

7. SAṆSĀRAVAṬṬA.

We take it that many people will have heard this word, will have used it at some time, even some schoolchildren are likely to have heard of it. The *vaṭṭa* part has the meaning of circulating, or spinning around, *saṇsāravāṭṭa* refers to a ‘spinning around,’ or perhaps a ‘cycle’ would be better, possessing the power to attract, to pull in, so that anything that happens to fall under its influence will find it very difficult to escape. In the material sense it’s easy to understand, being likened to a whirlpool, whirling strongly round and round, which, if a boat should stray into it will cause it to spin around, be drawn into the deep central vortex, sink, and be lost. The *saṇsāravāṭṭa*, however, isn’t anything material, it’s mental, and refers to wrong understanding causing the mind to spin around in defilement, sinking deeper and deeper all the time. Mentally, the unknowing stray into this cycle and, as with the whirlpool, are drawn in and sink down and down until there’s no way they can get out again. It’s also known as the ‘cycle of suffering’ - the mind sinks into it, and, because of its cyclical nature, can’t easily get out again.

We need to understand the *saṇsāravāṭṭa* properly so that we can learn to control it, or stop it from spinning. That would be useful, otherwise it will just be more theoretical knowledge for us to stow away.

Now, some religious systems, lacking the necessary knowledge, don’t teach about the end of this problem, don’t teach about when the spinning around will come to an end. Other systems do, but in such a way that it can’t be pinned down, saying that it will end one day but in how many tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of years isn’t known, and that, when it does end there’ll be some sort of coming together with god, an integration with god in some way or other will mark the end of the *saṇsāravāṭṭa*. Put in that way it has the flavour of myth, has the hallmark of supposition, and really isn’t the Buddha’s teaching. The same sort of thing happens with those Buddhists who don’t grasp the concept of *nibbāna* properly and turn it into a city, claiming that we have to cycle around until we reach the city of *nibbāna*, where we can then dwell for all eternity, never having to cycle around ever again. This too has the mark of superstition, in that it can’t actually be known, and it’s unreasonable, something we’re asked to believe in and not to question or investigate. If we have this kind of approach to the *saṇsāravāṭṭa* then that becomes a matter of supposition too, and doesn’t belong in the Buddhist religion, it belongs to the category of the superstitious, it becomes a belief, a blind belief, and isn’t of any real use.

In the Buddhist religion the *saṇsāravāṭṭa* is understood as a cycle spinning in the minds of people, causing them to suffer repeatedly. For example: you want to come here, want to come to Suan Mokkh, so you come - the desire causes you to come here, to come and listen - and suppose what you hear makes you feel contented, then, when you go home you’ll want to come here again, so you will, you’ll come here again, sit, listen and feel contented again, and so on and so forth. This would be the *saṇsāravāṭṭa* as it pertains to someone coming to Suan Mokkh to listen to a talk. Observe the cycle of behaviour: the desire to come to Suan Mokkh, the coming here, the satisfaction experienced, and then the desire to come again, coming again, feeling satisfaction again, wanting come back yet again, coming back yet again, the satisfaction arising yet again, and so on, and so forth. This would be the good, the virtuous side of the *saṇsāravāṭṭa*,

something beneficial but still causing desire, the desire to come to Suan Mokkh involves the need to be doing something, and if that need isn't finished with then there's no benefit in the ultimate sense, because that 'doing,' all that coming and going won't ever lead to real happiness.

Now, supposing it's the bad side of the *saṅsāravatṭa*. For example: someone is too lazy to work so perhaps they go and steal something instead. They feel the desire to steal, so they go and steal something, they feel satisfied with what they get, and, because what they get won't satisfy them forever, then, sooner or later they'll feel the desire to steal again, so they'll steal again, feel satisfied again, and so on and so forth, repeating over and over. This would be the *saṅsāravatṭa* too, but on the bad, the unskilful side of things.

We're probably a little perplexed by now because we normally hear about the *saṅsāra* as something bad, but in reality it's not so simple as that, and even the good, if it causes one to get stuck in a cycle, will be the *saṅsāravatṭa*. Someone feels the desire to do something good so that they go and do some good deed, achieve an elevated, an 'heavenly' state of mind as a result, and then, when the experience comes to an end, feel the desire to do something good again in order to repeat it, etc. etc. Even with the *brahma* realms, the *rūpā* and the higher *arūpabrahmas* (the deep and very deep states of concentration), if someone finds satisfaction and delight in them they'll spin around too, they won't escape the *saṅsāravatṭa*.

