

Topic: Notion of the Emptiness in *Pāli Nikāyas*

Abstract

People's happiness depends upon their awaking. Contradiction, harmony, war, and suffering have cause from misunderstanding the world, which you are living. In the Buddha's teachings, he taught us the way of look at the world that is the doctrine of emptiness.

Patrick Carré, a famous French Scholar, says about doctrine of Śūnyatā: "This is a truly strange concept. If the world and 'oneself', colorful entities are presenting, existing cannot deny, but in fact, they are empty, merely hollow, it must be cruelly mad that can advocate this unreasonable thing! Certainly, this respectable concept, the nihilism of the East may be merely 'a Modern Movement' bringing temporary character in our homeland. Due to it is still searching for itself a way in the forest which contents all empty concepts to discover a position obviously and establish the entirely new truth."

Most people believe that the doctrine of emptiness was arisen from Nagārjuna but in fact the notion of emptiness was begun from the Buddha time. Nagārjuna merely received and developed it became the doctrine of emptiness. It is demonstrated by the Buddha's discourse in Pāli Nikayas. Afterwards, the doctrine developed in the Abhidharma schools. Besides, the system of *Prajñāparamita Sūtras* is place an importance role in this doctrine Last but not least, the period of the *Madhyamaka* School is the pinnacle period of emptiness philosophy.

In this essay, Writer depended on the Buddha's teachings that recorded in *Pāli Nikāyas* to search origin for this doctrine.

According to The Pāli Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary (PTSD), the word *suññatā* has two main meanings, namely, empty or emptiness, void or voidness, unsubstantiality, phenomenality and freedom from defilements such as desire, hatred, and ignorance. There are three main ways to understand the notion of emptiness in *Pāli Nikāyas*. Firstly, emptiness is known as arahant's way of meditation. Secondly, emptiness is understood through dependent origination and *nibbāna*. Lastly, emptiness is understood through three marks of existence, namely, impermanence, suffering, and non-self.

1.1 Emptiness and Arahant's Path of Meditation

Emptiness is not only a doctrine merely but also useful and practical method that applies to daily practice life aim at liberation bringing. Buddha taught: "Now, Ānanda, I often abide in emptiness."¹ Buddha emphasized that he remain fully in a dwelling of emptiness and he explained how he dwells in. There are two available discourses on emptiness (*suññatā*), namely, the Shorter Discourse on Emptiness (*Cūlasuññatā Sutta*)² and the Greater Discourse on Emptiness (*Mahāsuññatā Sutta*).³ These two discourses represent the Buddha's instruction on the several stages of concentration. A practitioner had to experience these stages before attaining the stage of imperturbability whereby one achieves the status of Arahantship.

Empty and dwelling have relative to each other: "A Bhikkhu should go to the forest or the root of a tree or to the empty hut, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his back right, and setting mindful to the fore".⁴ The forest, the root of a tree, and the empty hut are locations where have few people, thus it is suitable in practice to enter into emptiness.

First, the Shorter Discourse on Emptiness introduces seven steps for contemplation on emptiness from emptying objects of consciousness to the state of signless concentration. The first step is the perception of forest: A monk is not attending to the perception of village, not attending to the perception of people. He attends to the singleness dependent on the perception of forest. When his mind enters into that perception of forest, he acquires confidence, steadiness, and resolution. First, he understands thus: "Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of village, those are not present here. Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of people, those are not present here. There is present only this amount of disturbance, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of forest."⁵

Afterwards, he understands: "This field of perception is void of the perception of village; this

¹ *Suññatā vihāre nāhaṃ, ānanda, etarahi bahulaṃ viharāmi'ti.* (MN 121)

² MN 120.

³ MN 121.

⁴ '*Bhikkhu araññagato vā rukkhamaḷagato vā suññāgāragato vā nisīdati pallaṅkaṃ ābhujitvā ujum kāyaṃ paṇidhāya parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā.*' *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10), *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (MN 118).

⁵ *So evaṃ pajānāti: 'ye assu darathā gāmasaṅñaṃ paṭicca tedha na santi, ye assu darathā manussasaṅñaṃ paṭicca tedha na santi, atthi cevāyaṃ darathamattā yadidaṃ—araññasaṅñaṃ paṭicca ekattan'ti.* (MN 121) Also see Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009), pp. 965-6.

field of perception is void of the perception of people. There is present only this non-emptiness, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of forest.”⁶ Similarly, the second step is the perception of earth. The third step is the perception of the state of infinite space. The fourth step is the perception of the state of infinite consciousness. The fifth step is the perception of the state of nothingness or no object of consciousness. The sixth step is the perception of neither perception nor non-perception. The last step is the perception of signless concentration of mind. This is the final step in the practice progress, practitioner will attain liberation. When his mind enters into that signless concentration of mind, he acquires confidence, steadiness, and resolution. He understands thus: “This signless concentration of mind is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.”⁷ When he knows and sees thus, his mind is liberated from the defilements such as sensual desire, ignorance, etc. Finally, He understands: ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being’.⁸

In every step, this paragraph was repeated: “Thus he regards it as empty of whatever is not there. Whatever remains, he discerns as present: ‘There is this.’ And so this, his entry into emptiness, accords with actuality, is undistorted in meaning, and pure.”⁹ The thing is very important that is ‘there is this and so there is that’ and it’s the undistorted and pure path leads practitioner to emptiness. Moreover, ‘this exists and so that exists’ is one of the fundamental Buddha’s teachings and all traditions recognize. It’s called the dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*).

Second, the Greater Discourse on Emptiness gives two main ideas, namely, the method to achieve peaceful and joyful, and the way to enter and dwell on emptiness. People live in this world, they always want to peace and happy. However, their mind are always thinking about this thing or that thing. They don’t know how to train their mind follows the right way to attain peaceful and happy. In this sutta, Buddha taught people the way to receive visitors and what the mind should thinks about.

Firstly, the method practises to achieve peaceful and joyful. Buddha practiced this method that brought to him the real result in his life. Thus this is the reality method. Anyone want to have peaceful and happy, he should follow this teaching. The Buddha sees that no single kind of form whose change and alteration would not arise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair in one who lusts for it and takes delight in it. However, the *Tathāgata* discovered the dwelling where is to enter and abide in emptiness internally by giving no attention to all external

⁶ So ‘suññamidaṃ saññāgataṃ gāmasaññāyā’*ti pajānāti*, ‘suññamidaṃ saññāgataṃ manussasaññāyā’*ti pajānāti*, ‘atthi cevidaṃ asuññataṃ yadidaṃ—araññasaññāṃ paṭicca ekattan’*ti*. Also see Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans., pp. 965-6.

