

6

(Duka) Saññojana Sutta

The (Twos) Discourse on the Fetters | A 2.6 = A 2.1.1.6

Theme: What holds us to suffering; what frees us from suffering

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6.1 WHAT ARE “FETTERS”?

6.1.1 Mental fetters (*saṃyojana*)

6.1.1.1 The (Duka) Saññojana Sutta (A 2.6) deals with mental “fetters” (*saññojana*, also spelt *saṃyojana*), a word analysed as *saṃ-* (a prefix suggesting coming together, similar to English co-, com- or con-) + √YUJ, meaning “to yoke (together).” Hence, *saññojana* or *saṃyojana* means “joining together,” that is, a bond, shackle, fetter, like the ball-and-chain fastened to prisoners in pre-modern times to prevent them from moving freely or escaping. **Fetters**, then, are mental bonds that bind us to our objects of desire, and prevent us from living a truly free life of wisdom and compassion.

6.1.1.2 The suttas often mention **the 10 fetters** (*dasa saṃyojana*), the first 3 of which are the most significant for us as unawakened beings. These are the fetters that we must urgently work to overcome even here and now. We have already briefly discussed the 3 fetters in the notes of **the (Duka) Upaṇṇāta Sutta** (A 2.5).¹ When we break these 3 fetters, we attain streamwinning, that is, the first stage of awakening, our very first real step on the noble eightfold path to awakening. Here, we will examine the remaining 7 fetters.

6.1.2 Levels of awakening

The Buddhist saints are known as **the 4 noble individuals** (*ariya, puggala*).² Their respective attainments are best understood in terms of the 10 mental fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*), which are listed as follows:

(1) <u>self-identity view</u>	<i>sakkāya, ditṭhi</i>	}	The 3 fetters: streamwinner +3 roots ³ weakened: once-returner
(2) <u>spiritual doubt</u>	<i>vicikicchā</i>		
(3) <u>attachment to rituals and vows</u>	<i>sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa</i>		
(4) sensual lust	<i>kāma, rāga</i>	}	The 5 lower fetters: non-returner
(5) repulsion	<i>paṭigha⁴</i>		
(6) greed for form existence	<i>rūpa, rāga</i>		
(7) greed for formless existence	<i>arūpa, rāga</i>	}	The 5 higher fetters: arhat
(8) conceit	<i>māna</i>		
(9) restlessness	<i>uddhacca</i>		
(10) ignorance	<i>avijjā</i>		

Table 6.1.2 The 10 fetters and sainthood [SD 49.14 Table 2]

¹ **(Duka) Upaṇṇāta S** (A 2.5), SD 51.5 (5.2.4).

² Technically, in the stock passage on the reflection on the sangha (*saṅghānussati*), they are called “the 4 pairs of persons, the 8 individuals” (*cattāri purisa, yugāni aṭṭha, purisa, puggala*): SD 15.10a (4).

³ “3 roots” = the 3 unwholesome roots (*akusala mūla*): greed, hate and delusion.

⁴ In some places, *paṭigha* is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*).

6.1.2.1 We have already discussed the first 3 fetters [6.1.1.2]. We will now proceed with discussing **the 5 lower fetters** (*uddham, bhāgiya saṃyojana*), which comprise the first 3 fetters and two more: those of (4) sensual lust (*kāma-c, chanda*), and its opposite, (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*) [Table 6.1.2]. While the first 3 fetters deal with purely mental states, related to the wrong views and their resulting practices, (4) and (5) are the key fetters here, both of which deal with the mind's processing of external sense-data.

In simple terms, **sensual lust** is the over-reliance and attachment to sense-experiences, that is, being caught up with the bodily activities of sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches. All our thoughts are directed to running after what we here deem as being pleasant or profitable and rejecting—showing **repulsion** to—what are deemed as unpleasant or unprofitable. The reality is that we are caught up with the thoughts or memories of past experiences.

Hence, we are living in the past, and fettered by such a reactivity even towards the future. We hope for pleasant experiences and profitable things to come, and hoping that we would not have any unpleasant or unprofitable encounters. In doing so, we habitually lose touch of the realities and truths of the present moment, and hence we are never really in control of ourselves. Our senses—the 5 physical senses and our thoughts—shape and direct us like a puppet on strings.