Not having to spin at all, ending the spinning, attaining cessation, peace, quenching, is to be free of the *vatṭa*, to get out from it. Hence, the main *dhamma* practise is about escaping from the spinning, be it on the good or bad side of things. We aren't concerned with physical matters here, we're talking about the mind, because mind is the important part of the organism. The mind spinning around like this - and quite content to do so - represents the *saṅsāravatṭa* on the mental side of things.

For ease of understanding we can divide this matter into three stages, into three parts. Stage one concerns the defilements: *avijjā*, ignorance being in control, allows the defilements of greed, anger, and delusion to arise. This is the defilement stage. The *kilesa*, the defilements are the cause of action, of the performance of any kind of *kamma* in accordance with defiled desires, hence the second stage is about *kamma*, about performing deliberated activities, good or bad. We intentionally desire something and even though it's a desire to do something good it's going to be done in ignorance, so the defilements are involved in any ignorant activity, good or bad. When we perform *kamma* there'll be a result that will be either good or bad, *sukha* or *dukkha*, depending on the *kamma* and the defilement behind it - this result is the third stage. Having received the results of *kamma*, of our actions, it won't mean that the defilements will disappear, because they'll still be around, in fact they'll have increased in strength. Thus the defilements will remain for the performance of more actions and their subsequent results. The *vatṭa* spins around and around like this. But there's an important hidden matter that needs to be stressed - that this is all done in ignorance, done through the defilements which disturb the mind most of the time. It will be while the defilements are active, while performing *kamma* or receiving its results that there'll be the mental fatigue, the spiritual weariness that the unknowing are afflicted by almost continually. Getting something brings one kind of mental weariness, losing brings another kind. Take a look, see that in the *saṅsāravatṭa* it's a matter of putting up with suffering, with the suffering

that comes from experiencing the beautiful as well as the ugly, because the defilements have the power to make us cling to those things in one way or another, and because of all that clinging being promoted by the defilements, and with ignorance always leading the way, there must be suffering.

Thus the cycle divides into three parts, all of which are suffering. The first part, defilement, is suffering; the second part, *kamma*, is suffering; the third part, the result of *kamma*, where we cling and have to bear with the ‘mine,’ means yet more suffering, and then up come the defilements all over again. We can sum it up in three words: desire, action, result: desiring to act, performing the action, and receiving the result, and then more desire, more action, more results; more desire, more action, more results, and so on and so forth, all because of incessant clinging. Clinging to being the actor, to being the one who acts means carrying the ‘me’ around and experiencing suffering as a consequence. Clinging to the action as ‘mine’ is to dwell with the expectation and hunger of a *preta*, (a creature whose desires can never be satisfied,) not with mindfulness and wisdom but with unwise hope and expectation: we get the result, feel satisfied, and there’s weariness, while not getting a satisfactory result is even more suffering. All of this happens because of clinging.

Take an interest in the *saṅsāravatṭa* spinning in the mind, spinning within us, spinning with intensity, especially at the centre, at the deep central point of the cycle, because if we stray in and reach this point it’s going to be very difficult to get out again. Someone who can’t get out is ‘sunk’ in the *saṅsāravatṭa*, they’re said to be like a stake stuck in the *vatṭa*, they settle down and don’t feel any need to escape, unless, that is, they have the good fortune to feel sufficiently chastened by the experience so that it starts them thinking, then trying, struggling to rise up, to escape. In this way there’s the beginning of a new understanding, new knowledge arises, knowledge they’ve never had before: someone falls into the cycle and then chastened, sickened by the experience, feels the need to escape. Thus comes about a new beginning. If by good luck or by accident they meet with this knowledge then they’re able to maintain the mind, keep it out of the whirlpool.

Escaping from the *saṅsāravatṭa* is about the mind losing its ignorance, losing its ability to be infatuated, to spin around in desire, to act unnecessarily and to receive the results. The repetitious cycle of desire-action-result stops and we emerge, come out from the *vatṭa*. Once free the mind meets with *nibbāna* within itself, there being no need to go anywhere or to wait for another ten thousand years for this to happen, there’s just the arising of right understanding and there’s the immediate cessation of suffering, of *dukkha*. *Nibbāna* is like this. Attaining *nibbāna* means no more spinning around in the *saṅsāravatṭa*, no more foolish desire, foolish action, no more results to cling to as ‘mine’ so none of associated mental distress, instead there’s the ease of one who doesn’t have *dukkha*. Then, even though we seek for food, for work, or do anything at all, there won’t be the *kilesa* hovering behind those actions. When anyone is foolish they act with defilement, but we aren’t foolish so we act with mindfulness and wisdom. Know the way to escape the *saṅsāravatṭa*; it’s a matter of losing ignorance, a matter of correct knowledge, of right understanding arising bringing with it an healthy dislike of ignorance, of the defilements that cause *kamma* and torture the mind. Now we won’t think, won’t feel that there is a ‘me,’ and we won’t do anything selfishly. We now know that this life is nature, is of nature, that it operates according to nature, and that it isn’t

‘me,’ it isn’t ‘mine.’ If the mind gives rise to the ‘me’ and ‘mine’ that’s a foolish mind, a foolish mind that’s just been reborn.

