



**From
Topsy-turvydom
To
Wisdom
Volume 2**

Quality Printers - 011 4 870 333

Bhikkhu Kaṭukurunde Ñāṇananda

**From
Topsy-turvydom
to
Wisdom**

(Volume 2)

An anthology of writings by
Bhikkhu Kaṭukurunde Ñāṇananda

ISBN 955-1255-00-3

Published by:
Dharma Grantha Mudrana Bhāraya
Sri Lanka

2012

*Long is the night to the wakeful
Long is the league to him who is weary
Long is Saṃsāra to the foolish
Who know not the truth sublime*

– Dhammapada v. 60

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First Impression - 2012

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Cover designed by:
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10. The Department of Public Trustee
No. 02, Bullers Road, Colombo 07.

Printed by
Quality Printers (Pvt) Ltd.
17/2, Pangiriwatta Rd, Gangodawila, Nugegoda.
Tel : 011 4 870 333

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Preface (to the first edition)

This is the second collection of essays to appear under the title 'From Topsy-turvydom to Wisdom'. The essays are addressed to those who are attracted by the 'come-and-see' (*ehipassiko*) quality of the Dhamma having become 'wiser' about the 'topsy-turvy' world they find themselves in. The main trend of the essays is towards that 'leading-onward' (*opaniyiko*) quality of the Dhamma, highlighting the intensely practical spirit of the Buddha's message to the world.

The first volume came out in 1998 as a collection of essays written for the Dhamma Web on the Internet – 'Beyond the Net'. All those essays as well as a good many of those included in the present volume, were written at the instance of Mrs. Y. Sirimanne who was the first to set up a web site on Theravada Buddhism under the auspices of B.P.De silva Holdings (Pvt) Ltd. of Singapore. It was her initiative which paved the way for our web-site 'seeingthroughthenet.net'.

May all those who had their share in the burden of offering this gift of Dhamma to the world, share in the accruing merits!

May they attain the bliss of Nibbāna!

– Bhikkhu Kaṭukurunde Ñāṇananda

Pothgulgala Āranyaya,
'Pahan Kanuwa'
Kandegedara
Devalegama
Sri Lanka

September 2011 (B.E. 2555)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

M.N	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
S.N.	<i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i>
A.N.	<i>Anguttara Nikāya</i>
Dhp.	<i>Dhammapada</i>
Sn.	<i>Sutta Nipāta</i>
P.T.S.	<i>Pali Text Society</i>

About the Author . . .

Bhikkhu K. Ñāṇananda is a Buddhist monk of Sri Lanka, presently residing in a forest hermitage in Devalegama. Before his ordination, he was an assistant lecturer in Pali at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. After entering the Buddhist Order in 1967 he has resided mostly in remote hermitages. He is the author of the world renowned book 'Magic of the Mind' in which he compares the illusory nature of consciousness to a magic show. Some of his other publications are "Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought", "Ideal Solitude", "Saṃyutta Nikaya Anthology Part II" and "Towards Calm and Insight".

'Sabbadānaṃ Dhammadānaṃ Jināti'

'The gift of Dhamma excels all other gifts'

About the D. G. M. B. . . .

Rare is the birth of a Buddha in this world. So rare too, is the opportunity to listen to his Dhamma. This conviction has inspired many a devoted Buddhist to cherish the Dhamma as something extremely precious.

The Buddha has declared that salutary friendship (Kalyāna-mittatā) is almost synonymous with his dispensation. The gift-of-Dhamma is the link that moulds the bond of this friendship. Dhamma deserves no price-tag precisely because it is price-less.

It is in this spirit that the D.G.M.B. launched its Dhamma-dāna movement in 1997. Many a parched traveller on the desert path has had a refreshing drink of the nectar of Dhamma free of charge ever since. Many an enthusiastic benevolent heart seized the opportunity to participate in a genuine act of Dhammadāna.

Should we always go for things that sport a price-tag? Is everything that comes free to us, necessarily worthless? What about the air and the sunshine?

It is in point of merit that the gift of-Dhamma excels all other gifts. Dhamma is the nectar that quenches the insatiate saṃsāric thirst of beings. The gift of Dhamma is therefore of far greater merit than an ordinary gift of food or drink. For the magnanimous-Dhammadāna is for ever an unfailing source of altruistic joy.

All enquiries regarding participation in this Dhammadāna should be addressed to:-

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**"Open for them, are the doors to the Deathless.
Let those who have ears release faith."**

– *Ariyapariyesana S.*, M.N.

To the all-compassionate Buddha surveying the world with his Buddha-eye after his attainment to Buddhahood, the world appeared like a pond of lotuses. In a pond of lotuses - blue, red or white - some lotuses grown in the water remain immersed in the water, without rising out of it. Some others come up to the surface of the water and stay at that level. Yet others rise well out of the water and stand clear, unsmearred by it.

Like lotuses in a pond, beings in this world are in various stages of their spiritual unfoldment. Some are keen-witted, some are dull-witted. Some are good-natured, some are evil-natured. Some are receptive to the truth, some shrink from it.

All the same, the lotuses are in the process of their growth from bulb to full-bloom. So too are beings in the world as they pass through **the three grades in their Samsāric maturity.**

- I. Gratification (*assāda*)
- II. Peril (*ādīnava*)
- III. Stepping-out (*nissaraṇa*)

Blinded by ignorance, beings seek gratification within the endless round of births and deaths. But there comes a time when they realize the peril in this whirling Samsāric 'merry-go-round'. Then they seek an exit from it and cry for a halt through the din of the fivefold orchestra – the pleasures of the five senses.

Lead me from untruth to truth!
Lead me from darkness to light!
Lead me from death to deathlessness!

It is to them that the Buddha addresses the above assurance -

**"Open for them are the doors to the Deathless. Let those
who have ears, release faith."**

The Nectar

Have a drink - of the Nectar of Dhamma !

That is how we of the Buddhist world celebrate the thrice blessed Vesak Day.

Dhamma is the non-intoxicant drink that dispels all worldly intoxications and quenches the *Samsāric* thirst of beings.

The Buddha points out that beings keep running round and round the cycle of births and deaths, because of intoxication. '**All worldlings are insane**' says the Buddha. Artificial intoxicants only aggravate the situation. They make the already mad, 'raving mad.'

Vanity and insanity go hand in hand. The *Samsāric* **intoxicants** that lead to heedlessness are fourfold.

