

15 *Anamataggasamyutta* Connected Discourses on Without Discoverable Beginning

1 (1) *Grass and Wood*

“Bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning.²⁵⁴ A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. Suppose, bhikkhus, a man would cut up whatever grass, sticks, branches, and foliage there are in this Jambudīpa and collect them together into a single heap. Having done so, he would put them down, saying [for each one]: ‘This is my mother, this my mother’s mother.’ The sequence of that man’s mothers and grandmothers would not come to an end, yet the grass, wood, branches, and foliage in this Jambudīpa would be used up and exhausted. For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. For such a long time, bhikkhus, you have experienced suffering, anguish, and disaster, and swelled the cemetery. It is enough to experience revulsion towards all formations, enough to become dispassionate towards them, enough to be liberated from them.” [179]

2 (2) *The Earth*

“Bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. Suppose, bhikkhus, a man would reduce this great earth to balls of clay the size of jujube kernels and put them down, saying [for each one]: ‘This is my father, this my father’s father.’ The sequence of that man’s fathers and grandfathers would not come to an end, yet this great earth would be used up and exhausted. For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. For such a long time, bhikkhus, you have experienced suffering, anguish, and disaster, and swelled the cemetery. It is enough to experience revulsion towards all formations, enough to become dispassionate towards them, enough to be liberated from them.”

3 (3) *Tears*

“Bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. What do you think, bhikkhus, which is more: the stream of tears that you have shed as you roamed and wandered on through this long course, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable—this or the water in the four great oceans?”²⁵⁵

“As we understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, venerable sir, [180] the stream of tears that we have shed as we roamed and wandered through this long course, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable—this alone is more than the water in the four great oceans.”

“Good, good, bhikkhus! It is good that you understand the Dhamma taught by me in such a way. The stream of tears that you have shed as you roamed and wandered through this long course, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable—this alone is more than the water in the four great oceans. For a long time, bhikkhus, you have experienced the death of a mother; as you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the water in the four great oceans.

"For a long time, bhikkhus, you have experienced the death of a father ... the death of a brother ... the death of a sister ... the death of a son ... the death of a daughter ... the loss of relatives ... the loss of wealth ... loss through illness; as you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the water in the four great oceans. For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning.... It is enough to experience revulsion towards all formations, enough to become dispassionate towards them, enough to be liberated from them."

4 (4) *Mother's Milk*

"Bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. What do you think, bhikkhus, which is more: [181] the mother's milk that you have drunk as you roamed and wandered on through this long course—this or the water in the four great oceans?"

"As we understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, venerable sir, the mother's milk that we have drunk as we roamed and wandered on through this long course—this alone is more than the water in the four great oceans."

"Good, good, bhikkhus! It is good that you understand the Dhamma taught by me in such a way. The mother's milk that you have drunk as you roamed and wandered through this long course—this alone is more than the water in the four great oceans. For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning.... It is enough to be liberated from them."

5 (5) *The Mountain*

Then a certain bhikkhu approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him: "Venerable sir, how long is an aeon?"²⁵⁶

"An aeon is long, bhikkhu. It is not easy to count it and say it is so many years, or so many hundreds of years, or so many thousands of years, or so many hundreds of thousands of years."

"Then is it possible to give a simile, venerable sir?"

"It is possible, bhikkhu," the Blessed One said. "Suppose, bhikkhu, there was a great stone mountain a *yojana* long, a *yojana* wide, and a *yojana* high, without holes or crevices, one solid mass of rock. At the end of every hundred years a man would stroke it once with a piece of Kāsian cloth.²⁵⁷ That great stone mountain might by this effort be worn away and eliminated but the aeon would still not have come to an end. So long is an aeon, bhikkhu. [182] And of aeons of such length, we have wandered through so many aeons, so many hundreds of aeons, so many thousands of aeons, so many hundreds of thousands of aeons. For what reason? Because, bhikkhu, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning.... It is enough to be liberated from them."

6 (6) *The Mustard Seed*

Then a certain bhikkhu approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him: "Venerable sir, how long is an aeon?"

"An aeon is long, bhikkhu. It is not easy to count it and say it is so many years, or so many hundreds of years, or so many thousands of years, or so many hundreds of thousands of years."

"Then is it possible to give a simile, venerable sir?"

"It is possible, bhikkhu," the Blessed One said. "Suppose, bhikkhu, there was a city with iron walls a *yojana* long, a *yojana* wide, and a *yojana* high, filled with mustard seeds as dense as a topknot. At the end of every hundred years a man would remove one mustard seed from there. The great heap of mustard seeds might by this effort be depleted and eliminated but the aeon would still not have come to an end. So long is an aeon, bhikkhu. And of aeons of such length,

we have wandered through so many aeons, so many hundreds of aeons, so many thousands of aeons, so many hundreds of thousands of aeons. For what reason? Because, bhikkhu, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning.... It is enough to be liberated from them."

