
 COMMENTS ON THE ANURUDDHA SUTTA*

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The question might well arise as to whether these visitations, such as that of Jālinī, of devas in general and, in other instances, those of Māra, should be regarded literally. Or are they merely symbolic, literary, poetic or teaching devices? It is difficult for us living in another age and another culture to appreciate the thought-processes of those persons living two and a half millennia ago. It is probable that they did not have the sharp distinctions we have between the symbolic and the actual, between subjective and objective experience. It is likely that these distinctions did not apply and the two tended to coalesce. Another problem is that what is being described is the experience of an arahant whose thought-processes are beyond the range of unenlightened beings even in their own culture.

It seems possible that this visitation is the objectifying of memories of past habitual thought-processes. An anterior dialogue concerning the pleasures the arahant once knew, the desires he once entertained, egotism, pride, worldly delusions and so forth. These are recognised by mindfulness, but have no power now to take hold of his mind. Māra is recognised and defeated by

**Editor's Note.* Owing to a technical mishap, most of the author's Comments were mislaid and so inadvertently not published in the last issue of BSR. We wish to express our profound apologies to Mr Ireland for the distress and inconvenience this may have caused him, and now publish the entire Comments from the beginning. The verses to which they refer can be found in BSR 12, No. 2, pp. 107-8. Please note that in n.3 (p.107), 'thirty-three companies of Sakka' should read: 'thirty-three companions . . .'

Frontispiece: the calligraphy in Sino-Vietnamese characters (Nôm) by Ven Thích Huyền-Vi reads:

*"Therefore, know
Transcendent Wisdom
as the Great Holy Mantra,
the Mantra of Great Knowledge."*

The seals, engraved by Ven. Bhikkhu Dhamma-
viro of Thailand, convey the same meaning as
the calligraphy.

just this fact of recognition. Jālinī seems to be the personification of former sensual desires (*kāmacchanda*) held by Anuruddha and the memory of the enjoyment once derived from them. It is no coincidence that Jālinī means 'The Ensnarer', 'The Bewitcher'¹¹. Most men would recognise her, the personification of youthful sexual fantasies, perhaps we are even now still ensnared by her. But for Anuruddha, through his experience of the Deathless, his insight into impermanence and his overcoming of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, the self-embodiment view, such pleasures afforded by sensual delights no longer have a hold over him. In the Māgandhiya Sutta (M 75) the Buddha uses a powerful (and shocking) simile, comparing such pleasures to that of a leper deriving relief by scorching his sores with burning embers. It is this vision of the Deathless, the ultimate goal of Nibbāna, that provides the ariyan disciple with an alternative to the pleasures afforded by sensuality that enables him to reject them decisively. An alternative powerful enough evidently to warrant such a simile. Those who have not had this experience are 'fixed in individuality' (*sakkāyasmim patiṭṭhitā*), the idea of the continuity and permanence of 'self' associated with any of the five aggregates of grasping and the spheres of the senses (*āyatana*). The contrast between the outlook of the *ariya*, the Buddhas and their disciples who are free from this fixation and the ordinary person, the *puthujjana*, is set forth in the Dvayānupassanā Sutta (Sn vv.756f.):

'See how the world with the devas has self-conceit for what is not-self. Enclosed by mind-and-body (*nāmarūpa*) it

11 Confirmation perhaps that *jālinī* is the personification of desire is the occurrence of the word in Thag v.162, where it is not used as a personal name, but in the abstract as a synonym for craving. See also DhP v.180: 'For whom there is no *ensnaring*, entangling craving . . .'

imagines: "This is real!" Whatever they imagine it to be, it is quite other than that. It is unreal, of a false nature and perishable. Nibbāna, not false in nature, that the *ariya* know as true . . . Forms, sounds, tastes, scents, bodily contacts and ideas which are agreeable, pleasant and charming, all these, while they last, are deemed to be happiness by the world with the devas. But when they cease, that is agreed by all to be painful. By the *ariya* the cessation of *sakkāya* is seen as happiness. This is the reverse of the outlook of the entire world!

It appears it is a thoroughgoing insight into the impermanence of conditioned existence that destroys the belief in *sakkāya*. 'What is impermanent, that is suffering; what is suffering, that is not-self'. So that heavenly bliss is, after all, suffering!