⁷ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans., p. 969.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *Iti yañhi kho tattha na hoti tena taṃ suññāṃ samanupassati, yaṃ pana tattha avasiṭṭhaṃ hoti taṃ ‘santamidaṃ atthi’*ti pajānāti*. Evampissa esā, ānanda, yathābhuccā avipallatthā parisuddhā suññatāvakkanti bhavati.* (MN 121)

appearances.¹⁰ In particular, the Buddha's way receives visitors. While receiving visitors such as bhikkhu or bhikkhuni, men or women lay followers, king or king's ministers, sectarians or their disciples, a practitioner need to dwell emptiness with his mind lean to seclusion, tending and inclining to seclusion, withdrawn, delighting in renunciation, and altogether done away with things that are the basis for taints, he invariably talks to them in away concerned with encouraging them.¹¹ This is the way of Buddha's receiving visitors that is the method to achieve peaceful and joyful in the present and it is also fundamental to attain enlightenment in the future.

Secondly, the method enters and abides upon emptiness. A practitioner needs to attain the four stages of concentration (jhāna or dhyāna), namely, he should leave sensual pleasures, leave unwholesome things, he would enter and abide in the first *jhāna*, a joyful state attaining by leaving sensual pleasures, leaving unwholesome things, with reflection (P. *vitakka*, Skt. *vitark*) and investigation (P. and Skt. *vicara*). Next, he should destroy reflection and investigation, he would enter and abide in the second *jhāna*, a joyful state achieving by concentration, without reflection and investigation. Continuous, he would enter and abide in the third *jhāna*, a state of wonderful joy attaining by leaving joy. And finally, he would enter and abide in the fourth *jhāna*, a peaceful purity state attaining by abandoning wonderful joy.¹² After achieving the fourth *jhāna*, there are three kinds of emptiness, namely, emptiness internally, emptiness externally, and emptiness internally and externally that a practitioner needs to enter and dwell in.¹³ Then he may attention to imperturbability, the perfected state of concentration whereby he realizes the state of *Arahantship*.

In brief, attaining the state of *Arahantship* is the supreme purpose of practitioners at the Buddha's time. To achieve the state, practitioner must experience steps practicing on emptiness as shown above. This is the one way to understand emptiness (*suññatā*).

1.2 Interpretation of Emptiness through Dependent Origination and *Nibbāna*

Dependent origination (P. *paṭiccasamuppāda*, Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*) is a fundamental teaching of the Buddha. The discourses in Pāli Nikayas record that Buddha used dependent origination to point the path to *nibbāna*. The both dependent origination and *nibbāna* are dealing with *suññatā*.

¹⁰ 'Ayaṃ kho ānanda, vihāro tathāgatena abhisambuddho, yadidaṃ sabbanimittānaṃ amanasikārā ajjhataṃ suññataṃ upasampajja viharituṃ tatra.' (MN 122)

¹¹ 'Ayaṃ kho panānanda, vihāro tathāgatena abhisambuddho yadidaṃ—sabbanimittānaṃ amanasikārā ajjhataṃ suññataṃ upasampajja viharituṃ. Tatra ce, ānanda, tathāgataṃ iminā vihārena viharantaṃ bhavanti upasankamitāro bhikkhū bhikkhuniyo upāsakā upāsikāyo rājāno rājamahāmatā tithiyā tithiyasāvakā. Tatrānanda, tathāgato vivekaninneneva cittaena vivekaṇeṇa vivekapabbhārena vūpakaṭṭhena nekkhammābhīratena byantībhūtena sabbaso āsavaṭṭhānīyehi dhammehi aññadatthu uyyojanikapaṭisaṃyuttamyeva kathaṃ kattā hoti.' (MN 122)

¹² Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, pp. 972-3.

¹³ Ibid., p. 973.

Firstly, discussing on dependent origination likes as a fundamental teaching of the Buddha. Dependent origination is the doctrine that *Sakyamuni* Buddha and *Vipassī* Buddha attained full enlightenment.¹⁴ They were born in the world with suffering of birth, aging, illness, and death. They contemplated and saw that dharmas in the world cannot exist independently. It was arisen from dependent origination.¹⁵ For example, consciousness that arises dependent on eye and forms is called eye-consciousness. And consciousness that arises dependent on ear and sounds is called ear-consciousness, etc. In the *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta* (MN 26), Buddha said:

“This Dhamma that I have attained is profound, hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in attachment, takes delight in attachment, rejoices in attachment. It is hard for such a generation to see this truth, namely, specific conditionality, Dependent Origination.”¹⁶

According to SN 12.65, Buddha discovered the path leading to enlightenment that is cessation of the twelve links of dependent origination. How to cease these twelve links? The Buddha saw the ancient path¹⁷ travelled by the perfectly Enlightenment Ones of the past. He followed that path by directly known the twelve links of dependent origination, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation. The cessation of the twelve links of dependent origination also means the cessation of the whole mass of suffering. The cessation of suffering means *nibbāna*.

Etymologically, the term ‘*paṭicca*’ means ‘on account of’, and ‘*samuppāda*’ means origin or arising. *Paṭiccasamuppāda* means dependent origination. Dependent origination refers this principle: “When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.”¹⁸ It deals with the origin of suffering (*dukkha*) and the cessation of suffering (*nibbāna*). The origin of suffering: When this exists, that comes to be – these twelve links as below:

Arising: (I-II) Through ignorance conditioned are the volitional formations, (II-III) Through the volitional formations conditioned is consciousness, (III-IV) Through consciousness conditioned are name-and-form, (IV-V) Through name-and-form conditioned are the six sense-bases, (V-VI) Through the six sense-bases conditioned is contact, (VI-VII) Through contact conditioned is feeling, (VII-VIII) Through feeling conditioned is craving, (VIII-IX) Through craving conditioned is clinging, (IX-X) Through clinging conditioned is existence, (X-XI) Through the existence conditioned is rebirth, (XI-XII) Through rebirth conditioned is Aging and death,

¹⁴ Walshe Maurice trans., *The Long Discourses of The Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 2012), pp. 199-221.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans., p. 260.

