*' (*pubbe kho vitakketvā vicāretvā pacchā vācam bhindati, tasmā vitakkavicārā vacīsaṅkhāro ti*). Here the active sense is clearly in evidence.

24 *Clearing the Path*, pp.107-8.

Translated from the Chinese Version by
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Tenth Fascicle
Part 19
(Supplication)

3. 1 'Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying in Śrāvastī, at Jetṭ's Grove, in Anāthapiṇḍada's Park.² Then Śakra, the chief of gods, approached the Exalted One, and having approached, he bowed down his head [at the Exalted One's] feet. Standing at one side, he spoke thus to the Exalted One: How does a bhikṣu overcome sensuous greed, realise his heart's release and, revered by gods and men, finally reach the 'place of [ultimate] peace (*kṣema*)' where there is no distress? – In this respect, Kauśika,³ the Exalted One said to Śakra, the chief of gods, if a bhikṣu hears of the existential constituents (*dharma*) as being empty (*sūnya*) and realises that there is nothing [in terms of 'I' and 'mine'],⁴ he perfectly understands

1 See T2, 593c13 ff.; Hayashi, p. 162 ff. Cf. M I, p. 251 ff. (Cūḷataṇhā-saṅkhayasutta).

2 The Buddha's whereabouts in the Pāli parallel differs: 'near Sāvathī in the Eastern Monastery in the palace of Migāra's mother' (see I.B. Horner, *The Middle Length Sayings* I (PTS), London 1987, p. 306).

3 Cf. BSR 8, 1 - 2 (1991), p. 144, n. 13. 拘翼 rendering Kauśika seems peculiar to EĀ.

4 Here EĀ substantially differs from the Pāli *sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhivi-vesāyāti*, which I.B. Horner translates by 'It is not fitting that there should be inclination towards any (psycho - physical) condition.' Perhaps it would be preferable to interpret the present sentence of EĀ as '...and realises that there is nothing [in terms of an own-being or self-nature (*svabhāva*)]'. Considering the likelihood of the Mahāsāṅghika affiliation of EĀ, the latter interpretation may be more suitable. As for associating EĀ with the Mahāsāṅghikas, see BSR 11, 2 (1994), p. 157 f., n. 2. To the given references should be added André Bareau, *Les sectes bouddhiques du petit véhicule*, Paris 1955, pp. 55 ff., 100 ff. See also Paul Harrison, 'Sanskrit Fragments of a Lokottaravādin Tradition', in: L.A. Hercus et al. (eds.), *Indological and Buddhist Studies*, Vol. in Honour of Professor J.W. de Jong on his 60th Birthday, Canberra 1982, p. 225 ff., on 'a Prākṛit proto-