

Invisible Fetters, Round of Rebirth and its Way Out

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Abstract

This article aims to understand fetters in connection with round of rebirth and its way out. Fetters (*saṃyojanas*), a form of defilements or latent tendencies are innately ingrained over countless transmigration of all beings. They are regarded as the evil kingpin of the whole mass of round of existence. As chain of causes which result sentient beings infinite rebirth, they function closely related with the dependent origination (*paticcasamuppāda*). The fetters are regarded as invisible restraint device due to the fact that their special entity is they cannot be visible through naked eyes of human beings. Such device hooked permanently all sentient beings to the round of rebirth, and the realms of suffering. In Buddhism, the only way to overcome the cause of sufferings or to emancipate all beings from the Fetters is practicing according to the rudimentary Four Foundations of Mindfulness. This so-called the Supreme Paths are the particular doctrine practicing to abandon all the *saṃyojanas*. If members in a society were to abandon all of the fetters successfully, such society would become “Ideal society” is a society that is luminous shine with wisdom.

Keywords: Fetters, Invisible, Round of Rebirth, *Samyojana*, Way Out

Introduction

To the precious lives of sentient beings, it seems impossible to calculate the exact number of our total births neither in the blinded past lives nor the unseen future. They have been wandering along from sphere to sphere (T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, 1975: 208)¹, world to world, clan to clan, etc. It is inevitable that we will definitely be back in the cycle of birth and death endlessly. Even the Buddha himself had lengthy period of time been fulfilled his conduct for four incalculable (*asaṅkheyya*) and one hundred thousand-world-aeon (*kappa*) to attain the Enlightenment. As such, the question may raise at this point how could we confident that we will be returning in such blissful planes, such as human, heavenly worlds, etc. As a matter of fact, we never know exactly when we will be deteriorated sinking down to those

¹There are three spheres in Buddhist view, namely: 1. The sense-sphere (*kāma-bhava*), 2. The form-sphere (*rūpa-bhava*), 3. The formless-sphere (*arūpa-bhava*). D.III.215”. “the sphere of sense-desire, that of the brahma-world, that of the higher heavens”.

unhappy planes, such as hell and animal kingdom (Ācariya Anuruddha, 2007: 109)² in which Ācariya Anuruddha exhibited the indefinite life span of beings living in these planes “There is no definite limit to the duration of life of beings in the four woeful planes, or among humans and fallen *asuras*” (Ācariya Anuruddha, 2007: 170). The woeful planes of existence are undesirable to all sentient beings as its definition appeared in The Abhidhammattha Sangaha:

The word *apāya* means, literally, “that which is devoid (*apa*) of happiness (*aya*).” This is the collective name for those realms of existence in which pain and misery greatly exceed happiness. They are the realms where evildoers are reborn as a consequence of their evil deeds (Ācariya Anuruddha, 2007: 163).

In order to clarify concept of cycle of rebirth, the Buddha said, “Birth is suffering. . . ” (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000: 1844), (Paṭhamakyaw Ashin Thitṭila (Setṭhila) Aggamahāpaṇḍita, 1995: 130-39). Then, should we transcend all of the suffering, how could these be?

This article aims to answer the following questions: What are invisible fetters? What is the kingpin that sinks sentient beings into a round of rebirth? As well as the paramount question, how can we unfetter the fetters?

Fetters and the Round of Rebirth

Rooted by three pollutants of the mind are known as Poisons of greed (*rāga*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*). Whenever they are expanded to a form of seven: The lust for sense pleasure, repulsion, conceit, wrong view, doubt, lust for becoming and ignorance, they will be referred as the latent tendencies (*anusaya*) as stated in the Vibhaṅga:

The latent tendency of lust for sense pleasure, the latent tendency of repulsion, the latent tendency of conceit, the latent tendency of wrong view, the latent tendency of doubt, the latent tendency of lust for becoming, the latent tendency of ignorance” (Paṭhamakyaw Ashin Thitṭila (Setṭhila) Aggamahāpaṇḍita, 1995: 494).