When we break all these 5 fetters, we become non-returners.⁵ Since we are free from all sense-based desires and their unwholesome opposites, we are no more attached to the world. Neither pleasure nor wealth nor power attract us. When we die, we are reborn in one of the realms of the pure abodes (*suddh'āvāsa*), from which we will neither return to this world nor be reborn in any other, but pass away as arhats.⁶

6.1.2.2 When the non-returned—who has broken the first 5 fetters—breaks the remaining fetter, that is, **the 5 higher fetters** (*oram, bhāgiya saṃyojana*) [6.1.1.2], he becomes an arhat. This is the final stage of the path; there is nothing more to be done spiritually beyond this, because, in terms of awakening and liberation, it is no different from the Buddha's awakening.⁷

Later forms of Buddhism contradicted the historical Buddha's teaching by claiming that the arhat still has to progress to attain “full awakening,” and that even the Buddha can postpone his entry into nirvana. These wrong views should be categorically rejected since they have no basis whatsoever in the teachings of the historical Buddha, and also to avoid the creation of some serious bad karma.⁸

6.2 THE SUTTA TEACHINGS

6.2.1 “THE CONTEMPLATION OF GRATIFICATION IN STATES THAT FETTER” [§§2-3]

6.2.1.1 The Commentary explains “**states that fetter**” (*saṃyojaniyesu dhammesu*) as “the nature of the 3 worlds (sense-world, form world, formless world) that is the conditioning states of the 10 fetters.”⁹ The world here is not physical world of space and time (*okāsa, loka*): it is only an empty stage for our cosmic drama. Nor is it the actors, the people or beings (*satta, loka*), that populate the stage: they merely go through the motions according to their script and as instructed by the stage director.¹⁰

⁵ See SD 10.16 (1.6.7); also SD 40a.1 (15.4.4) n; SD 49.14 Table 2.

⁶ On the pure abodes (*suddh'āvāsa*), see SD 10.16 (1.3.3).

⁷ On the 5 higher fetters (*oram, bhāgiya saṃyojana*), see SD 10.16 (1.6.8).

⁸ See esp **Sambuddha S** (S 22.58), SD 49.10.

⁹ *Saṃyojanīyesu dhammesūti dasannaṃ saṃyojanānaṃ paccaya, bhūtesu te, bhūmaka, dhammesu* (AA 2:96).

¹⁰ On the 3 worlds (*loka*), see SD 15.7 (3.5 (2)).

6.2.1.2 The real world that fetters us to itself, sucking us, absorbing us into its virtual reality are the formations (*saṅkhāra,loka*), is the idea of pretence, imagination, make-believe and emotions that motivate and captivate the actors and the audience—what are actors without their audience? We need audience and its approval—the applause, the roar, the accolades—which gratify the actors and authenticate their existence.

We are fettered because we have created (*saṅkhāroti*) all this; we act (*abhisāṅkharoti*) according to our creations—like the Almighty Creator-Gods of the theistic ideologies and mythologies, who ultimately exists only in the realities they have created for themselves. We have no choice but to create and react to our creations. Even Almighty God must feel some responsibility for his creation—but to do so, must exist in time and be subject to time, too.

6.2.2 “THE CONTEMPLATION OF REVULSION IN STATES THAT FETTER” [§§3-4]

6.2.2.1 For God and the gods to exist, they must be subject to space and time. Only when they are fettered by space, subjected to time, can they create worlds and their inhabitants, and demand or expect the adoration and attention of their creatures. God and the gods die when their creatures stop worshipping them, or do so in the wrong way—as they are prone to because they have their own minds that works their own wiles and ways.

God and the gods—in all their mythologies in history, the world over—in due course feel **revulsion** (*nibbidā*) for their own creatures and creation. Then, they try to destroy, or at least punish them, since they have failed them. Why else do they create suffering and hells for these creatures? Yet, such stories still shape and shadow our societies and people, keeping them in as a tribe and keeping them out if they fail these God or gods. These are the greater fetters that shackle the tribes of the world.

