

## DUKKA AS SEEN BY WISE MEN

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*Even during the Buddha's time, just as it is today, there were many philosophical arguments about the nature of existence. Some believed in a created soul which goes from one existence to another. Others postulated the materialist viewpoint that there is no hereafter. But the Buddha rejected all these views and his teachings are unique even among modern religions in that he alone taught the doctrine of Anatta – there is rebirth, but no enduring unchanging entity or soul that proceeds from one life to the next. What passes from deva world to human life to animal or peta existence is related to, but not identical with its previous existence. The acceptance of such a teaching gives Buddhism its moral basis, which makes men beware of present actions to safeguard a future existence. The cause of a future existence is tanha, craving or clinging which determines one's continued existence through samsara. So long as craving causes rebirth, there will be Dukkha, unsatisfactoriness. The only escape is through Nibbana, the destruction of craving in all its forms.*

*Ed.*

In this human world, even though a man feels that he is quite happy, he is actually burdened by his *khandhas* (aggregates) – which he has to feed and nurture all his life. This in itself is misery. This will be more apparent when he falls sick. A man who has nothing to do with him would not care to nurse him. Of course he may hire a nurse to look after him paying attendance fees, but even then it is doubtful if she can attend to him every day for a length of time, even when he continues paying her huge sums of money. When we speak of the life of *devas* we may not be able to say with certainty because we have never seen them. But we consider them enjoying a sensuous life. They too will have the *dukkha* of satisfying their sensual desires. The King of *devas* is reputed to have many female attendants. But he may not be able to satisfy their wants and desires all the time. When they remain unfulfilled, misery will get the better of the *devas*. *Brahmas* do not live in sensuality. But even then they will have the trouble with their conditioning volitional activities, *sankhara*, for, they are always busy whiling away their time in thinking this or that as they carry the burden of their *khandhas*. A wise man or yogi considers this state of affairs as *dukkha* or suffering. If one were to sit the whole day long without doing anything, one would feel weary. If one were to be sitting and ruminating for a month one would feel miserable. Then what shall we say about those *brahmas* sitting up for hundreds or thousands of years doing nothing but cogitating.

Consider that this cogitation lasts for aeons! This is *sankhara dukka*... the misery of indulging in mental activities. When a *brahma* dies, he again gets into the world of human beings which is waiting for him with all the concomitants of human miseries. When circumstances are not favourable even a *brahma* can be reborn an animal or a *peta*, or he may go down to the nether worlds. If worse comes to the worst. So from the point of view of a wise man or a yogi, the state of being a *brahma* is unenviable, for he too has to bear the brunt of the five *khandhas* which portend *dukkha*. So on the eve of *parinibbana*, the arahats used to contemplate.

“For how long shall I be shouldering this burden of the *khandhas* which portend suffering?”

### **Bhavatanha**

Having dealt with *kamatanha*, I now come to *bhavatanha*. There are two wrong views held by worldlings about life. One is called *sassata-ditthi*, eternalistic view of existence while the other is *uccheda-ditthi*, nihilistic view of existence. *Bhavatanha*, craving for existence, arises conjointly with the eternalistic view which assumes that pleasures are indestructible since living substance knows no death continuing throughout eternity. The physical part of the body may become decayed or destroyed, but the spiritual part of it lives as it migrates from one body to the other, giving rise to a new entity. The universe may get destroyed, but the spirit of living substance lives on. It is permanent. It is eternal. Outside the teaching of Buddhism this view is the most popular. Some who hold this view presume that when a man dies, he is raised to heaven where he lives eternally, or alternately, he is consigned to hell, also eternally, according to the will of god. Others would like to believe that one’s spirit migrates from one body to another and renews itself according to the working of one’s *kamma*. Another belief is that life is predetermined and fixed and it goes on eternally according to that predetermination. Briefly stated, a belief in eternity of the substance of life is *sassata-ditthi*. Under such a notion, life is like a bird hopping from tree to tree as the old tree on which it has first perched falls into decay. When the physical body dies, the living matter moves out to another new body.

Under the influence of *bhavatanha* supported by the idea of eternity, an individual is gratified with the thought that *atta*, self, abides by him permanently. He feels that what now exists is himself, confident that what he is now enjoying can also be enjoyed in his future lives. Hence his attachment to all that he sees, hears, tastes, smells, touches and thinks grows stronger and stronger throughout existence. He not only delights in sense-objects which he experiences in the present life but also in those which he hopes to experience

hereafter. He wants to enjoy life now and he desires to continue enjoying it in his next existence. Having led a happy life as a human being, he goes even further than that, hoping for happiness as a divinity. Thus grows desire. So some would like to be males in all their existences, while others aspire to be females. Such longings are the work of *bhavatanha*. Yearning for the sense-objects to which one has become attached means acceptance of the burden of the *khandhas*. *Bhavatanha* is, therefore, craving for sensual pleasures with the belief that the living substance is eternal.