- i. **The pride of youth**
- ii. **The pride of health**
- iii. **The pride of wealth**
- iv. **The pride of life**

Intoxicated by these conceits, beings misbehave like drunkards - blind to the realities of life. They come to grief sooner or later crushed by the relentless wheel of '*kamma*', the moral law of cause and effect.

The Nectar of Dhamma, on the other hand, makes for *heedfulness, sanity and sobriety*. It refreshingly awakens one to the stark realities of life, and infuses conscientiousness and sound judgement. That is the delicious 'super-drink' that quenches the thirst of craving, and puts a stop to this mad careering in *Samsāra*. That indeed is the ambrosia which brings Deathlessness.

*The drinker of Dhamma is ever at ease
With a mind unruffled and pleased
In Dhamma the noble saints have preached
The wise always find delight and peace.'*

– Dhammapada v. 79. 'The Wise'

Time and Tide – Wait for No Man

*"Life, personality, pleasure, pain
Join for one conscious moment - which lasts but a while"*

The millenium, which proverbially has been around the corner, seems to have come at last! See the great fun and frolic at the dawn of the New Era! How it kindles fond hopes of prosperity and peace amidst wanton destruction of wealth and innocent lives to celebrate it! Are we really in for better times?

The moment can only yield, what the moment itself has bred. "**Mind is the fore-runner of all good and bad mental states**". Let **this moment** decide what the millennium holds for us.

We are leaving behind a century of tremendously rapid material progress, precipitating an equally rapid downfall in spiritual values. Have we anything to learn in retrospect from our successes and failures before the chapter is closed?

The Atlantic Ocean is believed to be the watery grave of a once flourishing, civilization of a great land mass called "Atlantis". That ill-fated continent had attained heights of material prosperity 5000 years ago through science and technology, but moral depravity had undermined its achievements. Man's lop-sided development and mental imbalance made way for the great **Deluge**.

Looking back at our own achievements in the past century, should we not ask ourselves - "will history repeat itself?"

*"That man infatuated by sons and wealth
And steeped in the pleasures of sense
Will find himself snatched away by DEATH
Like a sleeping village by a sweeping FLOOD"*

– Dhp.v.287

TAMING THE BULL

Mind is like an unruly bull. Put in tether, it tugs and tugs and tugs - breaks loose and runs riot. One has to master the art of reining it in. Otherwise there is the risk of getting carried away by it. A wrong grasp of the rope leaves one with a bruised back.

The all-compassionate and supremely-wise Buddha – the 'Incomparable Tamer' – gives us as many as five methods to be applied in such a situation. The order of their arrangement is psychologically important. Only when the first method fails, the second has to be applied and when that too fails, the third, and so forth. The range of methods shows his breadth of compassion, and the particular arrangement, the depth of his wisdom. Each method is exemplified with a simile as a practical illustration easy to remember.

HERE ARE THE 5 METHODS :-

(i) *When in attending to some kind of mental object, one finds that **evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, aversion and delusion arise**, one should attend, instead of it, to **a wholesome object of thought**. As one goes on attending to such an alternative object, those evil unwholesome thoughts will be abandoned and the mind becomes steady, restful, one-pointed and concentrated.*

Simile : Just as a skilled carpenter or a carpenter's apprentice would knock out, beat out and remove a coarser peg by means of a fine one-

(ii) *If in spite of this attempt those evil unwholesome thoughts keep on arising, the danger of such thoughts should be carefully examined : 'These thoughts are **in this way unwholesome**. They are in this way **faulty**. They have such and such **painful consequences**'. By this method also those evil unwholesome thoughts will be dispelled and the mind made steady, restful, one-pointed and concentrated.*

THE FORTRESS

Simile : Just as a young woman or a young man, fond of adornment would be repelled, ashamed and disgusted with a carcass of a snake, a carcass of a dog or a carcass of a human being hung around the neck -

(iii) *If those evil unwholesome thoughts still continue to arise, one should assume an **attitude of unmindfulness and inattention.***

Simile: Just as a man with eyes, not wishing to see material shapes that come within his range of vision, would close his eyes or look away -

(iv) *If these still persist, one should pay attention to the **adjustment of those thought-preparations.***

Simile: Supposing to a man who is walking quickly, it occurs: 'Now, why do I walk quickly? What if I were to walk slowly?' Then he walks slowly. But then it occurs to him: 'why do I walk slowly? Should I not be standing?' So he stands. Then again it occurs to him: 'Now why am I standing? I might as well sit down.' So he sits down. It occurs to him then: 'Now, why am I sitting? Should I not be lying down?' So he lies down. Just as that man avoids the grosser posture and assumes a subtler one -

(v) *But if those evil unwholesome thoughts still keep on arising, then one should **clench one's teeth, press the tongue against the palate and pull up, squeeze and put down the mind with the mind.***

Simile: Even as a strong man would grab a weak man by the head or shoulders and pull him up, squeeze and put him down.

Whoever can train his mind to become steady, restful, one-pointed and concentrated by means of these five methods, is a master of the rambling ways of thought. Whatever thought he wishes to think – that he will think. Whatever thought he does not wish to think – that he will not think. He has cut off craving, unhooked the fetters and by fully understanding conceit, has put an end to suffering.

– *Vitakkasaṅṭhāna Sutta* M.N. I 118ff

'Many a battle is fought and won at the weakest point in your fortress'.

When enemy forces attack a fortress, they usually aim at its weakest point. Sometimes they launch a surprise attack hoping to break in through what their spies have found out to be the weakest point. But if, in the meanwhile, those within the fortress have already taken precautions to fortify that vulnerable spot, the enemies will themselves be taken by surprise when they attack. Then they will not only be repelled but fully conquered and subjugated.

So one's weakest point could well be the starting point on the road to perfection. **Failures are the pillars of success.**

*'Even as a frontier fort
Guarded within and without
So should one keep guard on oneself
Not to let the moment slip by
For they that let the moment slip by
Slip down into hell – only to cry.'*

– Dhp.v.315

THE AWAKENING

Yesterday = *last night's dream*
Tomorrow = *tonight's dream*
Today = *a day-dream*

'**Dream-like are sense-pleasures**' says the Buddha, the Awakened One. 'Just as one would see in a dream charming parks, charming forest glades, charming landscapes and charming water-ponds, but on waking up, sees not a trace of them, even so dream-like are sense-pleasures.'