6.2.2.2 Only when we understand the nature of God ideologies and the god mythologies are we no more creatures of our own creations—the proverbial uroboros, the snake trying to devour its own tail.¹¹ The stories are all mind-made; the sufferings are all self-made. When we realize this, we must only feel a **revulsion** towards how we can delude ourselves and others for millennia. Once we are wisely revulsed at our own delusions and errors, we break our mental fetters; we are finally free in the full spiritual sense.¹²

6.2.3 Related suttas (1)

6.2.3.0 These Suttas related to the (Duka) Saṃyojana Sutta by way of showing the dependent arising and the dependent ending of suffering. They help us understand it better, as they all share the same theme of mental fetters (*saṃyojana*).

(Dukkha) Saṃyojana Sutta 1	S 12.53/2:86	parable of the oil-lamp	SD 105.3
(Dukkha) Saṃyojana Sutta 2	S 12.54/2:87	parable of the oil-lamp	SD 105.4
Mahā Rukkha Sutta 1	S 12.55/2:87 f	parable of the great tree	SD 83.19
Mahā Rukkha Sutta 2	S 12.56/2:88	parable of the great tree	SD 83.20
Taruṇa Rukkha Sutta	S 12.57/2:89 f	parable of the sapling	SD 83.3
Nāma,rūpa Sutta	S 12.58/2:90 f	the descent of name-and-form	SD 105.5
(Nidāna) Viññāṇa Sutta	S 12.59/2:91	the descent of consciousness	SD 105.6

¹¹ On the imagery of the uroboros, see SD 23.3 (1); SD 49.2 (4.3.2.3).

¹² On revulsion, see *Nibbidā*, SD 20.1.

6.2.3.1 The (Dukkha) Saṃyojana Sutta 1 (S 12.53) and **the (Dukkha) Saṃyojana Sutta 2** (S 12.54) are practically identical. The only difference is that in the second Sutta, in both sections on arising and ceasing, the parables come *first* followed by their application. Both Suttas start off by stating: “Bhikshus, one who dwells contemplating the gratification (*assāda*) in states that fetter, **craving increases** (*taṇhā pavaḍḍhati*).”

The Suttas then lay down the dependent arising sequence:

craving leads to clinging;
clinging to existence;
existence to birth;

birth to decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair. This is the arising of the whole mass of suffering.

Then, there is **the parable of the oil-lamp**: an oil-lamp burns depending on oil and wick. Someone adds oil and adjusts the wick. In this way, the lamp goes on burning for a long time. Even so, when we attend to states that fetter us mentally, craving increases.

In the closing half, the Suttas state: “Bhikshus, when one contemplates the disadvantages or dangers (*ādinava*) in states that fetter, **craving ends** (*taṇhā nirujjhati*).” The Suttas then lay down the dependent ending sequence:

with the ending of craving, clinging ends;
when clinging ends, existence ends;
when existence ends, birth ends;

when birth ends, so do decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair, end, too. This is the ending of the whole mass of suffering.

This is just like **an oil-lamp** that burns depending on oil and wick. When no one adds any oil or adjusts the wick, with the exhaustion of the oil, the lamp is extinguished. Even so, when we do not attend to states that fetter us mentally, craving ends.

6.2.3.2 The Taruṇa Rukkha Sutta (S 12.57) has the same teaching as that in **the (Dukkha) Saṃyojana Suttas 1 and 2** (S 12.53+54) [6.2.3.1]. The only difference is that while the latter two Suttas use the parable of the oil-lamp, S 12.57 applies a different parable, that of the sapling (*taruṇa, rukkha*).

Suppose there were a sapling, and a man were to periodically clear the ground around the roots, periodically add some good soil and water it, it would grow. Even so, when we attend to states that fetter us mentally, craving increases.

On the other hand, if there were **a sapling**, and a man, with a shovel and a basket, were to cut it down at its foot, uproot it, along with all its main roots and secondary roots. Then, he would cut and split and reduce the tree to slivers. Having dried the slivers in the wind and sun, he would burn them.