## **Vibhavatanha**

Briefly put, *uccheda-ditthi* is a belief in no hereafter. Everything perishes after death. It is the doctrine preached by *Ajita* who flourished during Buddha's time. It runs thus:

An individual is made up of primary elements of earth, water, fire and air. When he dies, the earth-element goes into the mass of the earth; the water-element flows into the mass of water; the fire-element changes into heat; the air-element flows into the mass of air. All organs of the senses... of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, and thinking... disappear into space. When an individual, be he a wise man or fool, dies, his body is destroyed and annihilated. Nothing is left after death.

While residing in the living body, the earth-element manifests itself in the form of hardness or softness; but when the body dies, it leaves it merging itself with the earth outside it. In other words, the earth-element in the dead body turns into the material earth, *pathavi rupa*, from which trees and plants grow. In like manner, water-element in the dead body assumes wetness and fluidity of the material water.

The nihilists of the *Ajita* school do not recognize the existence of consciousness. All the faculties of seeing, hearing, etc., are conditioned by matter. So when they refer to these faculties they use the term *indriya*, organ of sense. So, when a man dies, his matter is annihilated. His faculties of the senses fritter away in space. No matter who dies, whether a wise man or a fool his existence is "cut off" or snuffed out. When a fool dies, there will be no rebirth and so he need not have any qualms or remorse for his *akusala kamma*, evil deeds, just as the wise man is unaffected by his *kusala kamma*, wholesome deeds.

This briefly, is the way of thinking of *Ajita*. His doctrine appeals to those who revel in committing evil, finding it irksome to do good. As it postulates that there is no life after death, it may be argued that there is life before death. If

that be so, it may further be asked: “What is life before death?” The answer, according to the line of reasoning of Ajita and his ilk, would be the living *atta* (self), or *satta* (being). It suggests that, despite its views on the four primary elements, *atta* or *satta* exists. This is attachment to self pure and simple. Those who hold the nihilistic view stipulate that one should not waste time doing meritorious deeds for forthcoming existences (which will not be forthcoming), but occupy oneself with full enjoyment of the present existence, the only existence one will have.

Craving arising out of this view of non-existence is *vibhavatanha* which promotes enjoyment of pleasures while they last since everything perishes after death. Naturally this ideology has a great appeal to those who delight in evil, shrinking from the practice of morality and other meritorious ways of life. Since nothing happens after death, there is no necessity to acquire merit. Those getting enamoured of this view do not like the idea that life is being constantly renewed and that the effects of good or bad kamma follow them in their trail. If no new life occurs after death, all their evil actions will come to an end with the end of their existence, and they will not be held responsible for any consequences, good or bad. In fact evil deeds done by them will be expunged when they pass away, emerging from them as innocent as a lamb. *Vibhava tanha* always finds satisfaction in the idea of total annihilation. A man possessed by it is always eager to enjoy all the pleasures of life without any restraint in the commitment of sins. This acceptance of pleasures in the present existence tantamounts to the acceptance of the *khandhas* that will arise in the next existence. Evil actions that accumulate in this life are *akusula kammass* to which the dying man gets attached; and by dint of these *kammass*, new *khandha* will arise.

For so long as craving persists, new existence is inevitable notwithstanding the nihilistic view. Medical advice says that the patient should not take any food unsuitable to his health; but the patient cannot restrain himself and takes what has been forbidden. The result is that his condition worsens. He might even die. The man afflicted with *uccheda-ditthi* is like that patient. Although he believes in no-hereafter, his craving for pleasurable objects is so intense that he “becomes” again, whatever his philosophy says. His new existence will hardly stand him in good stead for he has never done any meritorious deeds before. Every evil action produces an evil result. (It may even be put forward that to every evil action there is an opposite evil reaction.) His philosophy has all along been the fulfilment of selfish desires regardless of adverse consequences to others. Let others die so that he may live, so he considers. He has no qualms of remorse for his actions that harm others. As he develops only bad kammass in this way, he will have nothing to hope for except inferior and miserable existences throughout the future of the samsara.