¹⁷ The Ancient path is the eightfold path: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

¹⁸ SN 12.21

sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. Thus there is the origination of this whole mass of suffering.¹⁹

The cessation of suffering: When this does not exist, that does not come to be – these twelve links as below:

Cessation: (I-II) Through the entire cessation of this ignorance, the volitional Formations cease, (II-III) Through the cessation of volitional formations, consciousness ceases, (III-IV) Through the cessation of consciousness, name-and-form cease, (IV-V) Through the cessation of name-and-form, the six sense-bases cease, (V-VI) Through the cessation of the six Sense-Bases, contact ceases, (VI-VII) Through the cessation of the sense contact, feeling ceases, (VII-VIII) Through the cessation of feeling, craving ceases, (VIII-IX) Through the cessation of craving, clinging ceases, (IX-X) Through the cessation of clinging, existence ceases, (X-XI) Through the cessation of existence, rebirth ceases, (XI-XII) Through the cessation of rebirth, Aging and Death, Sorrow, Lamentation, Pain, Grief and Despair. Thus there is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.²⁰

The twelve elements link to be the chain without beginning and ending. When a link of the chain was broken, they would break completely. *Avijjā* (Skt. *avidyā*) means ignorance, synonymous with *moha* (Skt. *mūla*, delusion), and *aññāṇa* (non-knowledge). It is defined as ‘non-knowledge of the Four Noble Truths i.e. suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path leading to its cessation’.²¹ What is the noble truth of suffering? Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; not to obtain what you want is suffering, the five aggregates affected by clinging are suffering.²² And what is the noble truth of the origin of suffering? It is this craving which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination.²³ And what is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering? It is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it.²⁴ And what is the noble truth of the way leading to the

¹⁹*Anuloma: (i-ii) Avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā, (ii-iii) Saṅkhāra-paccayā viññāṇam, (iii-iv) Viññāṇa-paccayā Nāma-rūpaṃ, (iv-v) Nāma-rūpa-paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ, (v-vi) Saḷāyatana-paccayā phasso, (vi-vii) Phassa-paccayā vedanā, (vii-viii) Vedana-paccayā taṇhā, (viii-ix) Taṇha-paccayā upādānaṃ, (ix-x) Upādāna-paccayā bhavo, (x-xi) Bhava-paccayā jāti, (xi-xii) Jāti-paccayā jarā-maranaṃ soka-parideva-dukkha-domamass-upāyasā sambhavanti. Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti. (SN 12.1)*

²⁰*Paṭiloma: (i-ii) Avijjāya tveva asesavirāganirodhā saṅkhāranirodho, (ii-iii) Saṅkhāranirodhā viññānanirodho, (iii-iv) Viññānanirodhā Nāma-rūpanirodho, (iv-v) Nāma-rūpanirodhā saḷāyatananirodho, (v-vi) Saḷāyatananirodhā phassanirodho, (vi-vii) Phassanirodhā vedanānirodho, (vii-viii) Vedanānirodhā taṇhānirodho, (viii-ix) Taṇhānirodhā upādānanirodho, (ix-x) Upādānanirodhā bhavanirodho, (x-xi) Bhavanirodhā jātīnīrodho, (xi-xii) Jātīnīrodhā jarā-maranaṃ soka-parideva-dukkha-domamassupāyasā nirujjhanti. Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hoti. (SN 12.1)*

²¹ Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary, Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1988), pp. 31-2.

²² Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and bhikkhu Bodhi trans., p. 278.

²³ Bhikkhu Bodhi trans., *the Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), p. 1844.

²⁴ Ibid.

cessation of suffering? It is the Noble Eightfold Path; that is right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.²⁵ In other words, non-knowledge of the four noble truths as well as not-knowing dependent origination because Buddha said: “One who sees Dependent Origination sees *Dhamma*; one who sees the *Dhamma* sees Dependent Origination”.²⁶ Worldling with non-training mind and wrong view eyes regards the impermanent as permanent, painful as pleasant, non-self as self, impure as pure so he is suffering.

There are three kinds of the volitional formation (*sankhāra*) i.e. bodily volitional formation, verbal volitional formation, and mental volitional formation.²⁷ There are six classes of consciousness (*viññāṇa*), namely, eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, and mind-consciousness.²⁸ Feeling, perception, volition, contact, and attention are called name. The four great elements and the form derived from the four great elements are called form. This name and this form are together called name-and-form.²⁹ The eye base, ear base, nose base, tongue base, body base, and mind base, there are called six sense bases.³⁰ There are six classes of contact i.e. eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, and mind-contact.³¹ When sense-bases and its objects meet, consciousness will be arisen. At that time, *karma* will arise i.e. by the action of body, words, and thought. There are six classes of feeling, namely, feeling born of eye-contact, feeling born of ear-contact, feeling born of nose-contact, feeling born of tongue-contact, feeling born of body-contact, and feeling born of mind-contact.³² There are six classes of craving i.e. craving for forms, craving for sounds, craving for odours, craving for tastes, craving for tactile objects, and craving for mental phenomena.³³ There are four kinds of clinging, namely, clinging to sensual pleasures, clinging to views, clinging to rules and vows, and clinging to a doctrine of self.³⁴ There are three kinds of existence i.e. sense-realm existence, form-realm existence, and formless-realm existence.³⁵ The birth of various beings into the various orders of beings, their being born, descent (into the womb), production, the manifestation of the aggregates, the obtaining of the sense bases. This is called birth.³⁶ The aging of the various beings in various orders beings, their growing old, brokenness of teeth, greyness of hair, wrinkling of skin, decline of vitality, degeneration of the faculties, this is called aging. The passing away of various beings from the various orders of beings, their perishing, breakup, disappearance, mortality, death,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “*Yo paṭiccasuppādaṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati; yo dhammaṃ passati so paṭiccasuppādaṃ passati*” (MN 28).

²⁷ Bhikkhu Bodhi trans., the connected, p. 535.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Bhikkhu Bodhi trans., the connected, p. 535.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 534.

completion of time, breakup of the aggregates, the laying down of the carcass, this is called death. Thus this aging and this death are together called aging and death.³⁷

There are various representations of operation of dependent origination by separating its twelve factors into three groups i.e. past (ignorance and volitional formations), present (consciousness, name-and-form, the six sense-bases, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, and existence), and future (rebirth and aging and death). Is it probably a mistake?