A child in the womb doesn’t think about ‘me’ or ‘mine,’ it doesn’t desire, feel restless, anxious, and so on, it’s simply ignorant. When it’s born from it’s mother’s womb it receives contacts at the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and in the mind, so that when it meets with the delicious then, lacking any knowledge, it will feel liking and the desire to get more. This then normally continues and increases throughout life. *Avijjā*, ignorance arises first and gives birth to the defilements, *loba*, greed, *koda*, anger, and *moha*, delusion emerge. The mother of the defilements, of the *kilesa* is ignorance, *avijjā*, the *kilesa*, the defilements of *loba*, lust, *dosa*, hatred, aversion, and *moha*, delusion are the children she gives birth to. These *kilesa* influence us in such a way that, whenever we meet with, for instance, the delicious, we’ll fall into delighting in, and desiring it, we’ll pursue it.

Today, because many people, especially children, have come here for the first time, we want to tell a story, a story we’ve told before and can tell again: an ignorant child abandons it’s mother and father to run with criminals, with bandits, it goes to live under their power. The bandits make the child do whatever they want which causes it to suffer. It wants to be with the bandits but it also experiences unhappiness because of them. Sooner or later it might realise the truth of it’s situation, feel the need to escape from it and begin to seek for a way out, for a way to get rid of the bandits. Thus, because it has to live under their power, the child’s true duty becomes apparent to it.

We’re really the same, we grey-haired children have abandoned our parents to go and live with criminals, but back to the story: children run away from their parents (the *Dhamma*) to go and follow the bandits (the defilements), which indicates that before that happens they don’t have the defilements, they aren’t foolish yet so they continue to live with their parents (with the *Dhamma*, with *siladhamma*; the meaning is that they live properly, behave correctly, live a truly normal human life.) Subsequently, they experience the beautiful, the fragrant, the soft, the delicious and at some point they then discard the *Dhamma* (their parents) to follow after the bandits (the defilements come to dominate them), they experience delight and stimulation (they live with and under the power of the bandits), but they must experience suffering too. It’s the *vaṭṭa*. Fall under the power of bandits and we fall under the power of the defilements, because of that we’ll perform *kamma* and receive the results: *kilesa* - *kamma* - *vipāka* - *kilesa* - *kamma* - *vipāka*; we can sit and repeat this all day; just these three words: *kilesa*, defilement, *kamma*, action, *vipāka*, the results of action. We have defilement, we perform deliberated actions, *kamma*, and we get the result, and, by behaving in that way we encourage the defilements to increase, which has the result of making us perform more *kamma*, and so on and so forth. These children ditch their parents and run away to follow the bandits, to live with bandits, so they must suffer: because of acting in the way of the *vaṭṭa* they spin around in the cycle of suffering. Think about that, does it serve them right, or not? They discard their parents and run away to follow the bandits and then do as bandits wish, so they must experience suffering. Now, if they could think, because of the distress they experience, about changing their lifestyle, if they could feel desire to get out from under the power of the bandits, it would be the same as us wanting to escape from the *saṃsāra*, wanting to attain the freedom of *nibbāna*.

Remember this analogy. Straying into the *vaṭṭasaṃsāra* makes life hard to bear

with, so that at some later time there might be the desire to get out, and wanting to get out is like wanting to get away from the bandits and go back with our parents again. Those children abandoned their parents (who represent correctness) to follow the bandits (who represent incorrectness, defilement and foolish desire) and misbehave (seek the stimulating, the delightful), which brings distress, so that they begin to think fondly of their parents, think longingly about returning to them. Now, how do they achieve that when the bandits won't allow it, when they're strongly bound by them? The only thing they can do is to kill them. The *Dhamma* has the function of killing the defilements, by killing the defilements we come back to the *Dhamma*.

This story isn't meant to be taken literally of course, but it points out the fact that when we're born from our mother's womb we don't have anything, neither ignorance nor knowledge, we're neutral, as it were, normal, we're operating according to the *Dhamma*. But, subsequently, and still while we're children, we become infatuated with the delicious, with the beauty of the things we meet with, the mind is lulled into seeking the beautiful, the stimulating, into discarding order, correctness, and into assuming a low character, it becomes a thief, or whatever, and then follows the lead of the *kilesa* until it learns its lesson. If it doesn't learn then it continues to spin around in the cycle of wrongdoing, of *dukkha*.