– *Potaliya Sutta*. M. N.

The Buddha has awakened from the Samsāric slumber with its manifold dreams of sense-pleasures. The image of the dream calls to our minds the illusory nature of sense pleasures. Life after life we go to sleep in this or that mother's womb – in this or that plane of existence. Our **fleshly eye** opens at birth – but not the **wisdom-eye**. We dream at night and wake up by day. But our day-dream continues throughout our lives. We usually wake up on hearing an alarm. When death knocks at our door we are alarmed. That is our last chance to wake up. That is not the time to pack-up, but to **let-go**. '**From all that is dear and agreeable, there is a separation, a deprivation, a change to otherwise-ness**'.

– (M.P.S-D.N.)

'**All meetings end in partings**'.

*'In a dream one meets another
 But wakes up to see him gone
 So it is with the one held dear
 When he is dead and gone*

– *Jarā S. Sn.* v. 807

BE A GOOD DRIVER

If our life is a journey, the vehicle is our body. The journey is through pathways of movement - the four postures: **walking, standing, sitting and lying down**. It is a circuit we make everyday.

To be a good driver, one has to avoid accidents, As toddlers, we have had many accidents before we learned to walk upright. But to walk the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path upright, we need more mindfulness and awareness.

We tend to be careless in our driving especially at the '**posture-junctions**'. To avoid 'accidents' of slipping into unmindfulness, we have to be aware at the '**posture-junctions**' though it is easy to be mechanical and impulsive in the **change of postures**. This calls for **slowing down and keener attention**.

Walking, he knows, 'I am walking'; Standing, he knows 'I am standing'; Sitting, he knows, 'I am sitting'; lying down, he knows 'I am lying down'. In whatever way his body is disposed, so he is aware of it.

Driving recklessly along the perilous routes of *Samsāra* in our vehicle, we have met with many accidents and deaths. So now we have to take at least a 'retreat' as often as we can, to learn driving **slowly, carefully and mindfully** through the four postures, **paying attention to the posture-junctions**. That way, we grow in heedfulness (*appamāda*) which, the Buddha says is the path to the Deathless.

*'Heedfulness is the Deathless Path
 And heedlessness – the Path of Death.
 The heedful do not meet with Death.
 The heedless are as good as dead'.*

– Dhp. v. 21

see *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, M.N. I 55

Along the Precipice

Living in the Present is like walking along a precipice. Utmost balancing is required to avoid slipping into the **bottomless Past** on one side, and the **endless Future** on the other. Both are dreadful enough to look into, but this **awareness** itself should be sufficient to make us stick to our **path of the Present**.

It is truly a Path, meant only for the 'pedestrian', narrow as it is. Once we are on it, no distraction should make us falter, as we proceed step-by-step. We have only **five guidelines** to help us – *faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom*.

In fact, our progress on this narrow and steep path begins with faith and ends with wisdom. Where the path ends, is also our journey's end. Then there is neither a precipice and nothing to precipitate.

There is only a **TIMELESS-PLAIN of SUBLIME PEACE**

THE HIGHEST FREEDOM

Freedom and responsibility go together as a double bind. All levels of freedom in the world are bound up with a degree of responsibility. Rights and privileges can only be enjoyed at the cost of responsibilities and obligations. You are **free, but duty-bound**.

This anomaly in our worldly situation, is due to our reliance on assets. **All assets**, in the long run, turn out to be **liabilities**. We are bound by the very grasp and hold we have on them. Dependence is mutual. We rely on them so much that they demand from us the highest sacrifice.

But is there a freedom that is free from assets? The Buddha says: "**YES**". He described Nibbāna as the '**Assetless**' (*Nirupadhi*). It is the supramundane freedom from all assets. The **five Groups of Grasping** – *form, feeling, perception, preparations and consciousness* are looked upon as assets by the worldling. He relies on them for his self-identity. *Samsāric* existence is an endless process of amassing these assets. The tragedy however, is that one can have **no mastery over them**. In fact, an **object slavery** is prided on by the world as a petty mastery.

This petty mastery carries with it, its share of responsibilities. One is **morally responsible** for the actions issuing out of one's three doors of action - *body, speech and mind*. The karmic entanglement involved in it goes a long way, breeding birth, decay, disease, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, despair and all the rest of suffering implied by the Noble Truth of Suffering.

The way to freedom from this manifold suffering lies through the understanding that there is only a **conceit** of mastery over the five groups = **the 'assets'**. This understanding gives rise to disenchantment and dispassion leading to the **relinquishment of all assets**. That way one resigns this petty mastery and wins to the Highest Freedom that is '**Assetless**'.

THE LION'S ROAR

"The lion, monks, the king of beasts, comes out of his den in the evening. Coming out, he stretches himself. Stretching himself, he surveys the four quarters. Surveying the four quarters, he utters thrice his lion's roar. Thrice having uttered his lion's roar, he sallies forth in search of prey.

Whatever creatures in the animal realm, monks, that hear the sound of the roaring lion, are, for the most part, stricken with fear, dread and terror. Hole-dwellers creep into their holes. Water-dwellers dash for the water. Birds fly into the air.

And, monks, even those royal elephants tethered with stout chains in villages, towns and kingdoms – even they – burst and rend those bonds asunder, and voiding extremities, run helter skelter.

So mightily powerful, O! monks, is the lion, the king of beasts, over all beings in the animal realm – so potent, so majestic.

Even so, monks, when a Tathāgata arises in the world, the worthy-of-honour, fully-awakened, perfect in knowledge and conduct, well-farer, world-knower, unsurpassed charioteer of tameable men, teacher of gods and men, a Buddha, an Exalted One – and teaches the Dhamma :

*Such is form, such its arising, such its passing away,
Such is feeling, such its arising, such its passing away,
Such is perception, such its arising, such its passing away,
Such are preparations, such their arising, such their passing away,
Such is consciousness, such its arising, such its passing away.*

Then monks, even those gods with long life-spans, beautiful and blissful, long established in lofty mansions, – even they, on hearing the Tathāgata's Dhamma teaching, are, for the most part, stricken with fear, dread and terror. 'It seems, friends, **impermanent as we are, we**

imagined ourselves to be permanent. Unstable as we are, we imagined ourselves to be stable. Not-eternal as we are, we imagined ourselves to be eternal. Indeed, friends, we are **impermanent, unstable, not-eternal, and counted among the self-biased.'**

So mightily powerful, monks, is the Tathāgata, over the world including the gods – so potent, so majestic “

– S.N. III 84

The 'Lion's Roar' is a graphic depiction of the impact of the Buddha's **teaching of universal impermanence**, on gods and men **steeped in delusion**. Their complacent **belief in a permanent self** is shaken by it to such an extent that they are 'for the most part, stricken with fear, dread and terror.' This impressive declaration highlights the unique message a Tathāgata has for the worldlings caught up in the *Samsāric* cycle of births and deaths. It is a clarion call to wake up and **see things-as-they-are**.