These latent tendencies are predispositions to negative patterns of mind. They lie dormant deeply in the mind and are the intrinsic cause to one’s defilement and clinging, indulging the mind to a state of attachment in which leading to all forms of suffering (*dukkha*) as a consequence. One important fact to know is these latent tendencies are commonly recognized as Fetters

²The unhappy planes or planes of loss and woe (*apāya-bhūmi*) consist of four: 1.hell (*niraya*), animal kingdom (*tiracchānayani*), ghost-sphere (*pittivisaya*), 4.host of demons (*asurakāya*).

since they both shared the exact constituent Dhammas.³ On the other hand, the seven latent tendencies are the seven Fetters

Considering from this angle, the evil kingpin of these whole mass of round of existence, is what we know as Fetters. The form of defilements or latent tendencies is innately ingrained over countless transmigration of all beings from birth to death, from the death to a new born, and so on. Particularly in a birth of human beings, a psycho-physical organism with womb-born creatures (*jalābuja*), such fetters were resided within one's birth even before when one was a fetus in the mother's womb itself. To speak correctly, they were programmed tightly in the DNA⁴ of our genes working as energetic as to inherit the intrinsic latent bias deeply rooted into our mind from past to present, and from present to future. The Buddha speaks fettered person cannot escape from sufferings: "Fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught ordinary person is not freed from birth, ageing, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair; he is not freed from suffering, I say (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikku Bodhi, 2001: 93)."

Another point to be considered is that these fetters play a pivotal role playing in all respects with the suffering of beings. They do not function separately by themselves but are closely related with the principle doctrine as the dependent origination (*Paticcasamuppāda*) as chain of causes which result in rebirth. The Buddha stated the things that can fetter (S.II.86)⁵:

Bhikkhus, when one dwells contemplating gratification in things that can fetter, craving increases. With craving [*tañhā*] as condition, clinging [*upādāna*] (comes to be); with clinging as condition, existence [*bhava*]; with existence as condition, birth [*jāti*]; with birth as condition, aging-and-death [*jarā-marana*], sorrow [*soka*], lamentation [*parideva*], pain [*dukkha*], displeasure [*domanassa*] and despair [*upāyāsa*] come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

Suppose, bhikkhus, an oil lamp was burning in dependence on oil and a wick, and a man would pour oil into it and adjust the wick from time to time. Thus, sustained by that oil, fuelled by it, that oil lamp would burn for a very long time. So too, when one lives contemplating gratification in things that can fetter, craving increases. . . Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000: 590).

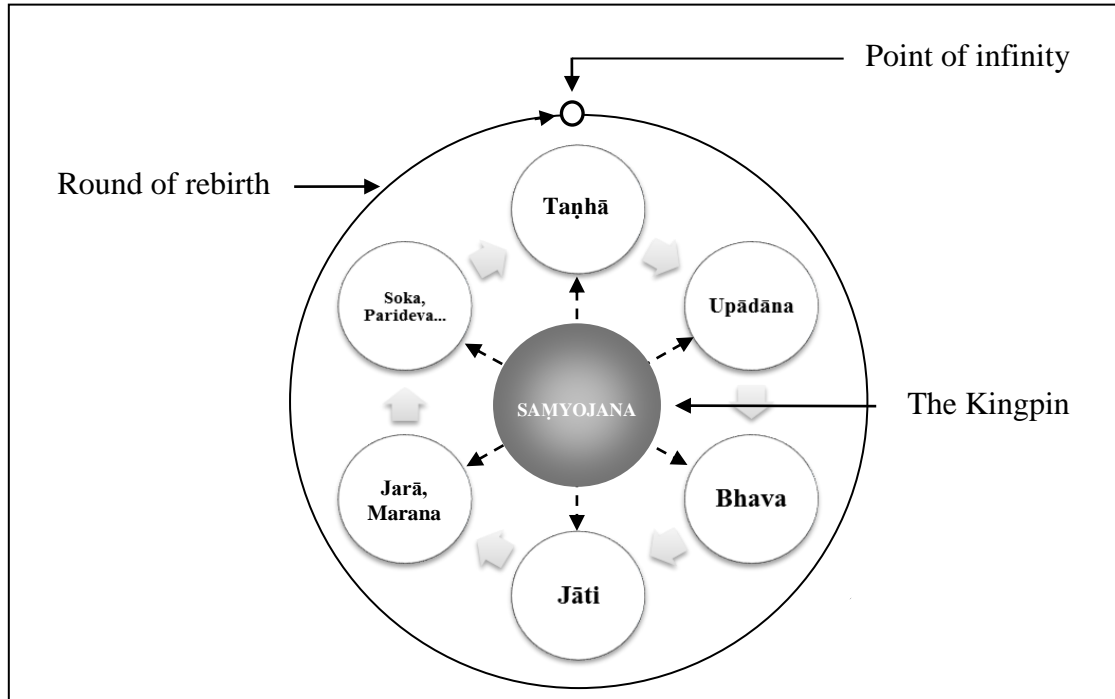
³ "Anunayasamyojanan", the first constituent of seven Fetters is regarded as *kāmarāgānusaya* in which the manorathapūraṇī clarified that *Anunayasamyojanan* refers to *kāmarāgasamyojanam*. "Atthame anunayasamyojanan ti kāmarāgasamyojanam", AA.VII.2.

