

The background of the cover is a photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sun is a bright yellow orb in the center, surrounded by soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, pink, and purple. The ocean is a deep blue, and the horizon is visible. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of palm trees are visible on the left and right sides.

Nibbāna - The Mind Stilled

Volume - IV

Bhikkhu K. Nāṇananda

Nibbāna -

The Mind Stilled

Volume IV

(The *Nibbāna* Sermons 16 - 20)

by venerable K. Ñāṇananda Bhikkhu

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**Dedicated to
my Upajjhāya
the late venerable
Mātara Sri Ñāṇārāma Mahāthera
of Meetirigala Nissarana Vanaya
Sri Lanka**

‘The Gift of Dhamma excels all other gifts’

We acknowledge with gratitude the generous support received from readers and well wishers which enabled us to bring out this volume as a gift-of-Dhamma for free distribution. We are also thankful to Mr. C. Jayasoma and his staff of the Quality Printers for their share in preserving the quality of the gift. May the merit accrued by this ‘Dhamma dāna’ redound to their well being here & here after! May it conduce to their attainment of the Bliss Supreme - Nibbāna!

- The Settlor

D.G.M.B.

March 2006 (B.E. 2549)

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A	<i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i>
As	<i>Atthasālinī</i> (comy on <i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī</i>)
It	<i>Itivuttaka</i>
Ud	<i>Udāna</i>
Ud-a	<i>Paramatthadīpanī</i> (comy on Ud)
Ja	<i>Jātaka</i>
Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
Th-a	<i>Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā</i>
Thī	<i>Therīgāthā</i>
D	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
Dhp-a	<i>Dhammapada aṭṭhakathā</i>
Nett	<i>Nettipparakaṇa</i>
Nid I	<i>Mahāniddeśa</i>
Nid II	<i>Cūḷaniddeśa</i>
Paṭis	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
Peṭ	<i>Peṭakopadesa</i>
Pj I	<i>Paramatthajotikā</i> (comy on Khp)
Pj II	<i>Paramatthajotikā</i> (comy on Sn)
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i> (comy on M)
M	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
Mil	<i>Milindapañha</i>
Mp	<i>Manorathapūraṇī</i> (comy on A)
Vibh-a	<i>Sammohavinodanī</i> (comy on Vibh)
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>
S	<i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Suttanipāta</i>
Spk	<i>Sāratthappakāsinī</i> (comy on S)
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i> (comy on D)

(Unless otherwise specified, references are given according to volume and page number of the PTS edition, and in the case of Dhp, Sn, Th and Thī according to the verse number of the PTS edition)

About the author. . . .

The venerable author of this compendium of sermons on Nibbāna was born in 1940. He graduated from the University of Peradeniya in 1962 and served as an Assistant Lecturer in Pali at the same University for a brief period. Impelled by a deep understanding of the teachings of the Buddha, he renounced his post in 1967 to enter the Order of Buddhist monks under the name Katukurunde Ñāṇananda in the forest monastic tradition of Sri Lanka.

The 33 sermons on Nibbāna presented in these 7 volumes were originally delivered by the venerable author to his fellow monks at the behest of his revered preceptor, the late venerable Mātara Sri Ñāṇārāma Mahāthera, the chief incumbent of Meetirigala Hermitage (Meetirigala Nissarana Vanaya) and an illustrious exponent of Insight Meditation in Sri Lanka. The meeting of these two eminent disciples of the Buddha in a teacher - pupil relationship for nearly two decades, led to an outstanding seminal contribution to the understanding of Dhamma in its correct perspective.

The reader of these volumes will no doubt find unmistakable evidence of the author's exposure to the methods of critical examination in the understanding of exegetical treatises during his university days. The mode of presentation, however, reveals a penetrative understanding of the deeper aspects of the Buddha's teaching blossoming into a harmonious blend of academic erudition with practical application of that intensive learning process afforded by the contemplative life of a forest monk. Readers familiar with the author's Concept and Reality, Ideal Solitude and The Magic of the Mind will find that the present set of sermons draws upon some of the doctrinal points outlined in those books for deeper analysis. Indeed these sermons exhibit a salutary orientation towards the practical aspects of the Buddha's teachings - a tendency already evident in the author's 'Towards Calm and Insight' and 'Seeing Through.'

The venerable author has also effected a significant change in the methods adopted to reach the seekers of Dhamma in specifying that all publications should be distributed free as 'gifts of Dhamma'. 'Towards Calm and Insight' was the first step in this direction and all publications, which followed upheld this time - honored Buddhist ideal of 'Dhamma - dana'. In order to support this laudable venture, a Buddhist Publication Trust was established under the aegis of the Public Trustee to enable the Buddhist laity and the well - wishers to participate in this worthy cause by way of contributions. This Trust, officially known as 'Dharma Grantha Mudrana Bhāraya' D.G.M.B.) successfully launched the publication of the original Sinhala series entitled 'Nivane Niveema' comprising 11 volumes of 3 sermons each.

Sermons delivered to the local community in the present abode of the venerable author at 'Pahan Kanuwa' in Devalegama (Kegalla District) are also being published by the D.G.M.B. as a separate series, while devotees inspired by these sermons are simultaneously sponsoring the publication of selected single sermons as separate booklets for free distribution. The present series bringing out the English version of 'Nivane Niveema' is being made available also through the Internet under the website <http://www.beyondthenet-net> in keeping with the aspirations of the venerable author to bestow this 'gift - of - Dhamma - that - excels - all - other - gifts' - on a global audience.

* * * * *

About the D.G.M.B.

Rare is the birth of a Buddha in this world. So rare too, is the opportunity to listen to his Dhamma. This conviction has inspired many a devoted Buddhist to cherish the Dhamma as something extremely precious.

The Buddha has declared that salutary friendship (Kalyāna-mittatā) is almost synonymous with his dispensation. The gift-of-Dhamma is the link that moulds the bond of this friendship. Dhamma deserves no price-tag precisely because it is price-less.

It is in this spirit that the D.G.M.B. launched its Dhamma-dāna movement in 1997. Many a parched traveller on the desert path has had a refreshing drink of the nectar of Dhamma free of charge ever since. Many an enthusiastic benevolent heart seized the opportunity to participate in a genuine act of Dhammadāna.

Should we always go for things that sport a price-tag? Is everything that comes free to us, necessarily worthless? What about the air and the sunshine?

It is in point of merit that the gift-of-Dhamma excels all other gifts. Dhamma is the nectar that quenches the insatiate samsāric thirst of beings. The gift of Dhamma is therefore of far greater merit than an ordinary gift of food or drink. For the magnanimous-Dhammadāna is for ever an unailing source of altruistic joy.

All enquiries regarding participation in this Dhammadāna should be addressed to:-

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Introduction

'Nibbāna' - the ultimate goal of the Buddhist, has been variously understood and interpreted in the history of Buddhist thought. One who earnestly takes up the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path for the attainment of this goal, might sometimes be dismayed to find this medley of views confronting him. Right View, as the first factor of that path, has always to be in the vanguard in one's practice. In the interests of this Right View, which one has to progressively 'straighten-up', a need for clarification before purification might sometimes be strongly felt. It was in such a context that the present series of 33 sermons on *Nibbāna* came to be delivered.

The invitation for this series of sermons came from my revered teacher, the late Venerable Matara Sri Nāṇārāma Mahāthera, who was the resident meditation teacher of Meetirigala Nissarana Vanaya Meditation Centre. Under his inspiring patronage these sermons were delivered once every fortnight before the group of resident monks of Nissarana Vanaya, during the period 12.08.1988 - 30.01.1991. The sermons, which were originally circulated on cassettes, began issuing in book-form only in 1997, when the first volume of the Sinhala series titled 'Nivane Niveema' came out, published by the 'Dharma Grantha Mudrana Bhāraya' (Dhamma Publications Trust) set up for the purpose in the Department of the Public Trustee, Sri Lanka. The series is scheduled to comprise 11 volumes, of which so far 9 have come out. The entire series is for free distribution as 'Dhamma dāna' - 'the gift of truth that excels all other gifts'. The sister series to come out in English will comprise 7 volumes of 5 sermons each, which will likewise be strictly for free distribution since Dhamma is price-less.

In these sermons I have attempted to trace the original meaning and significance of the Pali term *Nibbāna* (Skt. *Nirvāna*) based on the evidence from the discourses of the Pali Canon. This led to a detailed analysis and a re-appraisal of some of the most controversial suttas on *Nibbāna* often quoted by scholars in support of their interpretations. The findings, however, were not presented as a dry scholastic exposition of mere academic interest. Since the sermons were addressed to a meditative audience keen on realizing *Nibbāna*, edifying similes, metaphors and illustrations had their place in the discussion. The gamut of 33 sermons afforded sufficient scope for dealing with almost all the salient teachings in Buddhism from a practical point of view.