7 (7) Disciples

[183] Then a number of bhikkhus approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him: "Venerable sir, how many aeons have elapsed and gone by?"

"Bhikkhus, many aeons have elapsed and gone by. It is not easy to count them and say they are so many aeons, or so many hundreds of aeons, or so many thousands of aeons, or so many hundreds of thousands of aeons."

"But is it possible to give a simile, venerable sir?"

"It is possible, bhikkhus," the Blessed One said. "Suppose, bhikkhus, there were four disciples here each with a life span of a hundred years, living a hundred years, and each day they were each to recollect a hundred thousand aeons. There would still be aeons not yet recollected by them when those four disciples each with a life span of a hundred years, living a hundred years, would pass away at the end of a hundred years.²⁵⁸ It is not easy to count them and say that they are so many aeons, or so many hundreds of aeons, or so many thousands of aeons, or so many hundreds of thousands of aeons. For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning.... It is enough to be liberated from them."

8 (8) The River Ganges

On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrel Sanctuary. Then a certain brahmin approached the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him. When they had concluded their greetings and cordial talk, he sat down to one side and said to him: "Master Gotama, how many aeons have elapsed and gone by?"

"Brahmin, many aeons have elapsed and gone by. It is not easy to count them and say they are so many aeons, or so many hundreds of aeons, or so many thousands of aeons, or so many hundreds of thousands of aeons." [184]

"But is it possible to give a simile, Master Gotama?"

"It is possible, brahmin," the Blessed One said. "Suppose, brahmin, the grains of sand between the point where the river Ganges originates and the point where it enters the great ocean: it is not easy to count these and say there are so many grains of sand, or so many hundreds of grains, or so many thousands of grains, or so many hundreds of thousands of grains. Brahmin, the aeons that have elapsed and gone by are even more numerous than that. It is not easy to count them and say that they are so many aeons, or so many hundreds of aeons, or so many thousands of aeons, or so many hundreds of thousands of aeons. For what reason? Because, brahmin, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning.... It is enough to be liberated from them."

When this was said, that brahmin said to the Blessed One: "Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent, Master Gotama!... From today let Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge for life."

11 (1) Unfortunate

On one occasion, while dwelling at Sāvatti, the Blessed One said this: "Bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. Whenever you see anyone in misfortune, in misery, you can conclude: 'We too have experienced the same thing in this long course.' For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning.... It is enough to be liberated from them."

12 (2) Happy

"Bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning.... Whenever you see anyone happy and fortunate, [187] you can conclude: 'We too have experienced the same thing in this long course.' For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning.... It is enough to be liberated from them."

13 (3) Thirty Bhikkhus

At Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove. Then thirty bhikkhus from Pāvā approached the Blessed One—all forest dwellers, almsfood eaters, rag-robe wearers, triple-robe users, yet all were still with fetters.²⁶² Having approached, they paid homage to the Blessed One and sat down to one side. Then it occurred to the Blessed One: "These thirty bhikkhus from Pāvā are all forest dwellers, almsfood eaters, rag-robe wearers, triple-robe users, yet all are still with fetters. Let me teach them the Dhamma in such a way that while they are sitting in these very seats their minds will be liberated from the taints by nonclinging."

Then the Blessed One addressed those bhikkhus thus: "Bhikkhus!"

"Venerable sir!" those bhikkhus replied. The Blessed One said this:

"Bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. What do you think, bhikkhus, which is more: the stream of blood that you have shed when you were beheaded as you roamed and wandered on through this long course—this or the water in the four great oceans?"

"As we understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, venerable sir, the stream of blood that we have shed when our heads were cut off as we roamed and wandered on through this long course—this alone [188] is more than the water in the four great oceans."

"Good, good, bhikkhus! It is good that you understand the Dhamma taught by me in such a way. The stream of blood that you have shed as you roamed and wandered on through this long course—this alone is more than the water in the four great oceans. For a long time, bhikkhus, you have been cows, and when as cows you were beheaded, the stream of blood that you shed is greater than the waters in the four great oceans. For a long time you have been buffalo, sheep, goats, deer, chickens, and pigs.... For a long time you have been arrested as burglars, highwaymen, and adulterers, and when you were beheaded, the stream of blood that you shed is greater than the water in the four great oceans. For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning.... It is enough to be liberated from them."

This is what the Blessed One said. Elated, those bhikkhus delighted in the Blessed One's statement. [189] And while this exposition was being spoken, the minds of the thirty bhikkhus from Pāvā were liberated from the taints by nonclinging.

20 (10) Mount Vepulla

On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Rājagaha on Mount Vulture Peak. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus: "Bhikkhus!"