Now we're, perhaps all of us, like this to some extent, that is, we're happy to pursue the beautiful, the stimulating, the delicious, instead of keeping to the correct as we should. If we must go wrong, if we can't avoid it, then we shouldn't let it go on for too long, and taking just a sample, a taste of that kind of life, then turning away from it would be good. Ditching the family to run with the bandits and eventually coming to the realization that they are bandits, then rushing to get away, to go back, can be excused, and doesn't have to be heavy *dukkha*. Otherwise one will probably be a bad lot until one dies.

Behold the *saṃsāravatṭa* spinning repeatedly; a cycle of wrongness, foolishness, infatuation, of defilement. We perform *kammic* acts under the power of the various defilements, receive the results of them, and yet we remain infatuated - and we'll stay that way until we begin to see the suffering involved. If anyone should start to see that then they should also begin to feel the desire to seek a way out, to seek safety; if they don't see, well, they can close their eyes and ears and continue to spin around in the *vatṭa*, because there'll be no way for them to escape. But if someone does begin to see that this *vatṭa* business is suffering, then they have a chance of escaping it.

Hence, we'd like everybody to study the *vatṭa* well. Take the evil side first: when we desire to get anything because of it's ability to stimulate us then it's the defilements making us do that, in this case making us do wrong, making us steal cheat, be corrupt, or whatever, and receive the fruits of that: an increase in the power of the defilements so that there's the desire to go on doing the same thing over and again. Now, the good side means doing good actions to get good results, but if we still have the defilements deceiving us into delighting in our goodness then we're in the same place. Either way there must be suffering.

Ignorant rich people have *dukkha* in proportion to their wealth, have the mental distress that comes from having a lot of cash. If, however, they happened to be really clever rich people they could learn to avoid clinging to their wealth, then they could live coolly and even sleep well. But it's not only the rich and famous who have this problem,

if someone has just a little and clings to it then there'll be suffering too. If there's no clinging there's no suffering, so a beggar has more chance of being at ease than someone with lots of money and possessions. A beggar who doesn't cling to his meagre wealth will be happier than some rich person with hundreds of millions who does. Here's another story, a Chinese story: a beggar dwells in the basement of a rich man's house. In the mornings he goes to beg and gets a little money, gets enough for his needs, so, at dusk he goes back home, whips out his Stradivarius violin and fiddles contentedly until he falls asleep. He does this kind of thing every day. One day, however, he comes home but he doesn't play his violin. The rich man up above, not hearing any fiddle-playing comes to ask him why he's not playing, and the beggar tells him that today he got much more money than usual and, because of that, can't sleep or bring himself to play his fiddle – he's acquired the *dukkha* of ownership.

It's a matter of clinging or not clinging. If we fall into clinging there must be *dukkha*, don't cling and there won't be. Therefore, don't cling to anything. According to the highest *dhamma* we shouldn't cling even to life itself! We shouldn't cling to life? If we talk this way people in this day and age won't believe it. They'll say that they're not that stupid and must cling to being alive, to their possessions, to their honour and repute, that they can't let go. But then, because they're full of defilement, they must suffer. If they don't cling, if they can 'let go,' then they'll be allowing everything to be natural, to be ordinary, to be *tathātā*, to be 'just like that,' so that, if they have to do anything they'll be able to just do it, if they have to get anything then they'll just go about getting it, if they have to eat, they'll just eat, and so on, they'll be able to do everything without clinging, that is, they'll act correctly, honourably - and then they'll find that they have more than enough of everything.

So don't cling, because when we do we get bitten immediately. Be it possessions, honour, fame, or whatever, when we cling to them as 'mine' they bite us immediately. Hence we need mindfulness and self awareness to control the defilements so that they don't govern our lives. Clinging to anything turns it into something heavy, as the Buddha taught: 'the five *khandhas*, the five aggregates are heavy loads,' they're 'heavy' because we cling to them; the five aggregates are the locus of clinging: clinging to the body as 'mine' is heavy, clinging to the mind as 'mine' is heavy. We'll cling to *vedanā*, to feeling, or *saññā*, perception, or the *sankhāra*, active thinking, or *viññāna*, consciousness, or whatever, it doesn't matter, we cling to them as being 'mine' and they become heavy, heavy in the way of mental things. It's this mental heaviness that's suffering.

So, we don't know and cling continually, cling repeatedly to the aggregates as 'me,' perform 'my' *kamma*, get 'my' results, encourage the defilements, cause the 'me' to arise more and more and spin around in the *vaṭṭa* more and more, ever moving towards the deep central vortex of the whirlpool. The more ignorant we are the more we're drawn into the whirlpool. Be well aware that once in we'll sink and sink until it becomes very difficult, even impossible to get out again, and that by the time we realize it will be too late, and there'll be heavy *dukkha* to deal with.