Mark Time!

In one's military training, one not only learns how to advance and retreat systematically but also to 'mark-time' on occasion. This is a discipline in **marching on the spot** – 'left' & 'right', which trains one to bide one's time with patience and alertness.

In one's training for the battle with Māra, a meditator also has to learn how to '**mark-time**'. **Without advancing towards the future or retreating into the past**, he has to march 'on-the-spot' watching the '**rise and fall**' of sense-objects.

This marking-time is called '**meditative attention**' which requires a **high degree of mindfulness and full-awareness**. If one specializes in this kind of marking-time, one can win the battle with Māra without even the bother of advancing or retreating,

THE-TUG-OF-WAR

Usually in a tug-of-war, it is the one who has the tighter grip and grit that wins. One has to hold on and on, without letting go – until victory is assured. But there is a tug-of-war which calls for just the opposite kind of skill and that is one's final **tug-of-war in life**.

When the moment of death approaches, we heave, heave and heave to hold on to the last vestige of life in us – **the breath**. We heave only to sigh – or rather we **heave a sigh**, well knowing that the inevitable is going to happen. Māra's grip is tight on the other side and he seems determined to pull us on to his side together with all that is ours – namely, **the five grasping groups**.

The total weight of our burden is now lying on Māra's doorstep. In the very next moment we would be dragged into his gloomy den. This is a critical moment in which no one can lend a helping hand. Should we hold on and yield victory to Māra's side?

It is right at this moment that the opposite kind of skill comes in useful, – **the skill in letting-go**. **Let go of the five bundles**, and Māra is sure to suffer a somersault – going head over heels. This is the grand finale in *Samsāra* – victory over Death. In other words, you have won the neck-to-neck race with Māra by a hair's breadth.

"ATTENTION PLEASE"

Attention, in the context of Dhamma, is that '**radical attention**' which aims at getting down to the root of the matter through **insight into its source** or matrix. It tries to avoid the pitfalls of discursive thought which distract and becloud one's vision.

This kind of **right attention** goes hand in hand with **mindfulness and full-awareness**. Being mindful and fully aware, one can narrow down one's **attention to the present moment**.

In our everyday life, we rarely pay attention to the simple details of daily routine. Attention is always regarded as something to be 'called for'. We go about our routine work rather **mechanically**. Our behavior is largely **impulsive**. In our normal lives we feel more comfortable in our accustomed ruts and grooves. The hidden potentialities for deep insights in the simple details of daily routine are ignored.

But the simplest often turns out to be the **most profound**. One awakens to this truth by paying attention to the most ordinary-looking activities in one's everyday life, such as breathing, the change of postures and answering 'calls' -of-nature. Radical attention reveals ever new layers of fresh insight day by day in apparently insignificant life-situations. The range of attention extends over the **Four Foundations of Mindfulness** outlined in the *Satipaṭṭhana Sutta* – the **contemplations of body, feeling, mind and mind-objects**. With keener attention the foundations go deeper and deeper.

The disarming beam of **keen attention** switched on with mindfulness and full-awareness, does the work of **penetrative wisdom**. It is dynamic in holding the forces of Māra (the 'Evil-One') at bay, like a skilled swordsman with his parry and thrust.

Insight meditation works on the **principle of accelerating attention to stem prolificity of thought**. Normally, attention is slack in picking

up mind-objects. The rapidity of thought is a challenge hard to meet. To get at the **root of a thought**, one has to be **extremely vigilant**. Where vigilance is lacking, thoughts simply 'bump-off' and go astray. So, like an expert table tennis player, one has to **wield the racket of attention** right at the **point of TOUCH**.

*'But those who know full well the TOUCH
And take delight in being-at-peace
'Tis they by their knowledge of TOUCH
Are hanker-free and fully appeased.'*

– Sn. v. 737

THE TARGET

The following daily exhortation of the Buddha to his disciples stresses the value of six rare conditions conducive to one's attainment of deliverance.

"Strive on, monks, without delay,

Rare is the arising of a Buddha in the world,

Rare is birth as a human being,

Rare is the opportune moment,

Rare is the 'going-forth',

Rare is the hearing of true Dhamma,

Rare is the association with the good."

These six rare conditions are stated here in an ascending order of importance.

Extremely rare is the arising of a Buddha in the world. Rare as it is, it is much more rare for one to be born as a human being during a Buddha-age. As a human being, it is still rarer to come by the 'opportune-moment' with the blessings of the correct environment and freedom from physical and mental disabilities. With all those positive conditions on one's side, it is rarely that one is able to 'go-forth' from home to homelessness in the true **spirit of renunciation**. Even if one 'goes-forth', it is not always that one gets the opportunity of hearing the true Dhamma that holds the prospect of deliverance from suffering. Granted that rare opportunity, one will still be at a loss without proper guidance, unless one runs into that right type of friendship – the association with the good. **This is the rarest rare-gift a seeker of truth can get.**

Like the concentric colour-rings on a target, the first five rare conditions highlight the value of **salutary friendship** as the immediate condition for one's deliverance. The Buddha's personal attendant, Venerable Ānanda, on whom fell the duties of a

receptionist, once tried to give expression to his impressions of the value of salutary friendship.

"About the half, Lord, of this Holy Life consists in salutary friendship".

He hardly realized that he is modestly underestimating its value until the Buddha corrected him with the following memorable words:

"Not so Ananda, surely not so Ānanda. Indeed **the whole of this Holy Life** consists in salutary friendship".

So one would not have scored a bull's eye on the target until one has secured that salutary friendship which is so essential for making a success of the Holy Life.

BE IN YOUR ELEMENT

Whenever we are out of element we feel uneasy. We are quite at ease when we are in our element. The most elementary requirement for this feeling of ease, is the acquaintance with the four elements – *earth, water, fire and air*.