"Venerable sir!" those bhikkhus replied. The Blessed One said this:

"Bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. In the past, bhikkhus, this Mount Vepulla was called Pācinavaṃsa, [191] and at that time these people were called Tivaras. The life span of the Tivaras was 40,000 years.²⁶³ They could climb Mount Pācinavaṃsa in four days and descend in four days. At that time the Blessed One Kakusandha, an Arahant, a Perfectly Enlightened One, had arisen in the world. His two chief disciples were named Vidhura and Sañjiva, an excellent pair. See, bhikkhus! That name for this mountain has disappeared, those people have died, and that Blessed One has attained final Nibbāna. So

impermanent are formations, bhikkhus, so unstable, so unreliable. It is enough, bhikkhus, to experience revulsion towards all formations, enough to become dispassionate towards them, enough to be liberated from them.

"[At another time] in the past, bhikkhus, this Mount Vepulla was called Va^okaka, and at that time these people were called Rohitassas. The life span of the Rohitassas was 30,000 years.²⁵⁴ They could climb Mount Va^okaka in three days and descend in three days. At that time the Blessed One Ko^oāgamana, an Arahant, a Perfectly Enlightened One, had arisen in the world. His two chief disciples were named Bhiyyosa and Uttara, an excellent pair. See, bhikkhus! That name for this mountain has disappeared, those people have died, and that Blessed One has attained final Nibbāna. [192] So impermanent are formations.... It is enough to be liberated from them.

"[At still another time] in the past, bhikkhus, this Mount Vepulla was called Supassa, and at that time these people were called Suppiyas. The life span of the Suppiyas was 20,000 years. They could climb Mount Supassa in two days and descend in two days. At that time the Blessed One Kassapa, an Arahant, a Perfectly Enlightened One, had arisen in the world. His two chief disciples were named Tissa and Bhāradvāja, an excellent pair. See, bhikkhus! That name for this mountain has disappeared, those people have died, and that Blessed One has attained final Nibbāna. So impermanent are formations.... It is enough to be liberated from them.

"At present, bhikkhus, this Mount Vepulla is called Vepulla, and at present these people are called Magadhans. The life span of the Magadhans is short, limited, fleeting; one who lives long lives a hundred years or a little more. The Magadhans climb Mount Vepulla in an hour and descend in an hour. At present I have arisen in the world, an Arahant, a Perfectly Enlightened One. My two chief disciples are named Sāriputta and Moggallāna, an excellent pair. There will come a time, bhikkhus, [193] when the name for this mountain will have disappeared, when these people will have died, and I will have attained final Nibbāna. So impermanent are formations, bhikkhus, so unstable, so unreliable. It is enough, bhikkhus, to experience revulsion towards all formations, enough to become dispassionate towards them, enough to be liberated from them."

This is what the Blessed One said. Having said this, the Fortunate One, the Teacher, further said this:

"This was called Pācinavaṃsa by the Tivaras,
And Vankaka by the Rohitassas,
Supassa by the Suppiya people,
Vepulla by the Magadhan folk.

"Impermanent, alas, are formations,
Subject to arising and vanishing.
Having arisen, they cease:
Their appeasement is blissful."²⁶⁵

Notes

254 *Anamataggo 'yaṃ bhikkhave saṃsāro*. Spk resolves *anamatagga* into *anu amatagga*, explaining: "Even if it should be pursued by knowledge for a hundred or a thousand years, it would be with unthought-of beginning, with unknown beginning (*vassasataṃ vassasahassaṃ ñāṇena anugantvā pi amataggo aviditaggo*). It wouldn't be possible to know its beginning from here or from there; the meaning is that it is without a delimiting first or last point. *Saṃsāra* is the uninterruptedly occurring succession of the aggregates, etc. (*khandhādīnaṃ avicchinnappavattā paṭipāṭi*)."

The BHS equivalent of *anamatagga* is *anavarāgra* (e.g., at Mahāvastu I 34,7), "without lower or upper limit."

- 255 Spk: The four great oceans delimited by the rays of Mount Sineru. For Sineru's eastern slope is made of silver, its southern slope of jewels, its western slope of crystal, and its northern slope of gold. From the eastern and southern slopes rays of silver and jewels come forth, merge, traverse the surface of the ocean, and reach right up to the mountains that encircle the world-sphere; and so too with the rays coming forth from the other slopes. The four great oceans are situated between those rays.
- 256 *Kappa*. Apparently a *mahākappa* is intended, the length of time needed for a world system to arise, develop, and perish. Each *mahākappa* consists of four *asankheyyakappas*, periods of expansion, stabilization, contraction, and dissolution: see AN II 142,15–28.
- 262 The same group of bhikkhus provided the occasion for the Buddha to institute the offering of the *kāṭhina* robe at the end of the Vassa, the annual rains residence; see Vin I 253–54. Forest dwelling, etc., are four of the ascetic practices. Spk: *Yet all were still with fetters*. Some were stream-enterers, some once-returners, some nonreturners, but among them there were no worldlings or arahants.