The present translation, in so far as it is faithful to the original, will reflect the same pragmatic outlook. While the findings could be of interest even to the scholar bent on theorizing on *Nibbāna*, it is hoped that the mode of presentation will have a special appeal for those who are keen on realizing it.

I would like to follow up these few prefatory remarks with due acknowledgements to all those who gave their help and encouragement for bringing out this translation:-

To the venerable Anālayo for transcribing the tape recorded translations and for the meticulous care and patience with which he has provided references to the P.T.S. editions.

To Mr. U. Mapa, presently the Ambassador for Sri Lanka in Myanmar, for his yeoman service in taking the necessary steps to establish the Dhamma Publications Trust in his former capacity as the Public Trustee of Sri Lanka.

To Mr. G.T.Bandara, Director, Royal Institute, 191, Havelock Road, Colombo 5., for taking the lead in this Dhammadana movement with his initial donation and for his devoted services as the 'Settler' of the Trust.

To Mrs. Yukie Sirimane for making available this translation as well as our other publications to the world through the Internet under a special web-site <<http://www.beyondthenet.net>

And last but not least-

To Mr. Hideo Chihashi, Director, Green Hill Meditation Institute, Tokyo, Japan, and to his group of relatives, friends and pupils for their munificence in sponsoring the publication of the first volume of '*Nibbāna - The mind stilled*'.

'Nibbānam paramam sukham'
'Nibbana is the supreme bliss'

-Bhikkhu K. Nāṇananda

Pothgulgala Aranyaya
'Pahankanuwa'
Kandegedara
Devalegama
Sri Lanka
August 2002 (B.E. 2546)

Nibbāna - The Mind Stilled
Volume IV

Sermon - 16

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa*

*Etam santaṃ, etam paṇītaṃ, yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho
sabbūpadhipaṭṭhinissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ.¹*

"This is peaceful, this is excellent, namely the stilling of all preparations, the relinquishment of all assets, the destruction of craving, detachment, cessation, extinction".

With the permission of the Most Venerable Great Preceptor and the assembly of the venerable meditative monks. This is the sixteenth sermon in the series of sermons on *Nibbāna*.

In the course of our discussion of the *Bāhiyasutta* in our last sermon, we drew attention to the wide gap that exists between the sensory experience of the worldling and that experience the *arahant* gets through the eye of wisdom. It is the same gap that obtains between the two terms *papañca* and *nippapañca*. In sensory experience, which is based on worldly expressions, worldly usages and worldly concepts, there is a discrimination between a thing to be grasped and the one who grasps, or, in other words, a subject-object relationship.

There is always a bifurcation, a dichotomy, in the case of sensory perception. If there is a seen, there has to be something seen and the one who sees. That is the logic. In the *Bāhiyasutta*, beginning with 'in the seen there will be just the seen', the Buddha proclaimed to the ascetic *Bāhiya* a brief exhortation on *Dhamma* which enables one to transcend the above narrow view point and attain the state of non-proliferation or *nippapañca*.

There is nothing to see, no one to see, only 'a seen' is there. The cause of all these conceptual proliferation, or *papañca*, in the world is contact. The *arahants* understood this by their insight into the fact that the seen, the heard, the sensed and the cognized are simply so many collocations of conditions which come together for a moment due to contact, only to break up and get dispersed the next moment.

What is called the seen, the heard, the sensed and the cognized are for the worldling so many 'things'. But to the wisdom eye of the *arahants* they appear as mere conglomerations of conditions, dependent on contact, which momentarily come together and then get dispersed. This insight into the dependence on contact, *phassam paṭicca*, is the very essence of

the law of dependent arising, *paṭicca samuppāda*. It is equivalent to seeing the law of dependent arising itself.

In order to transcend the narrow point of view limited to the bases of sense contact or the six sense spheres and realize the state of *Nibbāna* indicated by the words *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ, anantaṃ sabbato pabhaṃ*,² "consciousness which is non-manifestative, endless, lustrous on all sides", one has to see the cessation of contact.

In a certain discourse in the *Mucalindavagga* of the *Udāna*, the Buddha has declared in a verse of uplift that the cessation of contact comes about only by doing away with that which brings about contact. The wandering ascetics of other sects grew jealous of the Buddha and his congregation of monks, because of their own loss of gain and honour, and began to hurl abuse on monks in the village and in the forest. A group of monks came and reported this to the Buddha. The Buddha's response to it was only a paean of joy. *Udāna* actually means a spontaneous utterance of joy, and the verse he uttered was such a one. But it embodied an instruction on *Dhamma* and a norm of *Dhamma* as well.

*Gāme araṇṇe sukhadukkhaphuṭṭho,
nev'attato no parato dahetha,
phusanti phassā upadhiṃ paṭicca,
Nirūpadhiṃ kena phuseyyum phassā.*³

In the first two lines we get an instruction:

"Touched by pain in village or in forest,
Think not in terms of oneself or others"

The reason for it is given in the norm of *Dhamma* which follows:

"Touches can touch one, because of assets,
How can touches touch him, who is asset-less?"

This is all what the Buddha uttered. From this we can glean another aspect of the significance of the terms *sabbūpadhipaṭinissagga*, relinquishment of all assets, and *nirupadhi*, the asset-less, used with reference to *Nibbāna*.

In a number of previous sermons we happened to explain the concept of *upadhi* to some extent, as and when the terms *upadhi* and *paṭinissagga* came up.⁴ To refresh our memory, we may summarize all that now. What is the concept of *upadhi*, or "assets", recognized by the world?

Whatever that bolsters up the ego, be it gold, silver, pearls, gems,

money, house and property, deposits and assets, all these are reckoned as *upadhi* in general. But when considered from the point of view of *Dhamma*, *upadhi* in a deeper sense stands for this fivefold grasping groups, *pañcupādānakkhandha*.

Upādānakkhandha literally means "groups of grasping". Groups of grasping do not necessarily imply that there are material objects to be grasped. But the worldling, overcome by that triple proliferation of cravings, conceits and views, and carried away by the worldly conventions, imagines those groups of grasping as things grasped and deposited. The concept of *upadhi* as assets has arisen as a result of this tendency to think of groups of grasping as things grasped and deposited. So it turns out to be a question of viewpoint.

Cravings, conceits and views prompt one to look upon all what one has grasped so far and what one hopes to grasp in the future as things one is grasping right now. One thinks of them as things deposited in a safe. The worldlings are holding on to such a mass of assets.

Nibbāna is the relinquishment of all such assets, accumulated in the mind. In order to relinquish these assets there must be some kind of understanding - an enlightenment. The vanity of all these assets has to be seen through by the light of wisdom. It is only by seeing their vanity that the assets are relinquished. In fact it is not so much a deliberate giving up of assets, as a sequential liquidation.

In a previous sermon we gave an illustration of the situation that precipitates relinquishment. Let us bring it up again. We found the cinema quite helpful as an illustration. In explaining the phenomenon of relinquishment of assets with reference to the cinema, we described how the assets accumulated in the minds of the audience, that is, the assets proper to the cinema world woven around the story that is filmed, are automatically abandoned when the cinema hall gets lit up.⁵ Then one understands the illusory nature of what has been going on. It is that understanding, that enlightenment, which precipitates the giving up or relinquishment of assets.

To go a step further in this illustration, when lights came on the *saṅkhāras* or preparations pertaining to the film show got exposed for what they are. In fact, *saṅkhāra* is a word that has associations with the dramatic tradition in its relation to the acting of actors and actresses down to their make-up, which is so artificial and spurious.

When the cinema hall gets lit up all of a sudden, one who has been enjoying the film show is momentarily thrown out of the cinema world, because those preparations are pacified or nullified, *sabba saṅkhārasamatho*. As a consequence of it, the heap of experiences which he had hitherto regarded as real and genuine, lose their sanction. Those assets get liquidated or relinquished, *sabbūpadhipaṭinissagga*. In their absence, that craving necessary for the appreciation or enjoyment of the scenes to come, becomes extinct, *taṇhakkhayo*. When craving is gone, the floridity of the scenes to come also fades away, *virāga*. With that fading away or decolouration, the film show ceases for the person concerned, *nirodha*, though technically the movie is going on. Because of that cessation all the fires of defilements proper to the cinema world, with which he was burning, get extinguished, *Nibbāna*.

So here we have the full gamut of the cinema simile as an illustration for *Nibbāna*. This kind of awakening in the cinema world gives us a clue to the fact that the assets, *upadhi*, are relinquished through an understanding born of enlightenment in the light of wisdom. This in fact is something that should be deeply ingrained in our minds. Therefore we shall endeavour to give some more illustrations to that effect.