⁴ Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) refers to a long linear polymer found in the nucleus of a cell, it associated with the transmission of genetic information of living organisms.

⁵ "Saññojaniyesu bhikkhave dhammesu assādānupassino viharato. . ." - S.II.86.

The following chart shows the dictated kingpin firmly tying beings into the round of ad infinitum rebirth:

Chart 1: Exhibiting the Dictated Kingpin Tying Beings in the Round of Rebirth



Invisible Fetters: the Human Bondage Device

One special entity of fetters is they cannot be visible by human beings naked eyes, it was called thus “invisible fetters” (Sanu Mahatthanadull, 2010:22) connoting the unwholesome mental factors in which hook all beings invisibly and unconsciously. According to the Sutta, there are ten divided fetters as follows:- 1.The view of the individual-group (*Sakkāyadiṭṭhisamyojana*); 2.Doubt-and-wavering (*Vicikicchāsamyojana*); 3.Wrong handling of habit-and-ritual (*Sīlabbataparāmāsasamyojana*); 4.Sensual desire (*Kāmachandasamyojana*); and 5.Malevolence (*Byāpādasamyojana*); 6.Lust of objective form (*Rūparāgasamyojana*); 7.Lust of the formless (*Arūparāgasamyojana*); 8.Conceit (*Mānasamyojana*); 9.Excitement (*Uddhaccasamyojana*) and 10.Ignorance (*Avijjāsamyojana*) (F.L. Woodward, 1972: 13). These fetters simply bind beings into existence as well

as connect existence by existence.⁶ In other words, they sink all beings into existence.⁷

Serving as a bondage device, fetters are truly a restraint device hooking permanently all sentient beings to the round of rebirth. Simile to a fish that its mouth is hooked with fishing rod with a sharp tip. Whether the fish is trying to flex its strength in escape from that sharp hook, it's never disengage. The more attempt to struggle, the more tighten the fishing rod hook. Likewise, human beings are being tied firmly with fetters in connection with the passive three roots of evil; lust, hatred and delusion, deceiving one to be in the enjoyable and sensuous delights of the phenomenal world within their domination.

Thus, the fetters implies “a state of invisible” tying sentient beings to the round of existence invisibly and unconsciously. One example that can best describe is right now, as in a moment that we are being “not-know” the *Avijjāsamyojanā*s undoubtedly still working in process in every single seconds.

How Could We Be Emancipated From these Fetters?

A question may raise at this point: Is it possible to unfetter the fetters? The answer lies upon the said of the Buddha in the Anguttara-Nikāya:

... if one unshackled the fetters, one can made an end of sufferings:

And when a monk is rid of these fetters. . ., has cut them at the roots, made them as palm-tree stumps, so that they cannot become in the future nor rise again; then is that monk said to have cut off craving, unshackled the fetters, and by understanding conceit in full, made an end of ill (E.M. Hare, 1978: 6).

The Buddhist way to overcome these cause of sufferings, or to emancipate all beings from the Fetters is practicing according to the rudimentary Four Foundations of Mindfulness. This so-called the Supreme Paths are the particular doctrine practicing to abandon all the *samyojanas*. When a man practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, along with other subsidiary

⁶ “*Imani hi satte bhavesu sanyojenti, upanibandhanti; bhavan va bhavena sanyojenti; tasma bhavasanyojanani ti vuccanti.*” - MA. I.4²⁴.

⁷ “*Samyojananti vaṭṭadukkheṇa saddhiṃ yojanaṃ bandhanaṃ pajānaṃ vaṭṭe osīdāpanasamatthaṃ dasavidhaṃ samyojanaṃ aṇuṃ thūlaṇti mahantaṇca khuddakaṇca.*” - DhA.I.22.

doctrinal principles, e.g., *Sikkhā*,⁸ *bodhipakkhiya-dhamma*⁹ and *visuddhi*,¹⁰ he can be one of the Noble persons in Buddhism: The stream-attainer (*Sotāpanna*)¹¹, The once-returner (*Sakadāgāmī*), The never-returner (*Anāgāmī*)¹² and The worthy one (*Arahanta*) (Bimala Charan Law, 2006: 103).

