

## **Replicators**<sup>1</sup>

We are all living beings, but most of us are still deep in slumber, and would not wake up despite the calls to wake up. Many others are sleepwalking, doing things without being ever involved, and don't even know it. Then there are many of us who go through our daily routine, wait for each routine to end so that we might feed ourselves, or seriously pursue some frivolity. Then we hope to find some rest, all of which we seem never to have enough of.

It is like as if some “nanites” (intelligent microscopic robots that self-replicate) are flooding our body and mind. In the Stargate series (1997-2007), the “nanites” are tiny self-replicating robots built by the Ancients to destroy the vampire-like Wraiths. To protect themselves the Ancients programmed the nanites from harming anyone with Ancient Technology Activation (ATA) gene. In time, however, the nanites evolved to take human form, becoming Asurans, superior humans in every way, except that they are heartless thinking machines!

These nanites are, for our purpose here, an image for the cycles within cycles of thinking that we get caught up in. In the suttas, this is known as “thought proliferation” (*papañca*).<sup>2</sup> This is a key characteristic of the unawakened mind, it is a series of thought explosions, and we run about excitedly to find out what is going on or to gawk at the on-going destruction.

The *papañca* nanites are tiny talkative self-replicating robots in our heads, talkative voices we hear inside us. The more we listen to them, the more they replicate themselves. So we see ourselves become bigger, or our problems more “real.” Very soon, these nanites take over our whole body, speech and mind. We then become Asuras,<sup>3</sup> the “fallen gods” of Buddhist mythology. We become viciously vindictive beings who will do anything to get what we want, use anyone for what they can give us (power, money, pleasure), and even destroy them in the process, and we care not a hoot about it.

To awaken as truly free beings, we need to stop *papañca*; we must end these thought explosions. How do we stop these mental bombs? Actually, we cannot, if we do not understand our own minds. Although we may not be able to stop thinking, we do not have to follow the thoughts. We should see them for what they really are: moments of memories and ideas that come and go, rise and fall.

It's like watching the traffic and we want to cross the road. We watch the flow of passing vehicles without paying attention to the individual vehicles. When we notice a safe window in the flow, we at once and mindfully cross safely to the other side.

So we simply observe our thoughts without commenting on them or following them. Soon, we will notice there are gaps in between the thoughts. These are very peaceful spaces which we should enjoy, as they empower us to lessen the thoughts and increase the joy.

In simple terms, the more peaceful joy we cultivate within, the closer we are to inner peace, the clearer our minds become. We can now see the path more clearly and the goal appears to us in the distance. But the vision is inspiring and compelling. We only want to move on. As we move, we notice how impermanent our path and journey are, everything passing by us and we are ourselves moving.

Then we realize we are but moving parts seeking the wholesome. None of these parts exist in themselves, which means that we have no abiding self: we can change and need to change. As we realize this, our self-doubt lessens and our conviction to spiritual growth is strengthened. As we grow stronger, the more we look within ourselves for strength and succour. We become less superstitious and more self-reliant. Finally,

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<sup>1</sup> This reflection is based on the conclusion of **Silence and the Buddha**, SD 44.1 (6.4): [link](#).

<sup>2</sup> On *papañca*, see **Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18), SD 6.14 (2): [link](#).

<sup>3</sup> Or “Asurans” in the Stargate series.

when these three fetters of self-identity, superstition and doubt are broken, we are well on the way to hear the sweet silence of awakening.<sup>4</sup>

What does it mean to break these three fetters? The fetter of “self-identity” here refers to our identifying with our physical body. We hold the wrong view that we *are* our body, the way we look (or think we look), the way we dress (hoping to impress others), our manner of speech, and so on.

It is trendy here, for example, for some young men, especially before going into national service or soon after, to go out of the way to build up their bodies, and enter some “manhunt” contests to show off our physical looks and sexuality. However, for many of us, a few years later, even sooner, suddenly realize how silly we have been to publicly expose ourselves for others to gawk at. We don’t even know what kind of people at goggling at our most private selves!

Or worse, what kind of impression are we giving others (with our half-dressed pictures online) when we look for jobs or meet others in more open society. Then, as we mature, we realize that we are not just a body, we are also mind. If we can connect with others on a more mental or emotional level, it works even better, as we get to know others (and ourselves) in more truly and really enriching ways.

The good thing is that, to that level, we realize that what we had done was merely a phase in our youth to connect with others or the world, or perhaps just to feel better about ourselves. But we are not defined by others; if we do, then we become emotionally dependent of others.

We should not allow others to define us, simply because we must discover ourselves for ourselves, that is, we should work to discover our own potential for goodness and happiness. It is a matter of time, we will discover that there is something good and beautiful in us that is unique. This is what we should give back to society and the world.

The fetter of “superstition” is the belief that our problems have only one cause, and that the cause comes from outside of us. For example, if we cannot find a good job or is unable to keep one, we think that we are at fault. This is like saying that “oil caused the fire.” But oil alone will not catch fire. If the temperature is too low or there is no oxygen, even if we light a match to it, it will not burn (the match itself would not light).

Many conditions work together to bring about our problems. Then we must understand what is a “problem.” It is really how we think. That is why, for some it is a problem, for others it is not. So we need to examine how we think. Then we are likely to discover that we tend to look for only “one thing” or “one person” to blame instead of looking at the various conditions that brought the “problem” about. Look at the bigger picture.

The fetter of “doubt” is what holds us back because we do not really know our own goodness and potential. We keep comparing ourselves with others. Or more exactly, we often think that what we have defines us. So we see others having “better” things or “more” things, and we think that they are better off. However, if we care to look closely at such people, we will always (and I mean always) we will see cracks and rots in their own lives.

If what we have defines us, then what are we when lose them? For, what we have, can and will be lost somehow. What we have is only “ours” when we use or share them. Then, we really are what we have; we have really enjoyed life. Then we are really at peace with ourselves. Then, we not only “have” a life, we are living life.

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<sup>4</sup> See **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8: [link](#).