In our everyday life, too, we sometimes see and hear of instances where assets get relinquished due to understanding. Someone heaps up a huge bundle of currency notes of the highest denomination, deposits it in his safe and keeps watch and ward over it day and night. One fine morning he wakes up to hear that for some reason or other that currency note has been fully devalued by law the previous night. How does he look upon the wads of notes in his safe now? For him, it is now a mere heap of papers. The craving, conceit and view he had earlier in regard to the notes are completely gone. The bank notes are no longer valid. He might as well make a bonfire of it. So this is some sort of relinquishment of assets in the world, however temporary it may be.

Another person gets a sudden transfer and is getting ready to leave for his new station. His immovable assets he is forced to leave behind, but his movable assets he hurriedly gathers up to take with him. The vehicle has already come and is tooting impatiently, signalling delay. It is well past time, but his 'preparations' are not finished. Time-pressed, in hot haste, he is running here and there. At last, when he can delay no longer, he grabs the utmost he can take and darts to the doorstep. Just then, he wakes up. It

was only a dream! The transfer came in a dream. No real vehicle, no real preparation, only a panting for nothing!

So here we have an 'awakening' peculiar to the dream world. This is an instance of letting go of assets connected with a dream. We go through such experiences quite often. Of course, we take it for granted that when we pass from the dream world to the real world, the assets proper to the dream world drop off. But are we sure that in leaving the dream world we are entering a real world? Is awakening from a dream a true awakening when considered from the point of view of the *Dhamma*? Do we actually open our eyes, when we awaken from a dream?

Terms like *Buddha*, *bodhi* and *sambodhi* convey the sense of awakening as well as understanding. Sometimes in the *Dhamma* the emphasis is on the sense of awakening. Here then is a kind of awakening.

Expressions like *dharmacakkhu*, "Dhamma-eye", *paññācakkhu*, "Wisdom-eye", and *cakkhuṃ udapādi*, "the eye arose", bespeak of an arising of some sort of an eye. We already have eyes, but an eye is said to arise. All this goes to show that in the context of *Nibbāna*, where we are concerned with the deeper aspects of the *Dhamma*, the awakening from a dream is not a true awakening. It is only a passage from one dream world to another.

But let us see how the concept of *upadhi*, or assets, goes deeper. What lies before us is the dream of *saṃsāra*. In order to awaken from this dream, we have to understand somehow the vanity of all assets connected with the dream that is *saṃsāra*. The fact that this understanding also comes through some illumination we have already explained the other day in our discussion of the paean of joy at the end of the *Bāhiyasutta*.⁶ As we pointed out then, the world of the six sense-bases which the worldlings regard as 'their world', when examined against the background of that *Udāna* verse reveals itself to be no more than six narrow beams of light, appearing through a solidly thick curtain, namely the darkness of delusion.

We happened to mention the other day that the sun, the moon and the stars shine precisely because of the presence of darkness. In the non-manifestative consciousness which is infinite and lustrous all round, *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ, anantaṃ sabbato pabhaṃ*, sun, moon and stars are not manifest, because there is absolutely no darkness for them to shine forth. Even the formless, which is the penumbra of form, disappears in that penetrative lustre of wisdom.

So the relinquishment of all assets, *Nibbāna*, is not like the other temporary awakenings already mentioned. Those three instances of awakening are of a temporary nature. The awakening in the cinema world is extremely short lived. That film fan, although he became disenchanted with the scenes because of the unexpected sudden illumination of the cinema hall, when it is dark again, influxes of sensuality, existence and ignorance so overwhelm him that he gets engrossed in the cinema world as before.

The case of the devalued currency note is also like that. Though the cravings, conceits and views about the devalued note are gone, one still runs after notes that are valid. As for the awakening from a dream, we all know that it is temporary. When again we go to sleep, we have dreams.

But the awakening in *Nibbāna* is not of such a temporary character. Why? Because all the influxes that lead one into the *samsāric* slumber with its dreams of recurrent births are made extinct in the light of that perfect knowledge of realization. That is why the term *āsavakkhaya*, extinction of influxes, is used in the discourses as an epithet of *Nibbāna*. The *arahants* accomplish this feat in the concentration on the fruit of *arahant-hood*, *arahattaphalasamādhī*.

Though there are enough instances of references to this *arahattaphalasamādhī* in the discourses, they are very often interpreted differently. As we have already seen in the context of that verse of uplift in the *Bāhiyasutta*, some discourses alluding to the nature of an *arahant's* mind have been misinterpreted, so much so that there is a lot of confusion in regard to the concept of *Nibbāna*. As a matter of fact, that concentration peculiar to an *arahant* is of an extraordinary type. It baffles the worldling's powers of understanding. This can well be inferred from the following verse of the *Ratanasutta*:

*Yaṃ Buddhaseṭṭho parivaṇṇayā sucim,
samādhim ānantarikaññam āhu,
samādhinā tena samo na vijjati,
idampi Dhamme ratanaṃ pañītaṃ,
etena saccena suvatthi hotu.*⁷

"That pure concentration, which the Supremely Awakened One extolled,
That concentration which the Noble Ones call 'immediate' (*ānantarika*),

There is no concentration comparable to it,
This is the excellent jewel nature of the *Dhamma*,
By the power of this truth may there be well-being."

This incomparable and extraordinary concentration has given rise to many problems concerning the concept of *Nibbāna*. The extraordinariness of this concentration of the *arahant* is to some extent connected with the term *ānantarika*, referred to above. Now let us turn our attention to the significance of this term.

The verse says that the concentration of the *arahant* is also known as *ānantarika*. The term *ānantarika* is suggestive of an extraordinary aspect of the realization of *Nibbāna*. Immediately after the extinction of the defilements through the knowledge of the path of *arahant-hood* one realizes *Nibbāna*, the cessation of existence or the cessation of the six sense-bases. As we mentioned earlier, it is as if the results are out as soon as one has written for an examination.⁸ One need not wait for the results. Realization is immediate.

There is a special term to denote this experience of realization, namely, *aññā*. It is a highly significant term, derived from *ājānāti*, "to know fully". *Aññā* is "full comprehension".

The concentration of the fruit of *arahant-hood* is also called *aññāphalasamādhī* and *aññāvimokkha*. *Aññā* carries with it a high degree of importance. We come across in the *Sutta* terminology a number of terms derived from the root *ñā*, "to know", namely *saññā*, *viññāṇa*, *paññā*, *ñāṇa*, *abhiññā*, *pariññā*, *aññā*. *Saññā* is "perception", *viññāṇa* is, radically, "discriminative knowledge", *paññā* is "distinctive knowledge", *ñāṇa* is "knowledge" as such, *abhiññā* is "specialized knowledge", *pariññā* is "comprehensive knowledge", *aññā* is that "final knowledge" of certitude through realization. The high degree of importance attached to *aññā* is revealed by the following two verses in the *Itivuttaka*:

*Sekhassa sikkhamānassa
ujumaggānusārino
khayasmim paṭhamaṃ ñāṇaṃ
tato aññā anantarā.
Tato aññā vimuttassa,
ñāṇaṃ ve hoti tādīno
akuppā me vimuttīti
bhavasamyojanakkhaye.*⁹

"To the disciple in higher training, as he fares along
Training according to the straight path,
There arises first the knowledge of extinction,
And then immediately the final knowledge of certitude.

And to that steadfast such-like-one,
Thus released by final knowledge of certitude,
There arises the thought: 'Unshakeable is my deliverance',
Upon the destruction of fetters of existence."

It is evident from these two verses that the realization referred to is in many ways final and complete. In point of fact, these two verses have been presented by the Buddha in this context by way of defining three things relevant to the realization of *Nibbāna*. These three are called faculties, *indriya*. They are:

- 1) *anaññātaññāssāmī'indriya*
- 2) *aññindriya*
- 3) *aññātāvindriya*

The term *aññā* is implicit even in the faculty called *anaññātaññāssāmī'indriya*. *Anaññātaññāssāmī* means "I shall know what has not been fully known". This is the definition of what in the verse is referred to as *khayasmim paṭhamam ñāṇam*, "first there is the knowledge of extinction". The knowledge of the extinction of the defilements is called *anaññātaññāssāmī'indriya* in this context. The words *tato aññā anantarā*, "and then immediately the final knowledge of certitude", refer to that faculty of final knowledge, or *aññindriya*. The knowledge that prompts the conviction "unshakeable is my deliverance" is the knowledge and vision of deliverance, which is defined as *aññātāvindriya*. It refers to one who is endowed with the final knowledge of certitude.