That the delights of heaven could have no attraction for one striving for enlightenment and seeing impermanence is illustrated by a story found in the Saṃyutta Commentary¹². It seems a certain bhikkhu striving for insight died suddenly whilst leaning against a vihāra gate-post. He was then reborn as a deva in the Tāvātimsa heaven leaning against a door-post there. Being approached and greeted as their lord by a host of lovely celestial nymphs, he gave vent to his disappointment in a verse recorded in the Devatā Saṃyutta (S I 5.6) which, without this story, would be incomprehensible. In the verse he compared the nymphs to a host of demons (*pisāca*), renaming the *Nandana* ('Delightful') Grove the *Mohana*, the 'Delusive', and declaring that a life indulging in sensual enjoyments there would be insufferable for him.

The verse beginning, 'Impermanent are all conditioned things . . .' is repeated several times in the first vagga of the Saṃyutta

12 Sarathāppakāsini I, p.85f.

alone and is spoken to or by devas of the Tāvātimsa heaven. It is apparently the special Dhamma-teaching of the Buddha for that deva-world. Sakka the devarāja repeats it again on the occasion of the Buddha's passing away or *parinibbāna*. Sakka is said to be an *ariya-sāvaka* and a *sotāpanna* and has thus evidently rid himself of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* and taken its message to heart. This verse is also elsewhere the response to the lines repeated by Jālinī: 'They know no bliss . . .'. These appear to be a quotation expressing a popular view current, presumably, among those who would aspire to be born after death in that heaven world.

If it were merely a matter of contrasting two kinds of bliss or happiness, that of indulgence in our desires and the bliss of Nibbāna, for those who have not experienced the latter there is little incentive to be rid of the former. As it is usually conceived heaven is the reward for good and blameless deeds performed here in the human world. The popular idea is that after enjoying such heavenly bliss for a vast period of time, a being could return to this world and presumably repeat the process indefinitely¹³. With such a view there seems little point in pursuing with any urgency the path leading to Nibbāna for the cessation of suffering. The attitude of Anuruddha and that unnamed bhikkhu would seem almost eccentric, were it not for another aspect of the holding of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* that has a more sinister implication. Contrary to the popular view, Anuruddha states that those beings holding *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* are *duggatā*, are destined for rebirth in misery, in the lower realms of existence, the *apāya*: the hells, animal birth and realm of the hungry ghosts (*petā-visaya*). Furthermore, this is not just a remote possibility due to some evil deed performed in the past, but is the direct and inevitable con-

13 See, for example, the view expressed by the devas in Itivuttaka, sutta 83.

sequence of holding *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* itself. In the Pañcagati Sutta (S LVI 11.10) the Buddha compares the little dust taken up on the tip of his fingernail with the great earth. Even so, ' . . . few are those beings deceasing as devas who are born again as devas or men, most are born again in hell (*niraya*)'. In other places these lower realms are portrayed as containing the vast majority of living beings, as the great oceans of the world are teeming with creatures. Again, as there is no opportunity there for performing meritorious deeds, so there is practically no way of escaping from these realms once a being has been born there. The simile is given that to escape from the *apāya* is as difficult as a turtle coming to the surface of the ocean once in an hundred years and putting its head through the hole in a yoke drifting on that ocean¹⁴. No wonder then that the blissful enjoyments of the heavens are held by the *ariya-sāvaka* in such abhorrence and regarded as miserable in themselves because of this terrible danger. In contrast to this, for a person who knows no happiness other than sensuality as the escape from suffering, the bliss of Nibbāna would appear fearful and ego-threatening, hence misery or *dukkha*, for that person. Thus, the quotation from the Sutta Nipāta cited earlier continues, 'What others call happiness, that the *ariya* declare to be misery; and what others call misery, that the *ariya* have found to be happiness . . . Herein those without insight have completely gone astray'.

Anuruddha, being an arahant, has finished completely with any kind of future birth. There is not even the remotest possibility that he could imagine aspiring to return to a deva-realm and find enjoyment there. Such an idea would be absurd and quite abhorrent to him.

14 M 129, S V, pp.455-6.