To be more specific, the *Sotāpanna* is the first group of the Buddhist noble person who are able to enter towards the stream of *nibbāna*, by abandoning the 3 *Samyojanas* namely:- *Sakkāyaditthi*, *Vicikicchā* and *Silabbataprāmāsa*. This is a reason why they are recognized as “the stream-enterer”. Next group of the noble person called *Sakadāgāmī* who can abandon the said three *Samyojanas* and can lessen *Kāmachandasamyojana* and *Byāpādasamyojana*. Then the noble person of *Anāgāmī* Grade can abandon the *Samyojana* which was forsaken by Phra *Sotāpanna* and can extinguish two more: *Kāmachandasamyojana* and *Byāpādasamyojana*. Regarding the *Arahantas* they emancipated all the Ten Fetters by abandoning the five more *Samyojanas* namely:- *Rūparāgasamyojana*, *Arūparāgasamyojana*, *Mānasamyojana*, *Uddhaccasamyojana*, and *Avijjasamyojana*. After all the *Samyojanas* have been extinguished, the state of *Nibbāna* appears instead. Then, the person’s mind is full of freedom from *Samyojanas* and turmoil, and he or she can lead a life happily. Therefore, it is no surprise at all if we meet with the noble individuals particularly the *Sotāpanna* and the *Sakadāgāmī* in the daily life, in the movie theaters, department stores, etc. This is because they are still fettered by sensual desire and malevolence (as well as the higher fetters). As a result, they prefer listening to fine music and carrying those brand name bags and so on.

To clarify this, the following chart will exhibit the concordance between abandoned Fetters and the number of birth of the four-kind noble individual:

⁸The threefold training, a principle of practices for study in terms of *Adhisīla-sikkhā* (training in higher morality), *Adhicitta-sikkhā* (training in higher mentality) and *Adhipaññā-sikkhā* (training in higher wisdom). D.III.220; A.I.229.

⁹ Usually translated as virtues partaking of enlightenment; qualities contributing to or constituting enlightenment; enlightenment states. Comprising of 37 qualities from 7 groups, namely: 4 *Satipaṭṭhānas*, 4 *Padhānas*, 4 *Iddhipādas*, 5 *Indriyas*, 5 *balas*, 7 *Bojhaṅgas* and 8 *Maggas*. Vism.681.

¹⁰*Visuddhi* were recognized as purity; stages of purity; gradual purification. The Seven purities were mentioned as follows: 1. *Sīla-visuddhi*, 2. *Citta-visuddhi*, 3. *Diṭṭhi-visuddhi*, 4. *Kaṅkhāvitaraṇa-visuddhi*, 5. *Maggāmaggañāṇadassana-visuddhi*, 6. *Paṭipadāñāṇadassana-visuddhi* and 7. *Ñāṇadassana-visuddhi*. M.I.149; Vism.1-710.

¹¹Sometimes can also be translated as the stream-enterer.

¹² This kind of noble individual will not reborn again in the human world, but in specific reserved Pure Abodes in the Form Sphere called the Five *Suddhāvāsa*.

Chart 2: The Concordance between Abandoned Fetters and the Number of Birth of the Noble Individuals

<i>The Noble Individuals</i>	<i>Abandoned Fetters</i>	<i>Number of birth (until the end of sufferings)</i>
1. <i>The stream-enterer</i>	1. The view of the individual-group	Not more than 7 time reborn in The human world (<i>manussaloka</i>) + heaven (<i>devaloka</i>)
2. <i>The once-returner</i>	2. Doubt-and-wavering	
3. <i>The never-returner</i>	3. Wrong handling of habit-and-ritual	
	4. Sensual desire	Reborn in the Five <i>Suddhāvāsa</i> hierarchy until <i>Nibbāna</i>
	5. Malevolence	
	6. Lust of objective form	
4. <i>The worthy one</i>	7. Lust of the formless	- No reborn -
	8. Conceit	
	9. Excitement	
	10. Ignorance	

Conclusion

The fetters play crucial role invisibly in the round of rebirth of human beings and all sentient beings. The success of its implementation of the corrected Buddhist approach based on the Four Foundation of Mindfulness can be achieved practically by one's great endeavor and taking seriously. Just imagine how nice a society would be if everyone in the society, in the same manner, were to abandon all of the fetters. Sooner or later it will succeed somehow. And such society would become "Ideal society" is a society that is luminous shine with intelligence. Most kinds of social problems will be vanished permanently from society remaining only a benevolent generosity, loving kindness and compassion, no malice against each other. Not only individuals that attained highest emancipation but also a society is built up with great wisdom of mankind. A society where all forms of fetters is totally absence.

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