The difference between *aññindriya* and *aññātāvindriya* is a subtle one. For instance, the expression *bhuttāvī pavārito*, one has finished eating and made a sign of refusal, decisively shows that one has had one's fill.¹⁰ Similarly, it is that *aññātāvindriya* (note the past active participle), which prompts the words "unshakeable is my deliverance", *akuppā me vimutti*.¹¹ The knowledge and vision of deliverance is reassuring to that extent.

As the above quoted verse from the *Ratanasutta* makes it clear, this unique and extraordinary concentration has been extolled by the Buddha

in various discourses. But for some reason or other, the commentators have simply glossed over references to it, though they sometimes expatiate on a particle of mere grammatical interest. Let us now take up for comment a few such discourses.

In the section of the Elevens in the *Ānguttara Nikāya* there comes a discourse called *Sandhasutta*. There the Buddha gives to Venerable *Sandha* a description of a level of concentration characteristic of an excellent thoroughbred of a man. It is a strange type of concentration. One who has that concentration is described as follows:

So neva paṭhavim nissāya jhāyati, na āpam nissāya jhāyati, na tejam nissāya jhāyati, na vāyam nissāya jhāyati, na ākāsañāncāyatanam nissāya jhāyati, na viññāñāncāyatanam nissāya jhāyati, na ākiñcaññāyatanam nissāya jhāyati, na nevasaññānāsaññāyatanam nissāya jhāyati, na idhalokam nissāya jhāyati, na paralokam nissāya jhāyati, yam p'idaṃ diṭṭham sutam mutam viññātam pattam pariyesitam anuvicaritam manasā, tam pi nissāya na jhāyati, jhāyati ca pana.

Evaṃ jhāyim ca pana, Sandha, bhadraṃ purisājānīyaṃ sa-indā devā sabrahmakā sapajapatikā ārakā 'va namassanti:

*Namo te purisajāñña,
namo te purisuttama,
yassa te nābhijānāma,
yampi nissāya jhāyasi.*¹²

In this discourse, the Buddha gives, as an illustration, the musing of a thoroughbred of a horse, which we shall drop for brevity's sake. The musing of an excellent thoroughbred of a man is described as follows:

"He muses not dependent on earth, water, fire, air, the sphere of infinite space, the sphere of infinite consciousness, the sphere of nothingness, the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, he muses not dependent on this world or on the world beyond, whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, traversed by the mind, dependent on all that he muses not - and yet he does muse.

Moreover, *Sandha*, to him thus musing the *devas* with *Indra*, with *Brahmā* and with *Pajāpati* even from afar bow down, saying:

'Homage to you, O thoroughbred of a man,
Homage to you, O most excellent of men,
For what it is on which you go on musing,
We are at a loss to comprehend."

Though all possible objects of concentration are negated, the Buddha affirms that he does muse. Venerable *Sandha*, out of curiosity inquires: "But then how, Lord, does that thoroughbred of a man muse?" The Buddha explains that while in that state of concentration, the perception of earth in earth, for instance, is gone for him, *pathaviyā pathavīsaññā vibhūtā hoti*. So also in the case of other objects of the senses, such as water, fire, air, down to whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after and traversed by the mind.

The verb *vibhūtā*, repeatedly used in this connection, is however differently interpreted in the commentary. It is paraphrased by *pākaṭā*, which means "clearly manifest".¹³ This interpretation seems to distort the meaning of the entire passage.

It is true that in certain contexts *vibhūta* and *avibhūta* are taken to mean "manifest" and "unmanifest", since *vibhava* is a word which seems to have undergone some semantic development. However, its primary sense is sufficiently evident in the *Sutta* terminology. For instance, the twin term *bhava/vibhava* stands for "existence" and "non-existence". In this context, too, *vibhūta* seems to have a negative sense, rather than the sense of being manifest. Hence our rendering: "The perception of earth is gone for him".

It is obvious enough by the recurrent negative particle in the first part of the *Sutta* (*neva pathaviṃ nissāya jhāyati, na āpaṃ nissāya jhāyati*, etc.) that all those perceptions are negated and not affirmed as manifest. The commentator seems to have missed the true import of the *Sutta* when he interprets *vibhūta* to mean 'manifest'.

If further proof is required, we may quote instances where the word *vibhūta* is used in the *Suttas* to convey such senses as "gone", "departed" or "transcended". In one of the verses we happened to quote earlier from the *Kalahavivādasutta*, there was the question posed: *Kismiṃ vibhūte na phusanti phassā?*¹⁴ "When what is not there, do touches not touch?" The verse that follows gives the answer: *Rūpe vibhūte na phusanti phassā.*¹⁵ "When form is not there, touches do not touch." In this context, too, *vibhūta* implies absence.

A clearer instance comes in the *Posālamāṇavapucchā* of the *Pārāyanavagga* in the *Sutta Nipāta*, namely the term *vibhūtarūpasaññissa*, occurring in one of the verses there.¹⁶ The canonical commentary *Cūlaniddesa*, which the commentator often draws

upon, also paraphrases the term with the words *vigatā, atikkantā, samatikkantā, vītivattā*,¹⁷ "gone, transcended, fully transcended, and superseded".

So the word *vibhūta* in the passage in question definitely implies the absence of all those perceptions in that concentration. This, then, is a unique concentration. It has none of the objects which the worldlings usually associate with a level of concentration.

We come across a number of instances in the discourses, in which the Buddha and some other monks have been interrogated on the nature of this extraordinary concentration. Sometimes even Venerable *Ānanda* is seen to confront the Buddha with a question on this point. In a discourse included in the section of the Elevens in the *Ānguttara Nikāya*, Venerable *Ānanda* questions on the possibility of attaining to such a concentration with an air of wonderment:

*Siyā nu kho, bhante, bhikkhuno tathārūpo samādhipaṭilābho yathā neva pathaviyaṃ pathavīsaññī assa, na āpasmiṃ āposaññī assa, na tejasmiṃ tejosaññī assa, na vāyasmīṃ vāyosaññī assa, na ākāsaññācāyatane ākāsaññācāyatanasaññī assa, na viññāṇaṇcāyatane viññāṇaṇcāyatanasaññī assa, na ākiñcaññāyatane ākiñcaññāyatanasaññī assa, na nevasaññānāsaññāyatane nevasaññānāsaññāyatanasaññī assa, na idhaloke idhalokasaññī assa, na paraloke paralokasaññī assa, yam p'idaṃ diṭṭhaṃ suttaṃ mutaṃ viññātaṃ pattaṃ pariyesitaṃ anuvicariṭaṃ manasā tatrāpi na saññī assa, saññī ca pana assa?*¹⁸

"Could there be, Lord, for a monk such an attainment of concentration wherein he will not be conscious (literally 'percipient') of earth in earth, nor of water in water, nor of fire in fire, nor of air in air, nor will he be conscious of the sphere of infinite space in the sphere of infinite space, nor of the sphere of infinite consciousness in the sphere of infinite consciousness, nor of the sphere of nothingness in the sphere of nothingness, nor of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception in the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, nor will he be conscious of a this world in this world, nor of a world beyond in a world beyond, whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, traversed by the mind, even of it he will not be conscious - and yet he will be conscious?"

Whereas the passage quoted earlier began with *so neva pathaviṃ*

nissāya jhāyati, "he muses not dependent on earth" and ended with the emphatic assertion *jhāyati ca pana*, "and yet he does muse", here we have a restatement of it in terms of perception, beginning with *neva pathaviyaṃ pathaviṣaṇṇī* and ending with *saṇṇī ca pana assa*. The Buddha answers in the affirmative and on being questioned as to how it is possible he gives the following explanation:

Idh'Ānanda, bhikkhu, evaṃ saṇṇī hoti: Etaṃ santam, etaṃ paṇītam, yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho sabbūpadhipaṭinissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānan'ti. Evaṃ kho, Ānanda, siyā bhikkhuno tathārūpo samādhipaṭilābho ...

"Herein, *Ānanda*, a monk is thus conscious (*evaṃ saṇṇī*): This is peaceful, this is excellent, namely the stilling of all preparations, the relinquishment of all assets, the destruction of craving, detachment, cessation, extinction. It is thus, *Ānanda*, that there could be for a monk such an attainment of concentration ..."

This, in fact, is the theme of all our sermons. Venerable *Ānanda*, of course, rejoiced in the Buddha's words, but approached Venerable *Sāriputta* also and put forward the same question. Venerable *Sāriputta* gave the same answer verbatim.