From definition of the factors of dependent origination as the former, we see clearly that ignorance is stream of birth, death, and suffering. It is not also existence as substance (*svabhāva*) that is arisen by conditions. It is not the first cause. Not to know that ignorance is arisen by condition or other eleven factors, herein is phenomenon of accumulation of ignorance. Consequently, people cling to existence of self. Due to wrong view and this thought, One searches for the truth or the first cause of the world, and arising *lobha*, *dosa*, *moha* that are motivation of *Saṅkhāra* (volitional formations). When thought of self-existence operates, consciousness presents and operates. The operation of consciousness demands that presence of conscious subject and object (six sense-bases and name-and-form) or external world (three existences). Meeting of conscious subject and object is contact, now feeling presents at once. Thus factors of ignorance, volitional formations, consciousness, name-and-form, six sense-bases, contact, feeling, and existence present together in mental operation. Feeling includes mental reaction (desire and ignorance, or hatred and ignorance), craving encompasses clinging. They are extremely and expression of numberless and infinite form. This must demand presence of three existences (*tibhāva*) again.

In summary, when thought of existence of self operates, the twelve factors of dependent origination will be also operated. Factors of dependent origination and elements (*dharmas*), which are constituted by dependent origination, operate following *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*. A person who is a conditioned thing (*saṅkhāra*) is operation of the twelve factors of dependent origination, leads to suffering if he is controlled by clinging of self or thought of existence of self. If he awakens to non-self and thought of the operation in the world of non-self, mental operation will lead to destroy suffering.

In terms of the connection between dependent origination with emptiness (*suññatā*), dependent origination is not made by Buddha or others. Whether or not Buddhas arise in the world, that element (*dhātu*) still exists. After Buddha had recognized to this element, he taught it to people.³⁸ Therefore, dependent origination is the principle of the nature of phenomena. Buddha says in SN 20.7 as below:

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ SN 12.20

Those discourses that are words of *Tathāgata* are profound, deep in their meaning, transcendent (*lokuttarā*), connect with emptiness (*suññatappaṭisaṃyuttā*).³⁹

The discourses (*suttana*) mean the Buddha *Dhamma* or the Buddha's teachings. The profound, deep, and transcendent *dhamma* concerns with emptiness. As shown above, the Buddha used dependent origination as the fundamental teaching leading to *nibbāna* (the cessation of suffering). The *dhamma* of dependent origination is also profound. According to SN 6.1, there are two profound *dhammas*, namely, dependent origination and *nibbāna*. Therefore, there are two *dhammas* concern with emptiness that is dependent origination and *nibbāna*.⁴⁰ *Nibbāna* is the cessation of suffering by awakened dependently arisen of phenomena (*paṭicca-samuppanna-dhamma*). Buddha explains dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) and dependently arisen phenomena (*paṭiccasamuppanna-dhamma*) in SN 12.20 as below:

“And what, bhikkhus, is dependent origination? ‘With birth as condition, aging-and-death comes to be’: whether there is an arising of Tathagatas or no arising of Tathagatas, that element still persists, the stableness of the Dhamma, the fixed course of the Dhamma, specific conditionality. A Tathagata awakens to this and breaks through to it. Having done so, he explains it, teaches it, proclaims it, establishes it, discloses it, analyses it, elucidates it. And he says: ‘See! With birth as condition, bhikkhus, aging-and-death’.”

“With existence as condition, birth ... with clinging as condition, existence ... with craving as condition, clinging ... with feeling as condition, craving ... ‘With contact as condition, feeling ... with the six sense bases as condition, contact ... with name-and-form as condition, the six sense bases ... with consciousness as condition, name-and-form’ ... with volitional formations as condition, consciousness ... with ignorance as condition, volitional formations.... This is called dependent origination.”⁴¹

The nature of existence is explained by Buddha through the word, *paṭiccasamuppāda* or dependent origination. This theory is that he experienced and awakened on the base of dependently arisen phenomena (*paṭiccasamuppanna-dhamma*). The former is the principle that was taken out depending on the experience of the latter.

“And what, bhikkhus, are the dependently arisen phenomena? Aging-and-death, bhikkhus, is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, vanishing, fading away, and cessation. Birth is impermanent ... Existence is impermanent ... Clinging is impermanent ... Craving is impermanent ... Feeling is impermanent ... Contact is impermanent ... The six sense bases are impermanent ... Name-and-form is impermanent ... Consciousness is impermanent ... Volitional formations are impermanent ... Ignorance is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, vanishing, fading away, and cessation. These, bhikkhus, are called the dependently arisen phenomena.”⁴²

After interpretation all experienced phenomena as dependently arisen phenomena (*paṭiccasamuppanna-dhamma*), Buddha formulated the principle of dependent origination

³⁹ “*Ye te suttantā tathāgatabhāsītā gambhīrā gambhīratthā lokuttarā suññatappaṭisaṃyuttā*”.

⁴⁰ Chong Mun-keat, *The Notion of Emptiness in Early Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banasidass Publishers, 1999), pp. 19-20.

⁴¹ Conditions, SN 12.20 < <http://suttacentral.net/en/sn12.20> > web, October 21st, 2014.

⁴² Ibid.

(*paticcasamuppāda*). The principle became the central standpoint in Buddhism. Moreover, through dependent origination attaining *nibbāna* is the second way to understand emptiness (*suññatā*) in Early Buddhism.

1.3 Emptiness and Three Marks of Existence (*tilakkhaṇa*)

There is another way to understand emptiness. This method deals with an understanding of impermanence, suffering, and non-self (*anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*).⁴³ Three marks of existence are impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). These three marks of existence have close ties. At SN 35.1, Buddha says:

“Bhikkhus, the eye is impermanent. What is impermanent is suffering. What is suffering is nonself. What is nonself should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’”(SN 35.1)

These three marks of existence will be shown in detail to see what they mean and how relation to emptiness (*suññatā*).

1.3.1 Impermanence (*anicca*) and Suffering (*dukkha*)

Why Buddha teaches impermanence and non-self? Buddha teaches impermanence and non-self to help people cease suffering. The cessation of suffering is *nibbāna*. This is the third in the four noble truths which Buddha recognized. Everything has two parts, namely, cessation-arising and no-arising. Buddha teaches the world is suffering and the cause of suffering. It belongs to cessation-arising. To cease suffering and the cause of suffering, Buddha teaches practice thirty seven conditions leading to enlightenment.⁴⁴ A practitioner follows this teaching, he will attain *nibbāna*. This belongs to no-arising. The world is a cessation-arising world that means it is controlled by the principle of birth, existence, decay, and cessation or the principle of impermanence (*anicca*).