We can easily sink all differences which make us uneasy, in the contemplation of the four elements within and without. How much pride and prejudice is kept going in the world by attending to differences in external appearance – differences in colour, shape and size? All these seem petty and superficial when we contemplate for a moment that, after all, **we are just bundles of earth, water, fire and air**. We can sink those petty differences and unite under the universal banner of '**Four Elements**'.

The Buddha has pointed out that **the contemplation on the four elements within and without, leads to an equanimity** which brings relaxation and peace of mind. In it, **we are one with our fellow beings and with the inanimate world around us**. Beings, as well as the objects surrounding us, challenging in their wide variety and vivid colour, fade away in the serene contemplation of the oneness in their essential inseparable texture. In fact, even the idea of '*surroundings*' vanish in that basic concept of oneness and the resulting feeling of equanimity.

So all we need to do to get down to this extraordinary sense of ordinariness, is to contemplate on those parts and functions of our body that represent the **characteristics** of the four elements – **solidity, liquidity, heat, and motion**. No microscope is necessary to convince us of our basic texture. Our hair, skin, flesh and bones tell us our affinity to the **earth element**. Bile, phlegm, blood and sweat are representative enough of the **water element**. Hunger, fever and heat remind us of the **fire element** within. Breathing in and out, we are moving with the **wind element**.

Once this 'elementary' training is over, one can enjoy a wonderful feeling of ease in which even the 3-dimensional world melts into a, 2-dimensional painting of mere colour patches – **a painting without a framework!**

A RADICAL SOLUTION

The Four Noble Truths discovered by the Fully Enlightened One, offers a radical solution to the problem of suffering with which the world is grappling. The Buddha found that the problem has been imperfectly stated. Only the symptoms of the disease had attracted the worldling's attention. An effective cure has to be based on a thoroughgoing diagnosis. So he had to give a restatement of the problem 'as-it-is'.

In the enunciation of the **First Noble Truth of Suffering**, which is something 'to-be-comprehended', the Buddha was thoroughgoing and forthright.

" Birth is suffering, decay is suffering, disease is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering. Being attached to the unloved is suffering, being separated from the loved is suffering, not getting what one wants is suffering, **in short, the five aggregates of grasping are suffering.**"

Last but not least – in short, the five aggregates of grasping are suffering. This, then, is the 'Dis-ease'. No doubt this is a 'bitter truth' to the worldling – but it is 'to be comprehended', if a radical cure is asked for.

What one usually does, is to 'departmentalize' this vast maze of suffering and search for a solution in one's departmental files.

If one is to rise above that kind of self-deception, one must be prepared to rise above **the deception of SELF** itself.

All possible views of SELF are traceable to the Five Aggregates of Grasping. Form, feeling, perception, preparations and consciousness are the five groups which for the sake of grasping are conceived **as compact**. They are but *transient heaps of processes*, elusive and delusive by their very nature. There is only a semblance of stability and a conceit of mastery about them.

Since **grasping, clinging or holding on to** these five groups **is the disease**, it follows that the cause is craving or desire. The radical cure, then, is the abandonment of that very craving – the '**letting go**' of it. The stress, tension and conflict arising out of that grasping will give place to the ease and bliss of Release - NIBBĀNA

The Noble Eightfold Path is the Middle Way – the Golden Mean – of setting about the task of letting-go. One grasps, clings and holds on to something out of fear. But when one is sufficiently convinced that what one grasps, clings and holds on to, is itself fearful, one has no choice but to let go. This is the conviction already implicit in the definition of Right View – the first step of the Path. It is stated as the understanding of suffering, its arising, its cessation and the Path leading to that cessation – all in one. Treading the Path, one strengthens this conviction and prepares one's mind for the final '**letting-go**'

The supra-mundane Path is perfected in four stages by the Noble Disciple to become a Stream-winner, a Once-returner, a Non-returner and an Arahant. It is like turning the wheel of Dhamma four times. Already as a Stream-winner, one is convinced that there is **no 'I'** outside the five fleeting and fearful groups which promise no security. The lingering conceit 'am' – the 'hang over' of the chronic *saṃsāric* disease – is shaken off only at the fourth round when, as an Arahant, one puts an end to the entire problem of *saṃsāric* suffering.

A TALL ORDER?

"**Monks, what is not yours**, you give up. Giving it up will be for your weal and happiness. And **what, monks, is not yours**?"

Form, monks, is not yours. Give it up. Giving it up will be for your weal and happiness.

Feeling, monks, is not yours. Give it up. Giving it up will be for your weal and happiness.

Perception, monks, is not yours. Give it up. Giving it up will be for your weal and happiness.

Preparations, monks, is not yours. Give it up. Giving it up will be for your weal and happiness.

Consciousness, monks, is not yours. Give it up. Giving it up will be for your weal and happiness.

– S.N. III 34

This exhortation sounds like a 'tall-order'. The **five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, preparations and consciousness** are **all what we HAVE** and **all what we ARE**. How can we afford to give them up? Here the Buddha is assuring us that if we let-go of them, we will be well and happy. Isn't it like telling a man who is clinging on to a creeper for fear of falling down a precipice, to let go of his hold?

Well, the truth of the matter is that what precipitates a fall is the weight of the one who is clinging on. The more burdened he is, the heavier the thud in landing and greater the pain and peril. But if the five aggregates are all what we HAVE and all what we ARE, letting go of them, will we be falling at all?

The above order, then, is not so 'tall' as it sounds, for in 'giving-up' we are only giving up our attachment to the five groups. It was the very tenacity of our grasp that made these a heavy burden. Letting go, is getting lighter. That way, we are rising above them, soaring high into the sky, well over the imaginary precipice and the chronic fear of a possible fall.

*'Those who do not accumulate,
Who know fully well the food they take,
Whose pasture is that VOID and SIGNLESS
Theirs is the track that's hard to trace
Like that of birds on the wing in the sky.*

– Dhp. v. 92

EASE AND DIS-EASE

The purpose of a hospital is to tend to the sick. Physicians and surgeons, nurses and attendants are trained for their jobs along the ideals of health and well-being of the society. They are duty-bound to bring ease to the dis-eased and as for disease itself, the well-known maxim is:

'Prevention is better than cure'

But aren't they really working with a contradiction? If they live up to that ideal, will they not run the risk of losing their jobs? If the patients are cured too soon, or if no patients turn up at all to fill the hospital beds, will not the hospital staff be faced with the crisis of 'unemployment'?