Then Venerable *Ānanda* gave expression to a joyous approbation: *Acchariyaṃ āvuso, abbhutaṃ āvuso, yatra hi nāma satthu ca sāvakassa ca atthena atthaṃ vyañjanena vyañjanaṃ saṃsandissati samessati na viggahissati, yad idaṃ aggapadasmiṃ*. "Friend, it is wonderful, it is marvellous, that there is perfect conformity between the statements of the teacher and the disciple to the letter and to the spirit without any discord on the question of the highest level of attainment."

These last words, in particular, make it sufficiently clear that this concentration is *arahattaphalasamādhi*, the concentration proper to an *arahant*. Here, then, is the experience of *Nibbāna*, extraordinary and unique.

Quite a number of discourses touch upon this *samādhi*. Let us take up some of the more important references. Venerable *Ānanda* is seen to pose the same question, rephrased, on yet another occasion. It runs thus:

Siyā nu kho, bhante, tathārūpo samādhipaṭilābho yathā na cakkhuṃ manasikareyya, na rūpaṃ manasikareyya, na sotaṃ manasikareyya, na saddaṃ manasikareyya, na ghānaṃ manasikareyya, na gandhaṃ manasikareyya, na jivhaṃ manasikareyya, na rasaṃ manasikareyya, na

*kāyaṃ manasikareyya, na phoṭṭhabbaṃ manasikareyya, na pathaviṃ manasikareyya, na āpaṃ manasikareyya, na tejaṃ manasikareyya, na vāyaṃ manasikareyya, na ākāsaṇācāyatanaṃ manasikareyya, na viññāṇaṇcāyatanaṃ manasikareyya, na ākiñcaṇṇāyatanaṃ manasikareyya, na nevaṣaṇṇānāsaṇṇāyatanaṃ manasikareyya, na idhalokaṃ manasikareyya, na paralokaṃ manasikareyya, yam p'idaṃ diṭṭhaṃ suttaṃ mutaṃ viññātaṃ pattaṃ pariyesitaṃ anuvicariṭaṃ manasā tam pi na manasikareyya, manasi ca pana kareyya?*¹⁹

"Could there be, Lord, for a monk such an attainment of concentration wherein he will not be attending to the eye, nor to form, nor to the ear, nor to sound, nor to the nose, nor to smell, nor to the tongue, nor to taste, nor to the body, nor to touch, nor to earth, nor to water, nor to fire, nor to air, nor to the sphere of infinite space, nor to the sphere of infinite consciousness, nor to the sphere of nothingness, nor to the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, nor to this world, nor to the world beyond, whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, traversed by the mind, even to that he will not be attending - and yet he will be attending?"

"There could be such a concentration", says the Buddha, and Venerable *Ānanda* rejoins with his inquisitive: "How, Lord, could there be?" Then the Buddha gives the following explanation, which tallies with the one earlier given:

Idh'Ānanda, bhikkhu evaṃ manasi karoti: Etaṃ santam, etaṃ paṇītam, yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho sabbūpadhipaṭinissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānan'ti. Evaṃ kho, Ānanda, siyā bhikkhuno tathārūpo samādhipaṭilābho ...

"Herein, *Ānanda*, a monk attends thus: This is peaceful, this is excellent, namely the stilling of all preparations, the relinquishment of all assets, the destruction of craving, detachment, cessation, extinction. It is thus, *Ānanda*, that there could be such an attainment of concentration ..."

In the light of the foregoing discussion, we are now in a position to take up for comment that enigmatic verse of the *Kalahavivādasutta*, which in a previous sermon we left unexplained, giving only a slight hint in the form of a simile.²⁰

*Na saṇṇāsaṇṇī na visaṇṇāsaṇṇī,
no pi asaṇṇī na vibhūtasāṇṇī,
evaṃ sametassa vibhoti rūpaṃ,
saṇṇānidānā hi papañcasāṅkhā.*²¹

The general trend of this verse seems to imply something like this: The worldlings usually believe that one has to have some form of perception or other. But the one referred to in this verse is not percipient with any such perception, *na saññasaññī*. As if to forestall the question, whether he is then in a swoon, there is the negation *na visaññasaññī*. A possible alternative, like a plane of existence devoid of perception, is also avoided by the emphatic assertion *no pi asaññī*. Yet another possibility, that he has gone beyond perception or rescinded it, is rejected as well with the words *na vibhūtasaññī*.

The third line says that it is to one thus endowed that form ceases to exist, while the last line seems to give an indication as to why it is so: *Saññānidānā hi papañcasāṅkhā*, "for reckonings born of proliferation have perception as their source".

The nature of these reckonings we have already discussed at length. The conclusion here given is that they are rooted in *papañca*. Now the passages we have so far quoted are suggestive of such a state of consciousness. Briefly stated, even the emphatic tone characteristic of these discourses is sufficient proof of it.

For instance, in the first discourse we took up for discussion, there is the recurrent phrase *na jhāyati*, "does not muse", with reference to all the possible objects of the senses, but at the end of it all comes the emphatic assertion *jhāyati ca pana*, "nevertheless, he does muse". Similarly the passage dealing with the *saññā* aspect starts with *neva pathaviyaṃ pathavisaññī*, "he is neither conscious (literally 'percipient') of earth in earth", followed by a long list of negations, only to end up with an emphatic *saññī ca pana assa*, "but nevertheless he is conscious". So also in the passage which takes up the attending aspect and winds up with the assertion *manasi ca pana kareyya*, "and yet he will be attending".

All this evidence is a pointer to the fact that we have to interpret the reference to the paradoxical state of consciousness implied by *na saññasaññī na visaññasaññī* etc. in the *Kalahavivādasutta* in the light of that unique concentration of the *arahant* - the *arahattaphalasamādhi*.

This is obvious enough even if we take into consideration the occurrence of the term *papañcasāṅkhā* in the last line of the verse in question. The worldly concepts born of the prolific tendency of the mind are rooted in perception. That is precisely why perception has to be transcended. That is also the reason for our emphasis on the need for

freedom from the six sense-bases and from contact. The abandonment of *papañcasāṅkhā* is accomplished at this extraordinary level of concentration.

The immense importance attached to the *arahattaphalasamādhi* comes to light in the passages we have quoted. These discourses are abundant proof of the fact that the Buddha has extolled this *samādhi* in various ways. The verse beginning with *na saññasaññī na visaññasaññī* in particular points to this fact.

On an earlier occasion we gave only a clue to its meaning in the form of an allusion to our simile of the cinema. That is to say, while one is watching a film show, if the cinema hall is fully illuminated all of a sudden, one undergoes such an internal transformation, that it becomes questionable whether he is still seeing the film show. This is because his perception of the film show has undergone a peculiar change. He is no longer conscious of a film show, nor has he put an end to consciousness. It is a strange paradox. His gaze is actually a vacant gaze.

The verse in question expresses such a vacant gaze. When the six sense-bases of the *arahant* cease and the lustre of wisdom comes up, giving the conviction that all assets in the world are empty, the vision in the *arahattaphalasamādhi* is as vacant as that gaze of the man at the cinema. It is neither conscious, nor unconscious, nor non-conscious, nor totally devoid of consciousness. At that level of concentration even this material form is abandoned.

The line in the paean of joy in the *Bāhīyasutta*, which we came across the other day, *atha rūpā arūpā ca, sukhadukkhā pamuccati*,²² "and then from form and formless and from pleasure and pain is he freed", can be better appreciated in the light of the foregoing discussion. With the relinquishment of all assets, even this body and the experience of a form and of a formless, as well as pleasure and pain, cease altogether due to the cessation of contact. That is why *Nibbāna* is called a bliss devoid of feeling, *avedayita sukha*.²³

Now as to this vacant gaze, there is much to be said, though one might think that it is not at all worth discussing about. If someone asks us: 'What is the object of the gaze of one with such a vacant gaze', what shall we say? The vacant gaze is, in fact, not established anywhere (*appatiṭṭham*). It has no existence (*appavattam*) and it is object-less (*anārammaṇam*). Even at the mention of these three terms, *appatiṭṭham*, *appavattam* and

anārammaṇaṃ, some might recall those highly controversial discourses on *Nibbāna*.²⁴

Why do we call the vision of the *arahant* a vacant gaze? At the highest point of the development of the three characteristics impermanence, suffering and not-self, that is, through the three deliverances *animitta*, *appaṇihita* and *suññata*, the "signless", the "undirected" and the "void", the *arahant* is now looking at the object with a penetrative gaze. That is why it is not possible to say what he is looking at. It is a gaze that sees the cessation of the object, a gaze that penetrates the object, as it were.

When the cinema hall is fully illuminated, the mind of the one with that vacant gaze at the film show does not accumulate the stuff that makes up a film. Why? Because all those cinema preparations are now stilled, cinema assets are relinquished and the craving and the passion for the cinema film have gone down, at least temporarily, with the result that the cinema film has 'ceased' for him and he is 'extinguished' within. That is why he is looking on with a vacant gaze. With this illustration one can form an idea about the inner transformation that occurs in the *arahant*.

