

THE TEN FETTERS

We are used to hear of THE FIVE FETTERS [panca nivaranna.] However, it would give us a wider understanding of the fetters obstructing our progress in attaining higher states of awareness when we discuss the TEN FETTERS [Dasa Sanyojanaa]. What is important is not the number of fetters but their contents. Therefore, it is better to display what was discovered, mostly, as it appeared in a discussion. (Acknowledged with gratitude.)

The following is a brief exploration of the Ten Fetters

1. Sakkaya-ditthi is translated as "personality belief". This is the belief that we are solid beings, which leads to the illusion of a separate self, egoism, or individuality. This is major obstacle to spiritual progress. Not only are we attached to the idea of self, we even glorify it. Conceit, arrogance pride, self-abasement. Attachment to idea of is fundamental to all problems; we defend the idea of 'I', we seek to cherish 'I', make a fuss of it. It is difficult to be entirely free from idea of self (Anatta) but at least do not take the five aggregates as self.

2. Vicikiccha means "skeptical doubt." In particular, doubt about (a) the Buddha, (b) the Dhamma, (c) the Sangha, (d) the disciplinary rules, (e) the past (for example, "What have I been in the past?"), (f) the future (for example, "What shall I be in the future?"), (g) both the past and the future (for example, "From what state to what state shall I change in the future?", "Who am I?"

"What am I?", "How am I?", etc.), (h) the doctrine of dependent origination). The Buddha said that this kind of doubt is like being lost in a desert without a map.

3. Silabbataparamasa means "adherence to wrongful rites, rituals and ceremonies"... the mistaken belief that purification can be achieved simply by their performance. Examples are the extreme ascetic practices condemned by the Buddha. Also at that time, the Brahmins had developed very complicated rituals which only they could carry out and which meant that the rest of the population had to ask the Brahmins for perform all the religious ceremonies on their behalf. "Oneself is one's own master. Who else can be the master?" (Dhp. v. 160). The Buddha said that neither the repetition of holy scriptures, nor self-torture, nor sleeping on the ground, nor the repetition of prayers, penances, hymns, charms, mantras, incantations and invocations can bring us the real happiness of Nirvana. Instead the Buddha emphasized the importance of making individual effort in order to achieve our spiritual goals. He likened it to a man wanting to cross a river; sitting down and praying will not suffice, but he must make the effort to build a raft or a bridge. The Buddha was talking to one of his prominent lay-disciples, called Anathapindika and said, "There are, O householder, five desirable, pleasant and agreeable things which are rare in the world. What are those five? They are, long life, beauty, happiness, fame and (Rebirth in) the heavens. But of these five things, O householder, I do not teach that they are to be obtained by prayer or by vows. If one could obtain them by prayer or vows, who would not do it?

"For a noble disciple who wishes to have long life, it is not befitting that he should pray for long life or take delight in so doing. He should rather follow a path of life that is conducive to longevity." (Anguttara Nikaya V, 43)

He goes on to recommend the same course of action in respect of the other four desirable things.

4. Kama-raga means "sensual desire." This is one of the roots of Tanha which is at the heart of all our problems with Dukkha.. After we experience Dukkha we latch onto something. But what we latch on to has nothing to do with the Dukkha. What comes up is called in Sanskrit- Samudaya.

Desire, as Tanha, is considered one of the "Daughters of Mara," one of three tempters sent by Mara, The Personification of Evil, to entice the future Buddha into abandoning his quest for Enlightenment. also considered as one of The Three Poisons.

5. Patigha. The literal meaning of this term is "to hit against", but it is often translated into English as "ill-will or hatred". This is the cause of conflict both on an individual basis, and between nations as well. As Arati, [aversion], another of the "Three Daughters of Mara." Hatred is one of The Three Poisons as well.

6. Rupa-raga is "attachment to the form realms." That is still binding ourselves to Samsara. As lust, Raga is also considered one of the "Three Daughters of Mara."

7. Arupa-raga is "attachment to the formless realms."

8. Mana literally this means "measuring" and is often translated as "conceit, arrogance, self-assertion or pride", but measuring is a better term because it means all forms of evaluation. Feeling oneself to be superior to others (the superiority complex) is indeed a form a conceit. But mana also includes measuring in the sense of judging oneself to be inferior to others (the inferiority complex) and also equal to others. Even in spiritual matters, e.g. how many do you observe precepts? how long do you sit for meditation? Certainly we are all different, but it is not helpful to engage in comparisons between oneself and others.

9. Uddhacca means "restlessness." It is the confused, distracted, restless state of mind, in which there is no tranquillity or peace. It has been defined as, "the excitement of mind which is disturbance, agitation of the heart, turmoil of mind." (Dhammasangani 429). It is the opposite of one-pointedness.

10. Avijja is translated as "ignorance", but this is ignorance in a special sense. It does not mean ignorance as it is used in the everyday sense, but it means specifically ignorance of the Four Noble Truths and the delusion which prevents us from seeing the real nature of impermanence and Dukkha. Last of The Three Poisons.

The first five Fetters are known as Lower Fetters (orambhagiya-samyojana) because they bind us to the sensuous world.

The second five Fetters are known as Higher Fetters (uddhambhagiya-samyojana) because they bind us to the rupa and arupa worlds

These Fetters can be eradicated in four stages, what we call The Four Stages of Sainthood. When a Fetter has been eradicated, this is permanent, it does not come back again. One who has eradicated the first three Fetters is a Sotapanna-[Stream Enterer]. He has had a glimpse of Nirvana, like someone walking in the foothills of a mountain has a glimpse of the top of the mountain through the clouds. He has entered the stream that leads to Nirvana. He has complete confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, and perfect moral conduct.

The next stage of sainthood is a Sakadagami [Once Returner], which is marked by the reduction of the next two Fetters. They are not yet eradicated, but are suppressed. When these two Fetters are completely eradicated, then the third stage has been reached. This is a Anāgāmi [NonReturner].

The last stage is the Arahant and is marked by the eradication of the last five Fetters. This state is not restricted by age, sex or social status. It is open to lay people as well as ordained monks. The Arahant will continue to live for his body's natural span, but he has eradicated all craving which binds ordinary people to the process of rebirth. Remember:

The Arahant creates no new Karma; he has gone beyond both good and evil, but he must still live with the Karmic effects of his previous actions.

But when the life in the body eventually passes away the Arahant has to die just like anyone else. One can summarise this state by saying that it is freedom of suffering, it is the destruction or Death of the Ego and the eradication of greed, hatred and delusion.

In the Ratana Sutta it says: "Their past is dead, the new no more arises, Mind to future becoming is unattached, The germ has died. They have no more desire for growth. Those wise (and steadfast ones) go out as did this lamp." (Sutta Nipata, 14)

To summarize: Although Nirvana may be defined as the end of craving, it is NOT a conditioned state, it is not the result of anything. The direct nature of the Buddha's teaching is focused solely on the cessation of dukkha. The eradication of the Ten Fetters leads through The Four Stages of Sainthood to the ultimate goal of all Buddhist practice, which is the realization of Nirvana and thus then, Sunyata.