Should not the maxim be changed to :

'Prevention is worse than cure?'

This may seem awkward, but this is the paradox of existence which the Buddha faced when he 'AWOKE', one memorable Vesak-morning, to the NOBLE TRUTH: '**The Entire World is SICK!**'. Well aware that this 'bitter-truth' goes against the grain, he at first hesitated to preach it. The Peerless Physician -cum- Surgeon knew full well, that the 'quacks' will not take him seriously. He also knew that the entire 'hospital-staff will threaten strike- action, if he went ahead with his program for a TOTAL CURE. He will be accused of upsetting the hospital 'set-up'.

Truly enough, when he finally decided to preach, out of compassion for the world, and launched his supra-mundane Health Program in the World-Hospital, he did encounter much opposition. From the socio-economic point of view of those who were eager to preserve the status-quo, the Buddha had introduced chaos into the cosmos. Thrones were abandoned, armies were disbanded and businessmen deprived of easy-money. Slaughter-houses, taverns and brothels

were adversely affected by his moral code. Nearer home – 'sweet home' – parents lost their darling children and husbands, and wives their ever-loving spouses – all due to the charm of the saffron robe. No wonder then, that there was a big outcry in protest.

" The recluse Gotama is out to deprive parents of their sons, The recluse Gotama is wresting away husbands from their wives. The recluse Gotama is set on breaching family lines".

The Buddha met this protest with the following mild challenge:

*'Thus-gone Ones of heroic mould
Lead the world on with the True Dhamma
When they are but leaders by righteous means
What reason for jealousy is there for the wise?*

For the Peerless Healer, all that mattered was the *Samsāric* maturity of beings. If any being in this Realm of Death could be saved from repeated births and deaths in *Samsāra*, he would go all the way to cure him. Like any conscientious doctor, he considered it his duty to attend to the 'SICK' worldlings promptly, to cure them radically and to discharge them the soonest possible- **from the 'Hospital -of- the World'**.

*'Pursue not the meaner ends
Have no truck with heedlessness
Go not the way of wrong views
Be not a booster of the WORLD!*

– Dh p.167

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER

"Wrong view, I say, is the biggest fault".

We might wonder why the Buddha makes such a serious statement about views when we are fully entitled to our views and opinions. Granted that freedom, however, we can't deny the fact that all our faults stem from a wrong view of things. This is the root of the matter.

When a seed is planted, its roots suck in moisture and nutrients from the earth to produce its own fruit – bitter or sweet as the case may be. The roots follow the intrinsic nature of the seed. Even so, one's bodily, verbal and mental behaviour is fully influenced by the view one holds. One must also face its consequences – evil or good as the case may be.

It is this truth that the Buddha tries to put across through the following exhortation to his disciples.

"Monks, in the case of a man of **wrong views**, whatever bodily, verbal or mental action he does, accords fully with the view he has taken up. Whatever **intentions, aspirations, determinations and preparations** there may be in him, all that will **conduce to what is unpleasant, unhappy and disagreeable** – to what is not beneficial but painful. And why so? Because his view, monks is evil. Monks, a margosa seed or a bitter-gourd seed or a bitter pumpkin seed thrown on moist earth imparts its bitterness, sourness and unpleasantness to whatever essence of earth and moisture it lays hold of. Why so? **Because the seed, monks, is bad.** It is the same, monks, in the case of that man of wrong view because his view is evil."

'Monks, in the case of a man of **right views**, whatever bodily, verbal or mental action he does, accords fully with the view he has taken up. Whatever intentions, aspirations, determinations and preparations there may be in him, all that will conduce to what is pleasant happy and agreeable – to what is beneficial and blissful. And why so? **Because his view, monks is good.** Monks a seedling of sugar-cane,

or a paddy seed or a grape seed thrown on moist earth imparts its sweetness, pleasantness and deliciousness to whatever essence of earth and moisture it lays hold of. Why so? **Because the seed, monks is good.** It is the same, monks, in the case of a man of right view, because his view is good.'

–A.N.I 82

*'As one sows the seed
So one reaps the fruit
The doer of good reaps
The fruit of good
The doer of evil
An evil fruit.'*

– S.N.I 227

THE SEE-SAW

We in this world of ups and downs are on a see-saw. Gain comes – and up we go, loss comes – we hit the floor. It's the same when honour and dishonour, praise and blame, pleasure and pain, alternate in our lives. All 'events' range between these four pairs.

To be puffed-up is to come down with a thud. These are the two possible extreme reactions to the eight worldly conditions which are but transient and trivial. Very often we forget that they are visitors who 'drop-in' only to depart – leaving us dazed and amazed.

So unless we receive them with sobriety and impartiality, we lose our equilibrium. They pose a challenge to our steadiness – to our equanimity. Whenever, we forget the rhythm of a see-saw, we lose our balance and come to grief.

*Whose mind remains unshaken
When touched by worldly vicissitudes
Sorrowless, stainless state secure
That's the blessing supreme in life'*

– *Maha Mangala S.*, Sn v. 268

Narcissus

– his reflections on his reflection.

Narcissus was a handsome Greek youth who had never seen his face. One day while roaming in a forest glade, he bent down into a pool to wash his face. Seeing his own reflection there, he mistook it for an angel. Falling in love with the imagined angel, he tried to embrace her. **The angel disappeared among the ripples but reappeared when the ripples calmed down.** Again and again he tried, but she kept on playing hide and seek with him. The whole day he spent there trying but it was in vain. So he went home in the evening determined to come back the following day and satisfy his fervent desire.

The following day, and the following day, and the following day, he came, but the ripples in the pool foiled his eager attempts to embrace the angel. At last he pined away frustrated and embraced '**Death**' at the edge of the forest pool.

When his grieving friends and relatives found him there, they saw a strong smelling forest flower in full bloom on a plant beside him. They named it after him in memory of his fateful angelic face, and the term '**narcissism**' found its way into the Dictionary to denote 'self-love'.

A Greek myth – An adaptation

*'Just see a world with all its gods
Fancying a self where no self exists
Entrenched in name-and-form it builds
The conceit: 'Ah! This is the truth'*

– Sn. v. 756 (P.T.S)

A post-script on Narcissus.