From the very outset the meditator is concerned with *saṅkhāras*, or preparations. Hence the term *sabbasaṅkhārasamatha*, the stilling of all preparations, comes first. Instead of the arising aspect of preparations, he attends to the cessation aspect, the furthest limit of which is *Nibbāna*. It is for that reason that the term *nirodha* is directly applied to *Nibbāna*.

Simply because we have recapitulated the terms forming the theme of our sermons, some might think that the formula as such is some form of a gross object of the mind. This, in fact, is the root of the misconception prevalent today.

It is true that the Buddha declared that the *arahant* has as his perception, attention and concentration the formula beginning with *etaṃ santam etaṃ paṇītam* etc. But this does not mean that the *arahant* in his *samādhi* goes on reciting the formula as we do at the beginning of every sermon. What it means is that the *arahant* reverts to or re-attains the realization he has already won through the lustre of wisdom, namely the realization of the stilling of all preparations, the relinquishment of all assets, the total abandonment of the five aggregates, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation and extinguishment. That is what one has to understand by the saying that the *arahant* attends to *Nibbāna* as his object.

The object is cessation, *nirodha*. Here is something that *Māra* cannot

grasp, that leaves him utterly clueless. This is why Venerable *Nandiya* in the *Nandiyatheragāthā* challenges *Māra* in the following verse:

*Obhāsajātaṃ phalagaṃ,
cittaṃ yassa abhiṇhaso,
tādisam bhikkhum āsajja
kaṇha dukkhaṃ nigacchasi.*²⁵

"The monk whose mind is always bright,
And gone to the fruit of *arahant*-hood,
Should you dare to challenge that monk,
O Blackie, you only come to grief."

Kaṇha, Blackie, is one of the epithets of *Māra*. Even gods and *Brahmas* are unable to find out the object of the *arahant*'s mind when he is in the *phalasaṃpatti*, the attainment to the fruit. *Māra* can never discover it. That is why this attainment is said to leave *Māra* clueless or deluded (*Mārassetaṃ pamohanaṃ*).²⁶ All this is due to the uniqueness of this level of concentration.

The three deliverances *animitta*, *appaṇihita* and *suññata*, are indeed extraordinary and the verse *na saññā saññī* refers to this *arahattaphalasaṃpatti*, which is signless, undirected and void.

Usually one's vision alights somewhere or picks up some object or other, but here is a range of vision that has no horizon. In general, there is a horizon at the furthest end of our range of vision. Standing by the seaside or in a plain, one gazes upon a horizon where the earth and sky meet. The worldling's range of vision, in general, has such a horizon. But the *arahant*'s range of vision, as here described, has no such horizon. That is why it is called *anantaṃ*, endless or infinite. *Viññānaṃ anidassanaṃ, anantaṃ sabbaṭṭapaṇṇaṃ*, "the non-manifestative consciousness, endless, lustrous on all sides."

That vacant gaze is an 'endless' perception. One who has it cannot be called conscious, *saññī*. Nor can he be called unconscious, *visaññī* - in the worldly sense of the term. Nor is he devoid of consciousness, *asaññī*. Nor has he put an end to consciousness, *vibhūtasaññī*.

Let us now take up two verses which shed a flood of light on the foregoing discussion and help illuminate the meaning of canonical passages that might come up later. The two verses are from the *Arahantavagga* of the *Dhammapada*.

*Yesaṃ sannicayo natthi,
ye pariññāta bhojanā,
suññato animitto ca,
vimokkho yesa gocaro,
ākāse va sakuntānaṃ,
gati tesam durannayā.*

*Yass'āsavā parikkhīṇā,
āhāre ca anissito,
suññato animitto ca,
vimokkho yassa gocaro,
ākāse va sakuntānaṃ,
padaṃ tassa durannayaṃ.²⁷*

"Those who have no accumulations,
And understood fully the subject of food,
And whose feeding ground
Is the void and the signless,
Their track is hard to trace,
Like that of birds in the sky.
He whose influxes are extinct,
And is unattached to nutriment,
Whose range is the deliverance,
Of the void and the signless,
His path is hard to trace,
Like that of birds in the sky."

The accumulation here meant is not of material things, such as food. It is the accumulation of karma and *upadhi*, assets. The comprehension of food could be taken to imply the comprehension of all four nutriments, namely gross material food, contact, will and consciousness. The feeding ground of such *arahants* is the void and the signless. Hence their track is hard to trace, like that of birds in the sky.

The term *gati*, which we rendered by "track", has been differently interpreted in the commentary. For the commentary *gati* is the place where the *arahant* goes after death, his next bourne, so to speak.²⁸ But taken in conjunction with the simile used, *gati* obviously means the "path", *padaṃ*, taken by the birds in the sky. It is the path they take that cannot be traced, not their destination.

Where the birds have gone could perhaps be traced, with some difficulty. They may have gone to their nests. It is the path they went by that is referred to as *gati* in this context. Just as when birds fly through the sky they do not leave behind any trace of a path, even so in this concentration of the *arahant* there is no object or sign of any continuity.

The second verse gives almost the same idea. It is in singular and speaks of an *arahant* whose influxes are extinct and who is unattached to nutriment. Here, in the simile about the birds in the sky, we find the word *padaṃ*, "path", used instead of *gati*, which makes it clear enough that it is not the destiny of the *arahant* that is spoken of.

The commentary, however, interprets both *gati* and *padaṃ* as a reference to the *arahant's* destiny. There is a tacit assumption of some mysterious *anupādisesa Nibbānadhātu*. But what we have here is a metaphor of considerable depth. The reference is to that unique *samādhi*.

The bird's flight through the air symbolizes the flight of the mind. In the case of others, the path taken by the mind can be traced through the object it takes, but not in this case. The key word that highlights the metaphorical meaning of these verses is *gocaro*. *Gocara* means "pasture". Now, in the case of cattle roaming in their pasture one can trace them by their footsteps, by the path trodden. What about the pasture of the *arahants*?

Of course, they too consume food to maintain their bodies, but their true 'pasture' is the *arahattaphalasangāmi*. As soon as they get an opportunity, they take to this pasture. Once they are well within this pasture, neither gods nor *Brahmas* nor *Māra* can find them. That is why the path taken by the *arahants* in the *phalasangāmi* cannot be traced, like the track of birds in the sky.

We have yet to discuss the subject of *sa-upādisesa* and *anupādisesa Nibbānadhātu*. But even at this point some clarity of understanding might emerge. When the *arahant* passes away, at the last moment of his life span, he brings his mind to this *arahattaphalasangāmi*. Then not even *Māra* can trace him. There is no possibility of a rebirth and that is the end of all. It is this 'extinction' that is referred to here.

This extinction is not something one gets in a world beyond. It is a realization here and now, in this world. And the *arahant*, by way of blissful dwelling here and now, enjoys in his every day life the supreme bliss of *Nibbāna* that he had won through the incomparable deliverances of the mind.

1. MI436, *MahāMālunkyasutta*.
2. DI223, *Kevaḍḍhasutta*.
3. Ud 12, *Sakkārasutta*.
4. See sermon 8.
5. See sermons 5, 7, 9, 11, 15.
6. Ud 9, *Bāhiyasutta*; see sermon 15.
7. Sn 226, *Ratanasutta*.
8. See sermon 1.
9. It 53, *Indriyasutta*.
10. Vin IV 82, *Pācittiya* 35.
11. E.g. MI 167, *Ariyapariyesanasutta*.
12. A V 324, *Sandhasutta*.
13. Mp V 80.
14. Sn 871, *Kalahavivādasutta*; see sermon 11.
15. Sn 872, *Kalahavivādasutta*.
16. Sn 1113, *Posālamāṇavapucchā*.
17. Nid II 166 (Burm. ed.).
18. A V 318, *Saññāsutta*.
19. A V 321, *Manasikārasutta*.
20. See sermon 11.
21. Sn 874, *Kalahavivādasutta*.
22. Ud 9, *Bāhiyasutta*; see sermon 15.
23. Ps III 115, *aṭṭhakathā* on the *Bahuvedanīyasutta*.
24. Ud 80, *Paṭhamanibbānapaṭisaṃyuttasutta*.
25. Th 25, *Nandiyatheragāthā*.
26. Dhp 274, *Maggavagga*.
27. Dhp 92-93, *Arahantavagga*.
28. Dhp-a II 172.