We should realise that the really dangerous *vaṭṭa* isn't in the middle of an ocean somewhere, it's in our minds - within every one of us. We can go and look at a whirlpool in the ocean and feel fear, but that's a small thing and it's in the world outside, the whirlpool in the mind is more frightening: defilement, the *kamma* it provokes, the results that follow, and the satisfaction we find in them - infatuation with this cycle of events,

with this mental whirlpool is a more frightening and a more difficult thing to escape from than anything spinning in the ocean.

Usually this problem arises through simple unawareness: a small child living with it's parents quite by chance meets with the bandits, and, feeling the lure of banditry, abandons it's family to follow them, that child really isn't aware, doesn't realise what's happening to it, if it did it wouldn't leave it's parents in the first place.

Now, we want to say something that might seem a little perverse, that is that parents like to bring those things capable of provoking delight and satisfaction to give to their children. They should be aware that in doing this they're luring their children into following the bandits, because lulling little children into becoming infatuated with the stimulating and delicious is what entices them into that path. Thus, through doing this, in a subtle sense, the parents themselves become the bandits.

Anyway, if we look more closely we can see that the *vaṭṭa*, or cycle can be either a spinning around in the defilements, or a spinning around in the mass of suffering, or, thirdly, a spinning around in the defilements and suffering combined. Spinning around in the defilement cycle means having the defilements repeatedly cause *kamma*, its results, and a further promotion of the defilements themselves: *kamma* - *vipāka* - *kilesa* - action - result - defilement, so that the defilements, *loba*, *koda*, and *moha* – greed, anger, and delusion are arising repeatedly. Now, when there's *loba*, greed, there's the heat of greed, when there's anger there's the heat of anger, when there's delusion there's the heat of delusion, and all are suffering, all are 'hot.' Take a look, discover the fires that scorch right here, scorch our heads, burn in our clothes, the fires that we still don't feel, don't know, the fires of greed, anger, and delusion that spin in the mind. Thus the cycle takes on a different form, becomes the cycle of greed-anger-delusion, greed-anger-delusion. Another cycle, a further result of this, is the spinning around in birth, ageing, sickness and death. This cycle is usually understood as being a physical matter, which understanding is then put forward as *the* understanding: birth then ageing; ageing then sickness; sickness then death; death then birth, and so on; being born from the mother's womb, dying and entering the coffin, then being born again in order to experience ageing, sickness and death again. That's a cycle too, a cycle repeating from physical life to life.

But we don't look at it in that way, and see it as a matter of a cycle within, a cycling around in the mind of the problems *associated* with birth, ageing, sickness and death. Thus right now, in this life is where the problems of birth, ageing, sickness and death blaze up and scorch us, in this life, even before we enter the coffin. We don't need to die first, life is like this now: spinning around in the suffering arising from the birth, ageing, sickness, and death that we foolishly cling to as 'mine.' In truth birth, ageing, sickness, and death are quite natural, but people tend to cling to them, steal them from nature, take possession of them, and experience disturbance, experience a lot of mental heat because they do: the body hasn't died yet, old age hasn't appeared yet, and there isn't any illness, but the fear of death, the fear of ageing, the fear of sickness can come and dominate life because of clinging. If we go into yet more detail: whenever there is one arising of 'me' and 'mine' into the mind there will be suffering, but the conditions for 'me' and 'mine' are of a nature to diminish, to decrease; conditions like old age, for instance, or disappointment, or pain come to an end, and then the 'me' and 'mine' quench with them, they 'die,' the thoughts of 'me' and 'mine' can be said to 'die,' but only to be 'born' again a moment or so later in conjunction with some other experience, then

there'll be another death, and then another arising, and so on: 'me' and 'mine' arise and then 'wear out,' they fade out, they arise and then die. This is a more detailed account of the matter, more detailed and more disturbing, because this business is very subtle, very quick, and troubles the mind all the more. 'Me' and 'mine' arise, undergo change - they wear away, which is one arising of suffering and its subsequent quenching. Then another matter comes along to be suffering and its quenching, then yet another matter comes along, and so on and so forth. There are so many ways for suffering to arise because the inner senses, the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or the mind are meeting with the various forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and mind objects all of the time, and any of those contacts can arouse clinging to 'me' and 'mine' and the resultant suffering. This can also be called birth, ageing, sickness, and death. But usually birth ageing, sickness, and death are thought of as being physical matters: birth from the mother's womb, followed by ageing, sickness, and death in the normal sense, and providing it all happens normally, as it should, there won't be any real problems involved. There's the problem of suffering when we take something to be 'mine,' for then birth is 'mine,' ageing is 'mine,' sickness is 'mine,' and death is 'mine.' Then we get bitten. Birth, ageing, sickness and death are nature, natural, they aren't 'mine.' Providing this is understood there won't be any suffering because there won't be any defilement to spin in the mind. We need to see the truth of this.