. . . . The angel disappeared among the ripples but reappeared when the ripples calmed down. Narcissus began to reflect wisely on the reflection to find out why the angel disappeared among the ripples but reappeared when the ripples calmed down. At last he realized that an angel appeared only when he looked at her. It was only his 'self-image' reflected on water.

Towards sunset he sat at the foot of a tree by the forest pool to take stock of his day's reflections. The **nominal-form** and the **formal-name** of his self-image had been deceiving him all this time. It had aroused an erotic **feeling** giving rise to a mis-**perception** impelling an **intention** to embrace resulting in an imagined **contact** and a pervert **attention**. He realized that he had wasted the whole day due to his ignorance of the **illusory reflective capacity** of the water surface – doting on the angelic form of his own imagination.

"At every attempt to embrace the angel I have been grasping merely an **intangible foam-like form**. I have been grasping merely a **bubble-like brittle feeling**. I have been grasping merely a **mirage-like illusory perception**. I have been grasping merely a **banana-trunk like essenceless heap of preparations**. I have been grasping merely a **magic-like delusive consciousness**

*Form is like a mass of foam
And feeling-but an airy bubble
Perception is like a mirage
And preparations a banana trunk*

*Consciousness is a magic show
A juggler's trick entire
All these similes were made known
By the 'kinsman – of – the sun.'*

– S.N. III 142 (P.T.S)

There is STRENGTH in Forbearance

Then, monks, Brahmadata, the King of Kāsi, spoke thus to Prince Dīghāvu: 'Do you, my good youngster, attend on me.' Then, monks, Prince Dīghāvu answered 'Yes, Sire', in assent to Brahmadata, the King of Kāsi. Then, monks, Prince Dīghāvu became an early riser than Brahmadata, King of Kāsi, he lay down later, he was a willing servant, eager to please, speaking affectionately. Then, monks, Brahmadata, the King of Kāsi, soon established Prince Dīghāvu in a confidential position of trust.

"Then, monks, Brahmadata, the King of Kāsi, spoke thus to Prince Dīghāvu: 'Well now, good youngster, harness a chariot, I will go out hunting.' And, monks, Prince Dīghāvu having answered 'Yes, Sire', in assent to Brahmadata, the King of Kāsi, having harnessed a chariot, spoke thus to Brahmadata, the King of Kāsi: 'A chariot is harnessed for you, Sire, for whatever you may think it is now the right time.'

Then, monks, Brahmadata, the King of Kāsi, mounted the chariot, Prince Dīghāvu drove the chariot, and he drove the chariot in such a manner that the army went by one way and the chariot by another. Then, monks, Brahmadata, the King of Kāsi, having gone far, spoke thus to Prince Dīghāvu: 'Well now, good youngster, unharness the chariot; as I am tired, I will lie down'. And, monks, Prince Dīghāvu having answered 'Yes, Sire', in assent to Brahmadata, the King of Kāsi, having unharnessed the chariot, sat down cross-legged on the ground. Then, monks, Brahmadata, the King of Kāsi, lay down and having laid his head on Prince Dīghāvu's lap, and because he was tired he fell asleep at once.

Then, monks, it occurred to Prince Dīghāvu: 'This Brahmadata, King of Kāsi, has done us much mischief; he has stolen our troops and vehicles and territory and store-houses, and granaries, and

he has killed my parents. This could be a time when I could show my wrath, and he drew his sword from its sheath. Then monks, it occurred to Prince Dīghāvu: 'My father spoke to me thus, at the time of his dying: **'Do not you, dear Dīghāvu, look far or close, for, dear Dīghāvu, wrathful moods are not allayed by wrath, wrathful moods, dear Dīghāvu, are allayed by non-wrath.'** 'It would not be suitable for me to transgress my father's words', and he replaced his sword in its sheath. And a second time, monks, it occurred to Prince Dīghāvu: 'This Brahmadaṭṭa when I could show my wrath', and he drew his sword from its sheath. **And a second time,** it occurred to Prince Dīghāvu: 'My father spoke to me thus It would not be suitable for me to transgress my father's words,' and again he replaced his sword in its sheath. **And a third time and again he replaced his sword in its sheath.** Then, monks, Brahmadaṭṭa, the King of Kāsi, frightened, agitated, fearful, alarmed, suddenly got up. Then monks, Prince Dīghāvu spoke thus to Brahmadaṭṭa, the King of Kāsi, 'Why do you, Sire, frightened suddenly get up ? He said: 'As I was dreaming here, my good youngster, the son of Dīghāti, the King of Kosala, attacked me with a sword. That is why I, frightened, suddenly got up.'

"Then, monks, Prince Dīghāvu, having stroked the head of Brahmadaṭṭa, the King of Kāsi, with his left hand, having drawn his sword with his right hand, spoke thus to Brahmadaṭṭa the King of Kāsi: 'I Sire, am Prince Dīghāvu, that son of Dīghāti the King of Kosala. You have done us much mischief. **Our troops, vehicles, territory, storehouses and granaries were stolen by you, and my parents were killed by you. This could be a time when I could show my wrath.**' Then monks, Brahmadaṭṭa, the King of Kāsi, inclining his head towards Prince Dīghāvu's feet, spoke thus to Prince Dīghāvu: **'Grant me my life, dear Dīghāvu, grant me my life, dear Dīghāvu.'**

**'How am I able to grant life to a king ?
It is a king who should grant me life.'**

'Well then dear Dīghāvu, you grant me life and I will grant you

life.'

Then, monks, Brahmadaṭṭa, the king of Kāsi, and Prince Dīghāvu granted life to one another and they took hold of (one another's) hands and they made an oath to do (one another) no harm. Then, monks, Brahmadaṭṭa, King of Kāsi, spoke thus to Prince Dīghāvu: 'Well then, dear Dīghāvu, harness the chariot; we will go away.' And monks, Prince Dīghāvu having answered, 'Yes Sire' in assent to Brahmadaṭṭa, the king of Kāsi, having harnessed the chariot, spoke thus to Brahmadaṭṭa, the King of Kāsi: 'The chariot is harnessed for you Sire, for whatever you may think it is the right time.' Then, monks, Brahmadaṭṭa, the King of Kāsi, mounted the chariot, Prince Dīghāvu drove the chariot, and he drove the chariot in such a manner that soon it met the army.