Sermon - 17

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa*

*Etaṃ santaṃ, etaṃ paṇītaṃ, yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho
sabbūpadhipaṭṭhānissaggo taṇhakkhaya virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ.*¹

"This is peaceful, this is excellent, namely the stilling of all preparations, the relinquishment of all assets, the destruction of craving, detachment, cessation, extinction".

With the permission of the Most Venerable Great Preceptor and the assembly of the venerable meditative monks. This is the seventeenth sermon in the series of sermons on *Nibbāna*.

In our last sermon, we tried to analyse some discourses that give us a clue to understand what sort of an experience an *arahant* has in his realization of the cessation of existence in the *arahattaphalasamādhī*.

We happened to mention that the *arahant* sees the cessation of existence with a deeply penetrative vision of the void that may be compared to a gaze that knows no horizon. We also dropped the hint that the non-manifestative consciousness, endless and lustrous on all sides, we had spoken of in an earlier sermon,² is an explicit reference to this same experience.

How the *arahant*, ranging in his triple pasture of the signless deliverance, the undirected deliverance and the void deliverance, *animitta vimokkha*, *appaṇihita vimokkha* and *suññata vimokkha*, gets free from the latency to perception, transcends the duality of form and formless, and crosses over this ocean of existence unhindered by *Māra*, has been described in various ways in various discourses.

Let us now take up for discussion in this connection three significant verses that are found in the *Itivuttaka*.

*Ye ca rūpūpagā sattā
ye ca arūpaṭṭhāyino,
nirodhaṃ appajānantā
āgantāro punabbhavaṃ.
Ye ca rūpe pariññāya,
arūpesu asaṅṭhitā,
nirodhe ye vimuccanti,*

te janā maccuhāyino.

*Kāyena amataṃ dhātum,
phusaṃtivā nirūpadhiṃ,
upadhipaṭṭhānissaggaṃ,
sacchikatvā anāsavo,
deseti sammāsambuddho,
asokaṃ virajaṃ padaṃ.*³

"Those beings that go to realms of form,

And those who are settled in formless realms,

Not understanding the fact of cessation,

Come back again and again to existence.

Those who, having comprehended realms of form,

Do not settle in formless realms,

Are released in the experience of cessation,

It is they that are the dispellers of death.

Having touched with the body the deathless element,

Which is asset-less,

And realized the relinquishment of assets,

Being influx-free, the perfectly enlightened one,

Proclaims the sorrow-less, taintless state."

The meaning of the first verse is clear enough. Those who are in realms of form and formless realms are reborn again and again due to not understanding the fact of cessation.

In the case of the second verse, there is some confusion as to the correct reading. We have mentioned earlier, too, that some of the deep discourses present considerable difficulty in determining what the correct reading is.⁴ They have not come down with sufficient clarity. Where the meaning is not clear enough, there is a likelihood for the oral tradition to become corrupt. Here we accepted the reading *asaṅṭhitā*.

*Ye ca rūpe pariññāya,
arūpesu asaṅṭhitā,*

"Those who, having comprehended realms of form,

Do not settle in formless realms".

But there is the variant reading *susaṅṭhitā*, which gives the meaning "settled well". The two readings contradict each other and so we have a

problem here. The commentary accepts the reading *asaṅḥitā*.⁵ We too followed it, for some valid reason and not simply because it accords with the commentary.

However, in several modern editions of the text, the reading *asaṅḥitā* has been replaced by *susaṅḥitā*, probably because it seems to make sense, *prima facie*.

But, as we pointed out in this series of sermons, there is the question of the dichotomy between the form and the formless. The formless, or *arūpa*, is like the shadow of form, *rūpa*. Therefore, when one comprehends form, one also understands that the formless, too, is not worthwhile settling in. It is in that sense that we brought in the reading *asaṅḥitā* in this context.

Those who have fully comprehended form, do not depend on the formless either, and it is they that are released in the realization of cessation. They transcend the duality of form and formless and, by directing their minds to the cessation of existence, attain emancipation.

In the last verse it is said that the Buddha realized the relinquishment of assets known as *nirupadhi*, the "asset-less". It also says that he touched the deathless element with the body. In a previous sermon we happened to quote a verse from the *Udāna* which had the conclusive lines:

Phusanti phassā upadhiṃ paṭicca,

*Nirupadhiṃ kena phuseyyum phassā.*⁶

"Touches touch one because of assets,

How can touches touch him who is asset-less?"

According to this verse, it seems that here there is no touch. So what we have stated above might even appear as contradictory. The above verse speaks of a 'touching' of the deathless element with the body. One might ask how one can touch, when there is no touch at all? But here we have an extremely deep idea, almost a paradox.

To be free from touch is in itself the 'touching' of the deathless element.

What we mean to say is that, as far as the fear of death is concerned, here we have the freedom from the pain of death and in fact the freedom from the concept of death itself.

The Buddha and the *arahants*, with the help of that wisdom, while in that *arahattaphalasangāmi* described as *anāsava cetovimutti paññāvimutti*,⁷ or *akuppā cetovimutti*,⁸ let go of their entire body and realized the cessation of existence, thereby freeing themselves from touch

and feeling. That is why *Nibbāna* is called a bliss devoid of feeling, *avedayita sukha*.⁹

This giving up, this letting go when *Māra* is coming to grab and seize, is a very subtle affair. To give up and let go when *Māra* comes to grab is to touch the deathless, because thereby one is freed from touch and feelings. Here, then, we have a paradox. So subtle is this *Dhamma*!

How does one realize cessation? By attending to the cessation aspect of preparations.

As we have already mentioned, to arise and to cease is of the nature of preparations, and here the attention is on the ceasing aspect. The worldlings in general pay attention to the arising aspect. They can see only that aspect. The Buddhas, on the other hand, have seen the cessation of existence in a subtle way. The culmination of the practice of paying attention to the cessation aspect of preparations is the realization of the cessation of existence.

Bhava, or existence, is the domain of *Māra*. How does one escape from the grip of *Māra*? By going beyond his range of vision, that is to say by attending to the cessation of existence, *bhavanirodha*.

All experiences of pleasure and pain are there so long as one is in *bhava*. The *arahant* wins to the freedom from form and formless and from pleasure and pain, as it was said in a verse already quoted:

Atha rūpā arūpā ca,

*sukhadukkhā pamuccati.*¹⁰

"And then from form and formless,

And from pleasure and pain is he freed."

We explained that verse as a reference to *arahattaphalasangāmi*. Here, too, we are on the same point. The concept of the cessation of existence is indeed very deep. It is so deep that one might wonder whether there is anything worthwhile in *Nibbāna*, if it is equivalent to the cessation of existence.

As a matter of fact, we do come across an important discourse among the Tens of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, where *Nibbāna* is explicitly called *bhavanirodha*. It is in the form of a dialogue between Venerable *Ānanda* and Venerable *Sāriputta*. As usual, Venerable *Ānanda* is enquiring about that extraordinary *samādhī*.

Siyā nu kho, āvuso Sāriputta, bhikkhuno tathārūpo samādhīpaṭilābho yathā neva pathaviyaṃ pathavisaññāssa, na āpasmīṃ āposaññāssa, na

*tejasmiṃ tejosaññī assa, na vāyasmīṃ vāyosaññī assa, na ākāsaññāncāyatane ākāsaññāncāyatanasaññī assa, na viññāñāncāyatane viññāñāncāyatanasaññī assa, na ākiñcaññāyatane ākiñcaññāyatanasaññī assa, na nevasaññānāsaññāyatane nevasaññānāsaññāyatanasaññī assa, na idhaloke idhalokasaññī assa, na paraloke paralokasaññī assa, - saññī ca pana assa?*¹¹

"Could there be, friend *Sāriputta*, for a monk such an attainment of concentration wherein he will not be conscious of earth in earth, nor of water in water, nor of fire in fire, nor of air in air, nor will he be conscious of the sphere of infinite space in the sphere of infinite space, nor of the sphere of infinite consciousness in the sphere of infinite consciousness, nor of the sphere of nothingness in the sphere of nothingness, nor of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception in the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, nor of a this world in this world, nor of a world beyond in a world beyond - and yet he will be conscious?"

Venerable *Sāriputta*'s reply to it is: "There could be, friend *Ānanda*." Then Venerable *Ānanda* asks again: "But then, friend *Sāriputta*, in which manner could there be such an attainment of concentration for a monk?"

At that point Venerable *Sāriputta* comes out with his own experience, revealing that he himself once attained to such a *samādhi*, when he was at *Andhavana* in *Sāvatti*. Venerable *Ānanda*, however, is still curious to ascertain what sort of perception he was having, when he was in that *samādhi*. The explanation given by Venerable *Sāriputta* in response to it, is of utmost importance. It runs:

Bhavanirodho nibbānaṃ, bhavanirodho nibbānaṃ'ti kho me, avuso, aññā'va saññā uppajjati aññā'va saññā nirujjhati.