On this point the Buddha taught that if they would live with the *tathāgata* (the Buddha) as *kalyāṇamitta* (good friend) then those normally subject to birth, ageing, sickness, and death would escape them; those who ordinarily have to experience suffering would escape it. Because when anyone dwells with the Buddha as their *kalyāṇamitta* and follows his teaching they learn to avoid clinging to anything as 'mine,' and when there's no clinging there's no suffering either, hence they're said to have 'escaped.' On occasion he would also point out that if someone could live in the way of the ten *sammatta*, the ten 'rightnesses,' or 'correctnesses,' then that one would escape birth, ageing, sickness, and death too - from the time that anyone takes the Buddha as their *kalyāṇamitta* they come into contact with the ten *sammatta* and can develop them to get rid of their problems. The ten 'rightnesses' represent the noble eightfold path plus *sammāñāna*, right knowledge, and *sammāvimutti*, right liberation, take the path of eight stages, add right knowledge and right liberation, and there are the ten 'rightnesses.'

The Buddha talked about these two matters: dwelling with him as *kalyāṇamitta* in order to escape from birth, ageing, sickness, and death, and maintaining the ten correctnesses to achieve the same result. So, if someone fears the spinning around in birth, ageing, sickness, and death they should hurry up and take on the Buddha as their *kalyāṇamitta*, behave correctly according to the ten rightnesses, conduct themselves in line with the eightfold path plus two - the tenfold path - and thus get out from the cycle of birth and death, escape from the mass of suffering.

Anyway, to continue: first there's the spinning around in the defilements - *loba*, *dosa*, *moha* - *rāga*, *dosa*, *moha* - spinning around in the fires of defilement; second there's the spinning around in the mass of *dukkha*, of suffering, of birth, ageing, sickness, and death: because we lack proper knowledge we take possession of birth, etc. and thus have to bear with the subsequent suffering. The ancients had a good way of putting it, and they talked about two fires, the fire of the defilements and the fire of suffering. We know that spinning around in the fire of defilement constitutes one cycle of behaviour,

and spinning around in the fire of suffering another, but as they're inter-related there's also the spinning around in both cycles at the same time. Thus we cycle around in three ways: in the defilement cycle, in the suffering cycle, and in the interconnected cycles of defilement and suffering. This is the *saṃsāravatṭa* we ought to be aware of.

The fact that this is talked about as something that must be long lasting, must extend into tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of lives, and as being external, something operating outside of us, is of little use here and now - we suffer here and now, but our suffering can only be quenched after ten thousand, a hundred thousand lives have passed, now how can that be anything other than foolish? Think about it: there's suffering here and now but we have to wait for another ten thousand, another hundred thousand lives to pass before it can end. That must be a hundred times, a thousand times foolish. We need to see suffering in our minds here and now and be able to quench or prevent it, then we can call ourselves Buddhists, disciples of the Buddha. So don't bother with external matters that are said to happen after death in ten, or a hundred thousand years, we say that's wrong, we disagree with it, we oppose it, because it's useless trying to study and practise that - it's laughable. If we think like that we're defeated, lost in suffering. Looked at in one way we can conquer suffering here and now; looked at in another then it's going to be necessary to wait for ten thousand, a hundred thousand lives to pass before it can happen, which isn't much use to us right now, has little or no value, and doesn't come from the Buddha. To have come from a Buddha it must have come from a base of knowledge, from one awakened to realities, from one able to really solve the suffering problem so that we can stop following the bandits all the time.

So, children, or whatever age we may be, take care, avoid running after the bandits, because anything tempting, anything pretty, delicious, anything that's fun, that's stimulating is the bait that lures us into discarding our parents and following them, and if we continue to do that we'll just be overwhelmed and surely get no real benefit from the experience.

The defilements combine together as ignorance to prevent us from experiencing the truth of anything; they add up to the blindness that keeps us ignorant of the mass of suffering so that we immerse ourselves in it, so that we keep on chasing after the bandits. We don't know the defilements as suffering; we don't know the mass of suffering as it really is - as suffering. The defilements make us happy to go on desiring, keep us satisfied with suffering. The defilements conceal the true nature of life and don't allow us to see it as it really is, as 'just like that,' hence we take it to be a good and bad experience. We're foolish, seeking foolishly after things that must change and transform and bringing them to be 'mine.' Think about it. We're lost for words, we could call it ignorant but that would be too mild, it's supreme ignorance to take the enemy to be a friend, to be 'mine.' But that's the *vaṭṭasaṃsāra*, the home of ignorance, where the defilements cause us to see suffering as something enjoyable.