There are three kinds of impermanence, namely, impermanence *kṣaṇas*,⁴⁵ impermanence arising-cessation,⁴⁶ and impermanence self-nature.⁴⁷ The third understands the operated principle of the universe that concerns with emptiness (*suññatā*). When a person understood this principle, he would not grasp in phenomena. In The Discourse about Bāhiya, the Buddha taught the way training oneself to escape from all dharma grasping and the end of suffering (*nibbāna*) as below:

⁴³ Buddhadhāsa Bhikkhu, *Heartwood of The Bodhi Tree, The Buddha's Teaching on Voidness* (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 1994), p.89.

⁴⁴ They include: The four subjects to be contemplated, four perfect efforts, four steps towards supernatural power, five spiritual faculties, the power of five faculties, seven factors of enlightenment, and the eightfold noble path.

⁴⁵ *Kṣaṇas* is an instance as a measure of time, for example a clicking of the fingers has 65 or 60 *kṣaṇas*, a thought is 90 *kṣaṇas*, and a minute is equal to 4500 *kṣaṇas*. Impermanence *kṣaṇas*: Not a moment is permanent, but passes through stages of birth, existence, decay, and cessation.

⁴⁶ The quickly change in each thought. Its character is arising and cessation quickly.

⁴⁷ Impermanence self-nature is the incessantly change of phenomena in the universe. It encompasses impermanence arising-cessation.

“In that case, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: In what is seen there must be only what is seen, in what is heard there must be only what is heard, in what is sensed there must be only what is sensed, in what is cognized there must be only what is cognized. This is the way, Bāhiya, you should train yourself.”

“And since for you, Bāhiya, in what is seen there will be only what is seen, in what is heard there will be only what is heard, in what is sensed there will be only what is sensed, in what is cognized there will be only what is cognized, therefore, Bāhiya, you will not be with that; and since, Bāhiya, you will not be with that, therefore, Bāhiya, you will not be in that; and since, Bāhiya, you will not be in that, therefore, Bāhiya, you will not be here or hereafter or in between the two—just this is the end of suffering.”⁴⁸ (*Udāna* 1.10)

“In what is seen there must be only what is seen” means seeing the visual object without eye-consciousness participate in. “In what is heard there must be only what is heard” means hearing the audible object without ear-consciousness. The six senses and the six objects meet with participation of the six consciousnesses that are the main cause leading to constitute *kamma* i.e. unwholesome and wholesome. Because of creating *kamma*, living beings get in suffering of the cycle of birth and death. “In what is sensed there must be only what is sensed” and “in what is cognized there must be only what is cognized” belong to mental category. For example, when you have sense of pain, you just cognize that it is pain. You don’t have any feeling such as angry, uncomfortable, and so on. When a person awakens the nature of phenomena as they are, he will destroy all suffering. A practitioner should awaken that sensual pleasures is obstacle of the noble path because its nature is impermanent. At *the Conducive to the Imperturbable (Aneñja-sappaya Sutta)*, Buddha says:

“Bhikkhus, sensual pleasures are impermanent, hollow, false, and deceptive. They are illusory, the prattle of fools. Sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come, sensual perceptions here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come – both alike are *Māra*’s realm, *Māra*’s domain, *Māra*’s bait, *Māra*’s hunting ground. On account of them, these evil unwholesome mental states such as covetousness, ill will, and presumption arise, and they constitute an obstruction to a noble disciple in training here.”⁴⁹

People have often tendency finding and possessing sensual pleasures in the world but they didn’t see their nature is impermanent and suffering. Impermanence is suffering in the nature of life. For example, five aggregates are impermanent so they will be suffering of birth, decay, illness, and death. Because of impermanence, you must accept parting with what we love. These truths make people suffering because when people crave for anything, they will find to possess.

⁴⁸ “*Tasmātiha te, bāhiya, evaṃ sikkhitabbaṃ: ‘diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ bhavissati, sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati, mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati, viññāte viññātamattaṃ bhavissati’ ti. Evañhi te, bāhiya, sikkhitabbaṃ. Yato kho te, bāhiya, diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ bhavissati, sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati, mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati, viññāte viññātamattaṃ bhavissati, tato tvaṃ, bāhiya, na tena; yato tvaṃ, bāhiya, na tena tato tvaṃ, bāhiya, na tattha; yato tvaṃ, bāhiya, na tattha, tato tvaṃ, bāhiya, nevidha na hurāṃ na ubhayamantarena. Esevanto dukkhassā” ti.)* (*Udāna* 1.10: *Bāhiyasuttaṃ*)

⁴⁹ *Aniccā bhikkhave, kāmā tucchā mosadhammā. Māyākatametaṃ bhikkhave, bālalāpanaṃ. Ye ca diṭṭhadhammikā kāmā, ye ca samparāyikā kāmā, yā ca diṭṭhadhammikā kāmasaññā, yā ca samparāyikā kāmasaññā, ubhayametaṃ mārādheyyaṃ, mārassesavisayo, marassesanivāpo, mārassesagocarō. Eitthete pāpakā akusalā mānasā abhijjhāpi byāpādāpi sārambhāpi saṃvattanti. Teva ariyasāvakaṃ idhamanusikkhato antarāyāya sambhavanti.*⁴⁹ (MN 106) Also see Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans., p. 869.

