

THE BUDDHISM DISCERNIBLE IN SCIENCE : SOME FUNDAMENTAL PARALLELS SEEN IN RETROSPECT*

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Abstract:

The material presented here focuses attention on some interesting and significant correspondences or parallels between certain concepts in chemical bonding and Buddhism. The initial idea pertaining to such parallelisms arose quite spontaneously and suddenly, without any intentional contemplation, during a lecture on ionic bonding given to the First Year Science students of the University of Kelaniya. The three tendencies of attraction repulsion and stabilization encountered in the theoretical treatment of bonding in an ionic crystal lattice are closely parallel to 'kamatanha, bhavatanha, vibhavanha' ('the desire for sensual pleasures, the desire for existence, the desire for non-existence'). These, according to the very first sermon delivered by The Buddha, are the causative factors in the coming into existence of a being. The first words in the relevant sutra ('Dhamma Chakka Pavattana Sutta') are quite comparable with the chemist's approach of avoiding both the ionic bonding extreme and the covalent bonding extreme in attempting to understand properly the properties of chemical substances. The pertinent Pali phrase is 'dve me bhikkhve anta pabbajitena na sevitabba'. (Monks, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth as a wanderer.)

In a crystal of sodium chloride or a molecule of hydrogen, the three tendencies of attraction, repulsion and stabilization are completely eliminated when the constituents of the crystal or the molecule are all separated by an infinite distance. Once such a state is reached, the sodium chloride crystal or the molecule of hydrogen will never come into existence again. In the sutra under consideration. The Buddha states of himself as 'nattidani punabbhavo' ('no more re-existence') consequential to the complete elimination of 'kamatanha, bhavatanha, vibhavanha'.

* N.B. The original article is in Sinhala. This English version has been produced by the author so that, as far as possible, it is in exact correspondence with the Sinhala original. As such, the English version necessarily contains several very long sentences and some awkward repetitions and constructions.