Get to know the fire inside, the fire that burns in the mind and presents a major problem. If there was a fire burning outside somewhere what would that matter, but if it were to burn on our heads, or in our clothes, what would we say to that? Think about it! If a wood fire, or a grass fire burns nearby it isn't a problem, but if a fire burns in our heads how should we react to that? We need to understand this kind of fire because we need to be able to put it out; if we don't understand it we'll continually chase after it, we'll follow the defilements and go on increasing our ignorance at the same time.

Thus this not so well understood matter of the *saṁsāravatṭa* can be looked at in different ways. Some say that it's an after-death affair, that for another ten thousand, hundred thousand years, another ten thousand, hundred thousand lives there'll be the *saṁsāravatṭa*, and that once we're free from it we can go and live in a city, a city called *nibbāna*, there to dwell forever and ever. If this interpretation were to be correct it would be good, but we're afraid it's not.

Now, can we make use of this *saṁsāravatṭa* so that it's beneficial - the negative form of the *vaṭṭasaṁsāra* we've been considering, can it be turned to our benefit? This is an aspect of the matter that we've been a little critical of because it hasn't been given the right sort of attention, but, the fact is, that, if we take a good look at the *vaṭṭasaṁsāra*, at the mass of suffering we're going to meet with *nibbāna*. But to do that we'll have to be sharp, be bright and quick, then perhaps we'll perceive the absence of suffering within suffering itself, the absence of the *vaṭṭa*, the cycle, within the cycle itself. We'll discern absence in presence, the 'is not' in the 'is.' If we can examine any 'thing' really closely then we'll find that the 'no-thing' is there too; take out the 'there is' and the 'there isn't' remains - if there isn't a 'there is' then there isn't going to be a 'there isn't' either, therefore, there must be a 'there is' for there to be a 'there isn't' underneath it. (Hmmm!) Or, putting it another way: if one would put out a fire then it would have to be done at the fire itself, because to attempt to put out a fire anywhere else would be rather more than insane. The extinguishing of the fire thus exists within the fire itself. So a sensible individual can see beforehand that the putting out of a fire must happen at the place where the fire is. Ergo: if we would quench suffering it must happen at suffering; if not then how could suffering ever be quenched? There must be suffering for the quenching of suffering - *nibbāna* - to happen. *Nibbāna* is the quenching of *dukkha*. We say that *nibbāna* is to be found in the *vaṭṭasaṁsāra* - quench the *vaṭṭasaṁsāra* and that is *nibbāna*. So look closely at the *vaṭṭasaṁsāra*, at the mass of *dukkha* spinning around, the suffering that spins and spins, look closely, go deeply into it and see that if the suffering is gone what remains? When there's no *dukkha*, no *saṁsāravatṭa*, that's *nibbāna*. When we said that *nibbāna* is to be found in the *vaṭṭasaṁsāra* there was some criticism because no one had said it before, or had said it in such a way that was difficult to understand. But, notwithstanding the criticism, we'll say it again: the quenching of suffering is in the suffering itself, just as the extinguishing of a fire is to be found in the fire itself - *nibbāna* is to be found in *dukkha*, in the spinning cycles of the *vaṭṭasaṁsāra*.

Now, some time ago, in Suan Mokkh an effort was made, some trouble was taken, some gasoline was invested in, and a month was used to create the 'coconut pond' - a pond with a coconut tree on a small island in the middle of it. A big tractor came and dug the earth and in about one month there was this pond, which represented a big investment for just a little benefit, that is, it allowed people to come and see that in the *saṁsāravatṭa* there is *nibbāna*. The water in the pond (which the ancients would have referred to as a 'sea of wax') represents the *vaṭṭasaṁsāra*; the island with the coconut tree is in the middle of the pond, in the midst of the 'sea of wax' to illustrate the point that in the *vaṭṭasaṁsāra* there is *nibbāna*. We must be ready to see this properly then it will be 'seeing truth,' seeing the truth of *dukkha*, suffering, it's arising, or cause, it's end, or quenching, and the way of practise leading to its quenching. One can sit and contemplate the coconut tree on the island in the middle of the pond until it's realized how the two dwell together - the extinguishing of the fire is to be found in the fire, the quenching of *dukkha* in the mass of

dukkha, and *nibbāna* in the *vaṭṭasaṅsāra*.