Then, he would collect the ashes, winnow them in a strong wind or disperse them into the swift currents of a river. Surely, for that tree, there is no more future arising.¹³ Even so, when we do not attend to states that fetter us mentally, craving ends.

6.2.3.3 The Nāma,rūpa Sutta (S 12.58) opens with the words,

“Bhikshus, one who dwells contemplating the gratification in states that fetter, there is **the descent of name-and-form** (*nāma,rūpassa avakkanti*).”¹⁴

¹³ While **Taruṇa Rukkha S** (S 12.57) centres on “that which fetters” (*saṃyojaniya*) or “states that fetter,” **Mahā Rukkha S 1+2** (S 12.55+56) use the term “that which brings about clinging” (*upādāniya*). While the former applies the parable of a young tree (*taruṇa rukka*), the latter two uses the parable of a great tree (*mahā rukkha*). Otherwise, they give the same teaching.

Name-and-form leads to the 6 sense-bases;
 the 6 sense-bases leads to contact;
 contact leads to feeling;
 feeling leads to craving;
 craving leads to clinging;
 clinging leads to existence;
 existence leads to birth;

birth leads to sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair. Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.¹⁵

Then, follows **the parable of the great tree**. Suppose there is a great tree, with its roots growing downwards and across, would send the sap upwards through the tree. Sustained by this sap, the tree grows and stands for a very long time. So, too, for one who dwells contemplating the gratification in states that fetter, there is the dependent arising of this whole mass of suffering.

On the other hand, when we dwell contemplating the disadvantages of states that fetter, there is **no descent of name-and-form**.

Without name-and-form,	there is no the 6 sense-bases;
without the 6 sense-bases,	there is no contact;
without contact,	there is no feeling;
without feeling,	there is no craving;
without craving,	there is no clinging;
without clinging,	there is no existence;
without existence,	there is no birth; without birth, there is no sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair. Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering. (S 12.58/2:90), SD 105.5

Suppose there is a **great tree**, and a man, with a shovel and a basket, were to cut it down at its foot, uproot it, along with all its main roots and secondary roots. Then, he would cut and split and reduce the tree to slivers. Having dried the slivers in the wind and sun, he would burn them. Then, he would collect the ashes, winnow them in a strong wind or disperse them into the swift currents of a river. Surely, for that tree, there is no more future arising.¹⁶

6.2.3.4 The (Nidāna) Viññāṇa Sutta (S 12.59) has the same basic teaching structure as the preceding suttas. It opens with the words,

“Bhikshus, one who dwells contemplating the gratification in states that fetter,
 there is **the descent of consciousness** (*viññāṇassa avakkanti*).”¹⁷

With consciousness, *there is name-and-form*;
 with name-and-form, *there are the 6 sense-bases*;
 with the 6 sense-bases, *there is contact*;
 with contact, *there is feeling*;
 with feeling, *there is craving*;

¹⁴ On the non-self state of these links, see **Moliya Phagguna S** (S 12.12/2:12-14), SD 20.5.

¹⁵ The links are abridged here: for the full series of links and its analysis, see, eg, (**Paṭicca,samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2,3/2:2), SD 5.15.

¹⁶ This parable recurs in **Mahā Rukkha S 1** (S 12.55), except that the subject there is not a great tree but “a sapling” (*taruṇa,rukkha*) (S 12.55/2:87 f), SD 83.20. Cf **Cetanā S 2** (S 12.39), SD 7.6b); **Atthi,raga S** (S 12.64), SD 26.10.

¹⁷ On consciousness (*viññāṇa*), see **Viññāṇa**, SD 17.8a.

*with craving,
with clinging,
with existence,*

*there is clinging;
there is existence;
there is birth; with birth, there is sorrow, lamentation, physical pain,
mental pain and despair. Such is the arising of this whole mass of
suffering.¹⁸*

(S 12.59/2:91), SD 105.6

Then, there is the same **parable of the great tree** [6.2.3.3] whose roots and sap very well sustain it so that it grows large and lives long. So, too, for one who dwells contemplating the gratification in states that fetter, there is **the descent of consciousness**. With consciousness, *there is name-and-form, and so on, down to this whole mass of suffering* (see preceding paragraph).