If it lost, they would be suffering. Understanding the nature of impermanence of phenomena by understanding the principle of dependent origination, it is the key help people open the deathlessness door that is *nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* is the highest meaning of emptiness. The relationship between impermanence and emptiness is as stated at SN 22.102:

“Bhikkhus, when the perception of impermanence is developed and cultivated, it eliminates all sensual lust, it eliminates all lust for existence, it eliminates all ignorance, it uproots all conceit ‘I am.’”⁵⁰

How to develop and cultivate the perception of impermanence? At SN 22.102, Buddha taught:

“Such is form, such its origin, such its passing away; such is feeling ... such is perception ... such are volitional formations ... such is consciousness, such its origin, such its passing away: that is how the perception of impermanence is developed and cultivated so that it eliminates all sensual lust, eliminates all lust for existence, eliminates all ignorance, and uproots all conceit ‘I am’.”⁵¹

Form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness are the factors of the five aggregates that constitute all phenomena (*dharma*) includes person and universe. Form or the form group has two kinds, namely, internal forms and external forms. The internal forms are the great elements⁵² which constitute a person. The external forms are the four great elements which constitute the universe. Feeling or the feeling group is the feelings of suffering (*dukkha*), happiness (*sukha*), and so on. Perception or the perception group is the process of analysis and summarization to be concept and give a name for object. Volitional formations or the group of volitional formations constitute *karma* (actions), namely, wholesome actions, unwholesome actions, and neutral actions. Consciousness or the consciousness group is identification. For example, eye-consciousness identifies colour, ear-consciousness identifies sounds, and so forth. When a practitioner has understood the arising and cessation of the five aggregates or person and the world, he knew the impermanence of phenomena. When he has understood impermanence, he eliminated all sensual lust, eliminated all lust for existence, eliminated all ignorance, and uprooted all conceit ‘I am’. At that time, he attained *nibbāna* (elimination all suffering, or emptiness).

1.3.2 Non-self (*anattā*)

The doctrine of *anattā* (non-self) is different from any philosophical theory or faith. At the Buddha’s time, sixty-two theory of Indian religion were among mankind clinging of self and possession of self sinking deeply into the cycle of births and deaths. At that time, Buddha spoke of the word ‘non-self’: “This is not mine, this is not I, this is not myself.”⁵³ He had often repeated the teaching of *anattā* (non-self) of *dhammas* (elements) in his discourses.⁵⁴ The term *anattā*

⁵⁰ *Perception of Impermanence*, SN 22. 102 <<http://suttacentral.net/en/sn22.102>> web, November 22nd, 2014.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *P. cattāro mahābhūtāni*, it is earth element, water element, air or wind element, and fire element.

⁵³ ‘*Netam mama, nesohamasmi, na me so attā’ti* (SN 22.59).

⁵⁴ SN 35.1, 35.2, 35.3, 35.4, 35.5, etc.

means non-self, non-ego, and soul-less. It is a specific characteristic of Buddhist teaching, explained through the principle of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*).⁵⁵

To understand “I” and “Mind”, a practitioner should go to the forest or the root of a tree or empty hut, considers thus: “This is void of a self or of what belongs to a self.”⁵⁶ And a noble disciple considers thus: “I am not anything belonging to anyone anywhere, nor is there anything belonging to me in anyone, anywhere.”⁵⁷ All things (*dharmas*) such as the six organs,⁵⁸ the six objects,⁵⁹ six consciousnesses,⁶⁰ the twelve entrances,⁶¹ the eighteen elements,⁶² and so on are empty of self and of what belongs to self. Therefore, the world is empty. At The *Suññaloka-sutta*, “empty is the world” explained as below:

“Then the Venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One ... and said to him: Venerable sir, it is said, ‘Empty is the world, Empty is the world.’ In what way, venerable sir, is it said, ‘Empty is the world’?”

It is, Ānanda, because it is empty of self and of what belongs to self that it is said, ‘Empty is the world.’ And what is empty of self and of what belongs to self? The eye, Ānanda, is empty of self and of what belongs to self. Forms are empty of self and of what belongs to self. Eye-consciousness is empty of self and of what belongs to self. Eye-contact is empty of self and of what belongs to self.... Whatever feeling arises with mind-contact as condition – whether pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant – that too is empty of self and of what belongs to self.

It is, Ānanda, because it is empty of self and of what belongs to self that it is said, ‘Empty is the World’.⁶³

Buddhaghōṣa said about the relationship between emptiness (*suññatā*) and non-self (*anattā*) that: “Contemplating on emptiness and contemplating on non-self are the same meaning, they are only different on the name.” Bhikkhu Buddhādāsa explained that the term ‘*suñña*’ or ‘*suñnatā*’ points to two things or two characteristics (*lakkaṇa*). The first meaning of emptiness (*suñnatā*) refers to the characteristic or fundamental nature of whole things, namely, all things that include

⁵⁵ See *Sankhittadhamma sutta* (SN 35.86).

⁵⁶ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans., p. 871.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ The six organs are eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

⁵⁹ Six objects are forms, sounds, odors, flavors, tangible objects, and mental phenomena.

⁶⁰ The six consciousnesses are sight consciousness, hearing consciousness, scent consciousness, taste consciousness, body consciousness, and mind consciousness.

⁶¹ The twelve entrances include six organs and six objects.

⁶² The eighteen elements are six organs, six objects, and six consciousness.

⁶³ *Atha kho āyasmā ānando ... pe ... bhagavantam etadavoca: “suñño loko, suñño loko’ti, bhante, vuccati. Kittāvatā nu kho, bhante, suñño lokoti vuccatī”ti? “Yasmā ca kho, ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā tasmā suñño lokoti vuccati. Kiñca, ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā? Cakkhu kho, ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā. Rūpā suññā attena vā attaniyena vā, cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā, cakkhusamphasso suñño attena vā attaniyena vā ... pe ... yampidaṃ manosamphassapaccayā uppajjati vedayitaṃ sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkhamasukhaṃ vā tampi suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā. Yasmā ca kho, ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā, tasmā suñño lokoti vuccatī”ti.* (SN 35.85)

physical things (*rūpadhamma*) and mental things (*nāmadhamma*) are empty. Secondly, emptiness (*suññatā*) points to the quality of the mind when it does not cling to anything. The character of mind when it isn't clinging to anything called 'emptiness' (*suññatā*).⁶⁴

Moreover, Bhikkhu Buddhādāsa affirms that all the Buddha's teachings are nothing more than emptiness. Any teaching unconnected with the subject of emptiness is not the speech of the Tathāgata.⁶⁵ The Buddha's words are short, spare, and straight to the point that is emptiness (*suññatā*). The essence of Buddha's teaching is empty nature of suffering (*dukkha*) and the defilements (*kilesa*), which are the causes of *dukkha*.⁶⁶ In the *Suttanipāta* 1125, Buddha taught: "Be mindful all the time, and discarding the delusion of self, perceive the world as being void. By so perceiving one should escape Death (*Mara*). One who so perceives the world cannot be seen by Death (*Mara*)."⁶⁷

This Buddha's word shows anyone who wants to be without problems dealing with *dukkha* and *Mara* (death), he must look on all things, as they truly are. The whole things are empty because they are constituted from dependent origination. Because of constituted dependent origination, they are non-self.