The method of practise is to allow the *vaṭṭasaṅsāra* to arise, let the *vaṭṭasaṅsāra*, the cycle of suffering appear in the mind and watch it, just watch, observe, then wait, and one will, sooner or later (probably later), meet with a reaction as boredom, disenchantment, disgust, dislike arises. There in the *vaṭṭasaṅsāra*, in the suffering, observe, just observe, and then – dislike, disenchantment, boredom with the things we’ve always been stimulated by might arise. If anyone experiences this kind of reaction then they’re safe; they know disenchantment, know *nibbidā* in the spinning of the *saṅsāravatṭa* itself. When anyone has *nibbidā*, disenchantment arise into the mind then infatuation, clinging abates, which is called *virāga*, ‘fading away.’ Because of experiencing disenchantment there is the subsiding of delusion, of clinging, and the mind withdraws, which is called *vimutti*, it’s then purer than formerly, which is *visuddhi*, and is more peaceful, which is known as *santi*, and, when it’s completely released from the *vaṭṭasaṅsāra* it’s *nibbāna*.

Thus, there is the living metaphor of the coconut pond. Anyone can go and sit there, go and contemplate the ‘sea of wax’ (the water in the pond) which represents the mind oscillating between good and bad, happiness and suffering, gain and loss, victory and defeat, etc. These opposites they call the *vaṭṭasaṅsāra*, or the ‘sea of wax.’ The ancients were very wise when comparing the *vaṭṭasaṅsāra* to wax, because wax when hot is fluid, when cold it’s solid, so it can be deceptive: good and bad, happiness and suffering are deceptive in much the same way, they deceive a person into falling for them and then they bite: good and bad, merit and demerit, one falls for them and they bite. Thus the *vaṭṭa* is referred to as ‘wax,’ and because it’s vast it’s referred to as a ‘sea’ of wax, the ‘sea’ of merit and demerit, good and bad, happiness and suffering, gain and loss, victory and defeat - so many, many pairs and all equally deceptive. This pond is the ‘sea’ of deception, the *vaṭṭa*, and the coconut tree is *nibbāna*, dwelling there in the middle of the sea, undisturbed, unmoved. Only someone able to escape, able to dwell above the *vaṭṭasaṅsāra*, above the sea of wax, able to remain untouched by merit and demerit, good and bad, happiness and suffering, and so on, only that one can reach *nibbāna*. Anyone still intoxicated by merit and demerit, by good and bad, by getting this and that, by the meritorious, by the skilful, by ‘me’ and ‘mine’ is stuck fast in the sea of wax; it’s only when someone escapes, particularly from the clutches of the ‘good,’ that they come into contact with the coconut tree, that one attains *nibbāna*.

Why isn’t it said ‘escapes from good and evil?’ The ‘good’ is mentioned because it’s difficult to escape from, the ‘bad’ being a much easier proposition. If we can escape from the power of the good we must be able to escape from the bad simply because the bad is more obvious, more frightening, and bites us more savagely, while the good bites us in a comfortable way, as when one is being massaged, for instance. The ‘good’ is deceptive in this way. Therefore it’s said that if anyone can escape from the good they can also escape from the bad, and then, dwelling in the midst of the sea of wax the rain fall won’t touch them and the thunder won’t reach them – they won’t be troubled - dwelling in the midst of the sea of wax they become those who cross over, who escape from the power of good and bad once and for all.

Still nobody makes the effort to attain, to get the benefit from this, and when we call them foolish they get angry, but if we can’t call them foolish what can we call them? People should get the benefit from, should make use of this, but they don’t.

Anyway, in the midst of the sea of wax, of the pond one will find a coconut tree; in the *vaṭṭasaṇsāra* one will find *nibbāna*. So, contemplate the *vaṭṭasaṇsāra*, wait, and *nibbidā*, dispassion will arise, from *nibbidā* will come *virāga*, the fading away of desire, little by little until it's complete, and one escapes. We'll discover the solution to any problem in the problem itself: we scrutinize the problem to understand it and then we can find the solution. If we don't look at the problem itself then we won't find the way to solve it. Only a fool would go and look somewhere else. If we're intelligent we'll examine the problem itself, find a method, and then we can solve it. So we must look for the way to quench suffering, for the conditions for the quenching of *dukkha* in *dukkha* itself. But nobody talks like this, and if they do then there's criticism, criticism. We think that this way is easier, shorter, quicker, and more beneficial, so we say: look for the escape from the *vaṭṭasaṇsāra* within the *vaṭṭasaṇsāra*, see how it arises, how it binds, envelops us. because when we understand all of this we'll also know how to escape from it.