On the other hand, when we dwell contemplating the disadvantages of states that fetter, there is **no descent of consciousness** ...

- no 6 sense-bases ...
- no contact ...
- no feeling ...
- no craving ...
- no clinging ...
- no existence ...
- no birth ...

no sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair. Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.

Suppose a man, *with a shovel and a basket, were to cut it down at its foot, uproot it, along with all its main roots and secondary roots. Then, he would cut and split and reduce the tree to slivers. Having dried the slivers in the wind and sun, he would burn them. Then, he would collect the ashes, winnow them in a strong wind or disperse them into the swift currents of a river. Surely, for that tree, there is no more future arising.*¹⁹

6.2.4 Related suttas (2)

These three Suttas deal with the same topic—of “(states) that fetter” (*saṃyojanīya*)—as the (Duka) Saṃyojana Sutta (A 2.6). The key difference is that these three Suttas describe the fetters (*saṃyojana*) as being **the 5 aggregates** (*pañca-k, khandha*) themselves—form (*rūpa*),²⁰ feeling (*vedanā*),²¹ perception (*saññā*),²² formations (*saṅkhārā*),²³ and consciousness (*viññāṇa*).²⁴

All these Suttas define “(states) that fetter” (***saṃyojanīya***) as “desire and lust” (*chanda, rāga*) and the “fetters” (***saṃyojana***) as the aggregates themselves. For example, form is *that which fetters* when we feel desire and lust for it; in that sense, *form* is a fetter. The same applies to all the other aggregates,

Studying these Suttas alongside A 2.6 gives us a broader perspective and understanding of the mental fetters and the ending of suffering:

¹⁸ The links are abridged here: for the full series of links and its analysis, see, eg, (**Paṭicca,samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2,3/2:2), SD 5.15.

¹⁹ (**Nidāna**) **Viññāṇa S** (S 12.59/2:91), SD 105.6.

²⁰ On form, see **Rūpa**, SD 17.2a.

²¹ On feeling, see **Vedanā**, SD 17.3.

²² On perception, see **Saññā**, SD 17.4

²³ On formations, see **Saṅkhārā**, SD 17.6.

²⁴ On consciousness, see **Viññāṇa**, SD 17.8a.

(Khandha) Saṃyojanīya Sutta	S 22.120	SD 105.8
(Saḷāyatana) Saṃyojanīya Sutta	S 35.109	SD 105.9
Saṃyojanīya,dhamma Sutta	S 35.122	SD 105.10

6.2.4.1 The (Khandha) Saṃyojanīya Sutta (S 22.120) opens with the Buddha telling us that he will teach us about “(states) that fetter” (*saṃyojanīya*) and “fetter” (*saṃyojana*). Then the Buddha states that each of the 5 aggregates—form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness—is a “fetter,” and that the “desire and lust” for any of these aggregates makes it a fetter—the desire and lust are “the states that fetter.”²⁵

This important teaching shows us that it is *not* the “thing”—form, feeling, perception, formations or consciousness—in itself that is a fetter or is sensual or impure, but it is how the mind, our attitude—if it is full of desire or lust—that makes it a fetter. In short, it’s all in the mind, so to speak.

We see a similar teaching in **the Nibbedhikā Pariyāya Sutta** (A 6.63), where the Buddha declares:

<i>Saṅkappa,rāgo purisassa kāmo n’ete kāmā yāni citrāni loke</i>	The thought of lust ²⁶ is a person’s desire: ²⁷ there are no sensual pleasures in the diversely beautiful ²⁸ in the world.
<i>saṅkappa,rāgo purisassa kāmo tiṭṭhanti citrāni tath’eva loke ath’ettha dhīrā vinayanti chandan’ti</i>	The thought of lust is a person’s desire. The diversely beautiful in the world remain just as they are. So here ²⁹ the wise remove desire (for them). ³⁰

(A 6.63,3.2/3:411), SD 6.11

The Sutta then goes on to describe each of the 5 aggregates, and how we should deal with each of them in some detail. This Sutta acts as an elaboration on the (Duka) Saṃyojana Sutta (A 2.6).