In summary, all things, which include physical things and mental things, are established relying upon dependent origination, their existent states contain characters of *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*, and their nature is called *suññatā* (emptiness). And Buddha often teaches his disciples on *paṭiccasamuppāda*, *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* than the teaching of *suññatā*. Because the doctrine of *suññatā* is difficult to understand, it needs to see through doctrine of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, or *anicca*, or *dukkha* or *anatta*. Buddha said: "Yo paṭiccasuppādaṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati; yo dhammaṃ passati so paṭiccasuppāda passati'ti."⁶⁸ It means seeing things establish due to dependent origination. And manifestations of things are *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*. Levels of enlightenment are *suññatā* so a bhikkhu himself must attain truth by his personal experience as "one who drinks cool or warm water, he knows himself" (如人飲水,冷暖自知).

Through Buddha's teachings on *suññatā* in *Pāli Nikāyas*, the notion of *suññatā* can be considered starting from the Buddha's time. *Suññatā* is the way leading to enlightenment and liberation and it is not nihilism. Afterwards, Buddhism has developed over various periods and

⁶⁴ Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, *The Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree, The Buddha's Teaching on Voidness* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1994), pp. 59-60.

⁶⁵ "One who is gone to tathatā (thusness, suchness)" or "One come from tathatā," the term used by the Buddha when referring to himself.

⁶⁶ Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree*, p. 27.

⁶⁷ "Suññato lokam avekkhassu, Mogharāja sadā sato; Attānudiṭṭhim ūhacca, evam maccutaro siyā; Evam lokam avekkhantaṃ, maccurājā na passati'ti. (*Suttanipata* 1125)

⁶⁸ "One who sees Dependent Origination sees *Dhamma*; one who sees the *Dhamma* sees Dependent Origination" (MN 28).

there are many schools. Each school interpreted the doctrine of *suññatā* belonging to their understanding.

1.4 Nothingness (*ākiñcañña*, 無所有)

In terms of absence of any possession, concerning two *Suttas*: *Sunakkhatta Sutta* (MN 105) and *the Conducive to the Imperturbable Sutta* (MN 106).

(1) *Sunakkhatta Sutta* (MN 105) said that intent of living beings' mind has five types as below:

- a. Intent on the five kinds of sensual pleasure
- b. Intent on imperturbable (their mind left the fetter of worldly material things)
- c. Intent on the base of nothingness (their fetter of the imperturbable has been split)
- d. Intent on the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (their fetter of the base of nothingness has been rejected)
- e. Intent on *Nibbāna* (their fetter of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception has been cut off)

These five types are intent of worldly people's mind and they are also the advanced levels of a practitioner who regards to *nibbāna* that is extreme goal. When their mind has intent on the first four factors, they could not come out from the defilements (*kleśa*). Thus, the base of absence of any possession, which mind is intent on, in the *Sunakkhatta Sutta* is merely the realm of the concentration of the base of nothingness, no meaning similar to *śūnya* (void).⁶⁹

(2) *The Conducive to the Imperturbable Sutta* (*Āneñjasappāya Sutta*, 不動利益經, MN 106) equivalent to 淨不動道經 (*The Way to the Imperturbable Sutta*, MA 75). In *The Way to the Imperturbable Sutta* (MA 75), Imperturbable divided into five types:

- a. The Way to the Imperturbable (淨不動道)
- b. The Way to the State of *Ākiñcañña* (淨無所有處道)
- c. The Way to non-perception (淨無想道)
- d. The *Nibbāna* without Remainder (*Anupādisesa-nibbāna*, 無餘涅槃)
- e. Noble Liberation (聖解脫)

⁶⁹釋厚觀, <<空之探究講義>> (台北: 財團法人印順文教基金會, 2010), p. 50.

The first three factors (the way to the imperturbable, the way to the state of *ākiñcañña*, and the way to the state of *ākiñcañña*) have name and sequence similar to *Sunakkhatta Sutta* (MN 105). The first three factors are divided seven types following *the Conducive to the Imperturbable Sutta* (MN 106) and *the Way to the Imperturbable Sutta* (MA 75) as below:

<p>1. The Way to the Imperturbable (淨不動道)</p>	<p>(1) The sensual pleasures (欲) and sensual perceptions (欲想) in this life and in lives to come are Māra’s realm (魔境), Māra’s domain (魔餌). With the peace Mind (心淨) attaining to imperturbable, this is the first way directed to the imperturbable (第一淨不動道).</p> <p>(2) The sensual pleasures and sensual perceptions in this life and in lives to come, all material form is the four great elements (四大), and all material form derived from the four great elements (四大所成色) are impermanence (<i>anicca</i>, 無常), suffering (<i>dukkha</i>, 苦), and extinguishing (滅). With the peace Mind (心淨) attaining to imperturbable, this is the second way directed to the imperturbable (第二淨不動道).</p> <p>(3) The sensual pleasures, sensual perceptions, material forms, and perception of forms in this life and in lives to come are impermanence, suffering and extinguishing. With the peace Mind (心淨) attaining to imperturbable, this is the third way directed to the imperturbable (第三淨不動道).</p>
<p>2. The Way to the State of <i>Ākiñcañña</i> (淨無所有處道)</p>	<p>(4) The sensual pleasures, sensual perceptions, material forms, and perception of forms in this life and in lives to come, and perceptions of imperturbable are impermanence, suffering and extinguishing. With the peace Mind (心淨) attaining to the State of <i>Ākiñcañña</i>, this is the first way directed to the State of <i>Ākiñcañña</i> (第一無所有處).</p> <p>(5) This life is void of a self or of what of belongs to a self (我我所空). With the peace Mind (心淨) attaining to the State of <i>Ākiñcañña</i>, this is the second way directed to the State of <i>Ākiñcañña</i> (第二無所有處).</p> <p>(6) I am not anything belonging to anyone anywhere, nor is there anything belonging to me in anyone anywhere (我是非為自，非為他). With the peace Mind (心淨) attaining to the State of <i>Ākiñcañña</i>, this is the third way directed to the State of <i>Ākiñcañña</i> (第三無所有處).</p>
<p>3. The Way to Non-Perception (淨無想定道)</p>	<p>(7) The sensual pleasures, sensual perceptions, material forms, and perception of forms in this life and in lives to come, perceptions of imperturbable, and perceptions of the State of <i>Ākiñcañña</i> are impermanence, suffering and extinguishing. With the peace Mind (心淨) attaining to Non-Perception, this is the third way directed to Non-Perception (淨無想定道).</p>