Then, monks, Brahmadaṭṭa, the King of Kāsi, having entered Benares having had the ministers and councillors convened, spoke thus: 'If, good sirs, you should see Prince Dīghāvu, the son of Dīghāti, the King of Kosala, what would you do to him ?' Some spoke thus: **'We, Sire, would cut off his hands; we Sire, would cut off his feet;his ears, his nose, his ears and nose,we Sire, would cut off his head.'**

Then, monks, Brahmadaṭṭa, the King of Kāsi, said: **'This, good sirs, is Prince Dīghāvu the son of Dīghāti the King of Kosala; there is no occasion to do anything (against him); life was granted by him to me and life was granted by me to him.'**

"Then, monks, Brahmadaṭṭa, the King of Kāsi, spoke thus to Prince Dīghāvu: 'Concerning that, dear Dīghāvu, which your father said to you at the time of dying: **'Do not you, dear Dīghāvu look far or close, for, dear Dīghāvu, wrathful moods are not allayed by wrath, wrathful moods, dear Dīghāvu, are allayed by non-wrath'**, what did your father mean ?' He said: 'Concerning that, Sire, which my father said to me at that time of dying, - 'Not far' means, **do not bear wrath long.**

The Buddha's Tribute to Parents

This is what my father said to me at the time of dying, when he said 'not far', Concerning that, sire, which my father said to me at the time of dying **'not close'** means: **'do not hastily break with a friend'**. This is what my father said to me, Sire, at the time of dying, when he said 'not close'. Concerning that Sire, which my father said to me at the time of dying. for 'dear Dīghāvu, **"wrathful moods are not allayed by wrath"** means: my parents were killed by a king, but if I were to deprive the king of life, those who desired the king's welfare would deprive me of life and those who desired my welfare would deprive the king of life; thus that wrath would not be settled by wrath. **But now that life is granted to me by a king and life is granted to a king by me, thus is wrath settled by non-wrath.** This is what my father said to me, Sire, at the time of dying when he said: "for, dear Dīghāvu, wrathful moods are not allayed by wrath; wrathful moods dear Dīghāvu, are allayed by non-wrath."

"Then, monks, Brahmadata, the King of Kāsi, thinking:
'Indeed it is marvellous, indeed it is wonderful that this Prince Dīghāvu is so clever that he understands in full, the matter which was spoken by his father in brief, **gave back his father's troops and vehicles and territory and store-houses and granaries and gave him his daughter**

– Book of Discipline IV pp 495 ff
(Vinaya Mahavagga Dīghāvubhanavara)

**“Monks, two persons, I say, it is not easy to repay. Which two ?
The father and the mother.”**

“Even if, monks, one with a life span of a hundred years, living the full hundred years, were to carry one's mother on one shoulder and the father on the other, attending on them by anointing, bathing and massaging while they defecate and urinate on his shoulders – even then one could not have paid or sufficiently repaid one's debt of gratitude to one's parents.

And even if monks, one were to bestow on one's parents the regal splendour of sovereignty over the whole of this great earth with its abundance of seven kinds of gems – even then, one would not have paid or sufficiently repaid one's debt of gratitude to one's parents.

Why so? Because parents have done so much for their children : They gave them life, nourished them and showed them the world.

But whoever, monks, initiates, instils and inculcates *the qualities of faith in parents lacking in faith, morality in parents of poor morals, liberality in parents stingy in giving, and wisdom in parents deficient in wisdom* – such a one has paid, sufficiently repaid, and amply repaid, the debt of gratitude to his parents.”

– A.N. I 61

May all sons and daughters follow the Path of Dhamma !

Interest and Rest

Interest takes you half the way. That is the 'root' of the matter – where we butt in with a 'But the **thing** is“

To get interested in **some 'thing'** is to get a perch in the fleeting trend of thought, the rapidity of which the Buddha declared – “has no parallel”.

“It is not easy to give a simile to show how rapidly thought changes.”
– A.N. I 10

Then how does 'interest' come in?

Interesting as it may seem, interest (*chanda*) is a euphemism for craving (*taṇhā*). It is a seemingly innocuous representative of craving – the lightest shade of it, as it were. It works almost unseen like the root of a plant. It is the '**mouse**' which controls the '**cursor**' – attention (*manasikāra*).

Where **interest** rests, you find yourself attending to some point of **contact** (*phassa*) and you become aware of three grades of **feeling** (*vedanā*) – pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral (*sukha, dukkha, adukkhamasukha*).

Your concentration now picks up the 'thing' of your choice – and there you are!

Concentration (*samādhi*) is the harbinger of the 'thing' and you are either happy, unhappy or bored.

You are now fully involved in it with '**mindfulness**' (*sati*). That is, **you can be mindful of your pleasure, pain, or boredom.**

According to the Buddha, the uninstructed worldling is always '**see-sawing**' between pain and pleasure. It is the blind alley he finds himself in – ignorant as he is.

“. . . on being touched by painful feeling, he delights in sense pleasures. And why is that ? The uninstructed worldling monks, knows no way out of painful feeling other than sense pleasures...”
– S.N. I 208

But is there an exit from this blind alley? Is there an end to this 'see-sawing'?

“Yes”, says the Buddha. You have to move towards the middle – the fulcrum – leaving the extremes of pain and pleasure. You have to find an interest in the neutral – though it may appear 'boring'. In fact you have to go on boring at the middle. If you delve deeper at the middle, you can get at the Truth and find an Exit.

It is true that we are usually not 'interested' in the neutral. We simply ignore it. We are indifferent. All the same, ignorance lurks there. However if we delve deeper at this point with right attention, ignorance gets transformed into **Wisdom**. That is the light in which you see the Exit.

At one time, the Buddha instructed the monks as to how they should reply to a series of questions likely to be raised by wandering ascetics of other sects, concerning the **origin, behaviour, and purpose of 'all things'** (*sabbe dhammā*).

“. . . . When thus questioned, monks, you may reply to those wandering ascetics as follows:

**“Rooted in interest (desire) friends are all things.
Born of attention are all things.
Arising from contact are all things.
Converging on feeling are all things.
Headed by concentration are all things.
Dominated by mindfulness are all things.
Surmountable by Wisdom are all things.
Yielding deliverance as essence are all things
Merging in the Deathless are all things.
Terminating in Nibbāna are all things.**

When thus questioned, monks, you may reply in this way to those wandering ascetics of other sects”

–A.N. V 106f

So after all, interest takes you only half the way, and it is Wisdom that takes care of the rest. You are **fully at 'rest'** when there is no **'interest'**!

By the same author

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