6.2.4.2 The (Saḷāyatana) Saṃyojanīya Sutta (S 35.109), like the (Khandha) Saṃyojanīya Sutta [6.2.4.1] defines “(states) that fetter” (*saṃyojanīya*) as “desire and lust” (*chanda,rāga*) but applies the term “**fetter**” (*saṃyojana*) as the 6 sense-bases (*saḷ-āyatana*), that is, the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.³¹ Again—as in the above Suttas [6.2.4.1]—we are reminded that these senses are not in themselves fetters: only when we have desire and lust for them, we are fettered to them. Our attitude of desire and lust are “(states) that fetter” us to these senses, and that these senses are “fettlers.”³²

6.2.4.3 The Saṃyojanīya,dhamma Sutta (S 35.122)—the discourse on the objects that fetter—is identical to the (Saḷ-āyatana) Saṃyojanīya Sutta (S 35.109) [6.2.4.2] except that it (S 35.122), instead of the internal sense-bases (*ajjhatt’āyatana*) (as in S 35.109), deals with the 6 external sense-bases (*bāhir’-*

²⁵ **(Khandha) Saṃyojanīya S** (S 22.120/3:166 f), SD 105.8.

²⁶ On *saṅkappa,rāga*, “thought of lust” or “lustful intention,” see SD 6.11 (2.2.2.4).

²⁷ *Saṅkappa,rāgo purisassa kāmo*. Be Ce Ee Se all give the same 5-line stanza. It recurs in **Na Santi S** (S 1.34), SD 42.6 without line a. Here [§3.4] the stress is in our own thinking or intention, while in S 1.34, it is on the nature of the world. Note how line a flows into b, and line c into d. Line e points to what should be done.

²⁸ “Diversely beautiful,” *citra*: see SD 6.11 (2.2.2.3).

²⁹ “So here the wise” (*ath’ettha dhīrā’ti atha etesu ārammaṇesu paṇḍitā chanda,rāgaṃ vinayanti*, “here then the wise removes lust and desire in the sense-objects,” SA 1:63). In other words, “here” refers to our minds.

³⁰ On this verse’s significance, see SD 6.11 (2.2.2.1).

³¹ For an analysis of the 6 sense-bases, see **Saḷ-āyatana Vibhaṅga S** (M 137) + SD 29.5 (1.2).

³² **(Khandha) Saḷāyatana Saṃyojanīya S** (S 35.109/4:89), SD 105.9.

āyatana), that is, the sense-objects: form, sound, smell, taste, touch and thoughts. Hence, in the Sutta title, *dhamma* or “object,” refers to the external senses or sense-objects.³³

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The (Twos) Discourse on the Fetter

A 2.6

1 “Bhikshus, there are these two states [truths]. What are the two?

The contemplation of gratification in states that fetter³⁴ *yā ca saṃyojaniyesu dhammesu assādānupassitā*
and the contemplation of revulsion in states that fetter. *yā ca saṃyojaniyesu dhammesu nibbidā’nupassitā*

2 Bhikshus, one who dwells contemplating the **gratification** in states that fetter does not abandon lust, **[51]** does not abandon hate, does not abandon delusion.

3 Without abandoning lust, without abandoning hate, without abandoning delusion, one is not fully freed from birth, decay, death; from sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair—one is not fully freed from suffering, I say!

4 Bhikshus, one who dwells contemplating the **revulsion** in states that fetter abandons lust, abandons hate, abandons delusion.

5 Having abandoned lust, having abandoned hate, having abandoned delusion, one is fully freed from birth, decay, death; from sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair—one is fully freed from suffering, I say!

6 These, bhikshus, are the two states [truths].

— evaṃ —

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³³ *Saṃyojaniya, dhamma S* (S 35.122/4:108), SD 105.10.

³⁴ On the nature of the fetters (*saṃyojana*) in this early period, prob the 1st period of the Buddha’s ministry: on the 2 period of the Buddha’s ministry, see SD 1.1 (2.2) & SD 40a.1 (1.3).