The sensual pleasures (*kāma*, 欲) are the five sensual pleasures in the realm of desire (*kāmadhātu*), imperturbable is the four jhānas. To pay attention to two points, imperturbable from the fourth jhāna above is the base of nothingness (Ch. 無所有處, Skt. *ākimcanyāyatana*), and the base of non-perception equivalent to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (Ch. 非想非非想處, Skt. *naivasamjñā-nāsamjñāyatana*) but it lacked the base of the infinite space (Ch. 空無邊處, Skt. *ākāśanantyāyatana*) and the base of the boundless of consciousness (Ch. 識無邊處, Skt. *vijñānanantyāyatana*), this is the first.⁷⁰ The base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception in MN but it is called non-perception, the base of non-perception in MA.⁷¹ The signless-mind concentration (p. *animittacetosamādhi*, Ch. 無相心定) is often translated ‘concentration in which all thinking ceases in the desire to enter the non-perception’ (*Avrha*, 無想定) in MA. Three types of concentration, namely, imperturbable, nothingness, and without thought (signless) in this sutta is incorrect with theory of Sarvāstivāda i.e. arising from concentration in which there is complete extinction of sensation and thought (滅盡定) arises imperturbable, signless, and nothingness.⁷² This is the second.

1.5 Three Concentrations (*samādhi*) and Three Types of Contact (*phassa*)

There are three kinds of concentration i.e. emptiness concentration, nothingness concentration, and signless concentration are mentioned in SA 80. A group that gathers these three is called the noble Dharma seal (聖法印). Afterward, dependent on them to develop becoming three interrelated groups: (1) three concentrations: emptiness concentration (*śūnyatā-samādhi*), desireless concentration (Skt. *Apraṇihita-samādhi*), and signless concentration (*animitta-samādhi*), also called three emancipations (Skt. *trīnivimkṣa-mukhāni*, Ch. 三解脫門). (2) Three kinds of touching: imperturbable touching (Skt. *aniñjya-sparśa*), signless touching (Skt. *animitta-sparśa*), and nothingness touching (Skt. *ākīñcanya-sparśa*). (3) Three Dharma seals: all formations are impermanent, all things are non-self, and nibbāna is tranquility.⁷³

In three kinds of concentration i.e. emptiness, nothingness, and signless, nothingness is replaced by desireless. It becomes a group been unanimous in Buddhist circles but comparison between Chinese *Āgamas* and *Pāli Nikāyas* is very different. *Mahākoṭṭhika Sūta* (大拘絺羅經, MA 211) mentioned the four kinds of concentration such as the concentration in which there is

⁷⁰ See Yin shun, <<空之探究>>, p. 68-71: Four Jhānas Eight Concentrations: first jhāna, second jhāna, third jhāna, fourth jhāna, the base of the infinite space, the base of the boundless of consciousness, the base of nothingness, and the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

⁷¹ 《中阿含經》卷 18 〈2 長壽王品〉：「彼一切想是無常法、是苦、是滅，彼於爾時而得無想。彼如是行、如是學，如是修習而廣布，便於處得心淨，於處得心淨已，比丘者或於此得入無想，或以慧為解。彼於後時，身壞命終，因本意故，必至無想處。是謂說淨無想道。」(CBETA, T01, no. 26, p. 543, a4-9).

⁷² 釋厚觀, <<空之探究講義>> (台北: 財團法人印順文教基金會, 2010), pp. 52-3.

⁷³ 釋厚觀, p. 97.

complete extinction of sensation and thought, the concentration in which all thinking ceases in the desire to enter Non-perception Heaven (*Avrha*, 無想天), imperturbable concentration, and nothingness concentration; and three kinds of touching such as emptiness, nothingness, and signless. These touching are different with emptiness, desireless, and signless about letters and meaning. Connecting to this sutta, *Mahāvedalla Sutta* (MN 43) mentioned on the cessation of perception and feeling concentration (滅受想定) and four kinds of deliverance of mind (心解脫) i.e. the signless deliverance of mind, the immeasurable deliverance of mind, the nothingness deliverance of mind, and the voidness deliverance of mind. The voidness deliverance of mind means ‘void of a self or of what belongs to a self’.⁷⁴ According to *Pāli Nikāyas*, SN 43.4, DN 33, and AN 3.163 there are three kinds of *samādhi* (concentrations) that are emptiness concentration (*suññato samādhi*, 空三昧), signless concentration (*animitto samādhi*, 無相三昧), and aimless concentration (*appaṇihito samādhi*, 無向三昧). It is the path leading to the unconditioned.⁷⁵ Besides, the three concentrations are named at SA 80, namely, emptiness concentration, signless concentration and the absence of any possession concentration (無所有三昧). In SA 80, ‘aimless concentration’ is replaced by ‘the nothingness concentration’.

Three Concentrations		Three Contacts	
SA 80	SN 43.4, DN 33	MA 211	MN 44
emptiness	emptiness	immovability	emptiness
Nothingness	aimless	nothingness	signless
Signless	signless	signless	aimless

In brief, emptiness is laid in impermanence and non-self of the world, signless is symbol of *nibbāna*, and desireless is boring and abandoning the world to turn to *nibbāna*. Three kinds of contact and three doors of liberation were established thus.⁷⁶ This table compares three concentrations and three types of contact in Chinese *Āgamas* and *Pāli Nikāyas*.

1.6 Conclusion

The notion of emptiness was found in the Buddha's discourses. Nagārjuna was skillful in use the teachings of Buddha to create doctrine of emptiness but it is not far away the essence of the Buddha's teaching.

⁷⁴ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans., p. 394.

⁷⁵ “Kamato ca, bhikkhave, asaṅkhatagāmiṃ maggo? Suññato samādhi, animitto samādhi, appaṇihito samādhi - ayam vuccati, bhikkhave, asaṅkhatagāmiṃ maggo ...pe...” (SN 43.4)

⁷⁶ 釋厚觀, p. 100.