Seyyathāpi, āvuso, sakalikaggissa jhāyamānassa aññā'va acci uppajjati, aññā'va acci nirujjhati, evam eva kho me āvuso bhavanirodho nibbānaṃ, bhavanirodho nibbānaṃ'ti aññā'va saññā uppajjati aññā'va saññā nirujjhati, bhavanirodho nibbānaṃ saññī ca panāhaṃ, āvuso, tasmīṃ samaye ahoṣiṃ.

"One perception arises in me, friend: 'cessation of existence is *Nibbāna*', 'cessation of existence is *Nibbāna*', and another perception fades out in me: 'cessation of existence is *Nibbāna*', 'cessation of existence is *Nibbāna*'.

Just as, friend, in the case of a twig fire, when it is burning one flame arises and another flame fades out. Even so, friend, one perception arises

in me: 'cessation of existence is *Nibbāna*', 'cessation of existence is *Nibbāna*', and another perception fades out in me: 'cessation of existence is *Nibbāna*', 'cessation of existence is *Nibbāna*', at that time, friend, I was of the perception 'cessation of existence is *Nibbāna*'."

The true significance of the simile of the twig fire is that Venerable *Sāriputta* was attending to the cessation aspect of preparations. As we mentioned in connection with the formula *etaṃ santam, etaṃ pañitam*, "this is peaceful, this is excellent", occurring in a similar context, we are not to conclude that Venerable *Sāriputta* kept on repeating 'cessation of existence is *Nibbāna*'.

The insight into a flame could be different from a mere sight of a flame. Worldlings in general see only a process of burning in a flame. To the insight meditator it can appear as an intermittent series of extinctions. It is the outcome of a penetrative vision. Just like the flame, which simulates compactness, existence, too, is a product of *saṅkhāras*, or preparations.

The worldling who attends to the arising aspect and ignores the cessation aspect is carried away by the perception of the compact. But the mind, when steadied, is able to see the phenomenon of cessation: *Thitaṃ cittaṃ vipparamuttaṃ, vayañcassānupassati*,¹² "the mind steadied and released contemplates its own passing away".

With that steadied mind the *arahant* attends to the cessation of preparations. At its climax, he penetrates the gamut of existence made up of preparations, as in the case of a flame, and goes beyond the clutches of death.

As a comparison for existence, the simile of the flame is quite apt. We happened to point out earlier, that the word *upādāna* can mean "grasping" as well as "fuel".¹³ The totality of existence is sometimes referred to as a fire.¹⁴ The fuel for the fire of existence is grasping itself. With the removal of that fuel, one experiences extinction.

The dictum *bhavanirodho nibbānaṃ* clearly shows that *Nibbāna* is the cessation of existence. There is another significant discourse which equates *Nibbāna* to the experience of the cessation of the six sense-bases, *saḷāyatanaṃirodha*. The same experience of realization is viewed from a different angle. We have already shown that the cessation of the six sense-bases, or the six sense-spheres, is also called *Nibbāna*.¹⁵

The discourse we are now going to take up is one in which the Buddha presented the theme as some sort of a riddle for the monks to work out for themselves.

*Tasmātiha, bhikkhave, se āyatane vedītabbe yathā cakkhuñca nirujjhati rūpasāññā ca virajjati, se āyatane vedītabbe yathā sotañca nirujjhati saddasaññā ca virajjati, se āyatane vedītabbe yathā ghānañca nirujjhati gandhasaññā ca virajjati, se āyatane vedītabbe yathā jivhā ca nirujjhati rāsasaññā ca virajjati, se āyatane vedītabbe yathā kāyo ca nirujjhati phoṭṭabbasaññā ca virajjati, se āyatane vedītabbe yathā mano ca nirujjhati dhammasaññā ca virajjati, se āyatane vedītabbe, se āyatane vedītabbe.*¹⁶

"Therefore, monks, that sphere should be known wherein the eye ceases and perceptions of form fade away, that sphere should be known wherein the ear ceases and perceptions of sound fade away, that sphere should be known wherein the nose ceases and perceptions of smell fade away, that sphere should be known wherein the tongue ceases and perceptions of taste fade away, that sphere should be known wherein the body ceases and perceptions of the tangible fade away, that sphere should be known wherein the mind ceases and perceptions of mind objects fade away, that sphere should be known, that sphere should be known."

There is some peculiarity in the very wording of the passage, when it says, for instance, that the eye ceases, *cakkhuñca nirujjhati* and perceptions of form fade away, *rūpasāññā ca virajjati*. As we once pointed out, the word *virāga*, usually rendered by "detachment", has a nuance equivalent to "fading away" or "decolouration".¹⁷ Here that nuance is clearly evident. When the eye ceases, perceptions of forms fade away.

The Buddha is enjoining the monks to understand that sphere, not disclosing what it is, in which the eye ceases and perceptions of form fade away, and likewise the ear ceases and perceptions of sound fade away, the nose ceases and perceptions of smell fade away, the tongue ceases and perceptions of taste fade away, the body ceases and perceptions of the tangible fade away, and last of all even the mind ceases and perceptions of mind objects fade away. This last is particularly noteworthy.

Without giving any clue to the meaning of this brief exhortation, the Buddha got up and entered the monastery, leaving the monks perplexed. Wondering how they could get it explained, they approached Venerable Ānanda and begged him to comment at length on what the Buddha had preached in brief. With some modest reluctance, Venerable Ānanda complied, urging that his comment be reported to the Buddha for confirmation. His comments, however, amounted to just one sentence:

Salāyatananīrodham, kho āvuso, Bhagavatā sandhāya bhāsitaṃ. "Friends, it is with reference to the cessation of the six sense-spheres that the Exalted One has preached this sermon."

When those monks approached the Buddha and placed Venerable Ānanda's explanation before him, the Buddha ratified it. Hence it is clear that the term *āyatana* in the above passage refers not to any one of the six sense-spheres, but to *Nibbāna*, which is the cessation of all of them.

The commentator, Venerable *Buddhaghosa*, too accepts this position in his commentary to the passage in question. *Salāyatananīrodhan'ti salāyatananīrodho vuccati nibbānam, tam sandhāya bhāsitaṃ ti attho,* "the cessation of the six sense-spheres, what is called the cessation of the six sense-spheres is *Nibbāna*, the meaning is that the Buddha's sermon is a reference to it".¹⁸

The passage in question bears testimony to two important facts. Firstly that *Nibbāna* is called the cessation of the six sense-spheres. Secondly that this experience is referred to as an *āyatana*, or a 'sphere'.

The fact that *Nibbāna* is sometimes called *āyatana* is further corroborated by a certain passage in the *Salāyatanaṅgavagga-sutta*, which defines the term *nekkhammasita domanassa*.¹⁹ In that discourse, which deals with some deeper aspects of the *Dhamma*, the concept of *nekkhammasita domanassa*, or "unhappiness connected with renunciation", is explained as follows:

If one contemplates with insight wisdom the sense-objects like forms and sounds as impermanent, suffering-fraught and transient, and develops a longing for *Nibbāna*, due to that longing or expectation one might feel an unhappiness. It is such an unhappiness which, however, is superior to an unhappiness connected with the household life, that is called *nekkhammasita domanassa*, or "unhappiness connected with renunciation".

How such an unhappiness may arise in a monk is described in that discourse in the following manner:

'Kudāssu nāmāhaṃ tadāyatanaṃ upasampajja viharissāmi yadariyā etarahi āyatanaṃ upasampajja viharanti?' iti anuttāresu vimokkhesu pihaṃ upatthāpayato uppajjati pihāpaccayā domanassaṃ. Yaṃ evarūpaṃ domanassaṃ idaṃ vuccati nekkhammasitadomanassaṃ.

"O, when shall I attain to and dwell in that sphere to which the Noble Ones now attain and dwell in?" Thus, as he sets up a longing for the

incomparable deliverances, there arises an unhappiness due to that longing. It is such an unhappiness that is called unhappiness connected with renunciation."

What are called "incomparable deliverances" are the three doorways to *Nibbāna*, the signless, the undirected and the void. We can therefore conclude that the sphere to which this monk aspires is none other than *Nibbāna*. So here we have a second instance of a reference to *Nibbāna* as a 'sphere' or *āyatana*.

Now let us bring up a third:

*Atthi, bhikkhave, tad āyatanam, yattha n'eva pathavī na āpo na tejo na vāyo na ākāsañcāyatanam na viññāṇañcāyatanam na ākiñcaññāyatanam na nevaññānāsāññāyatanam na ayam loko na paraloko na ubho candimasūriyā. Tatra p'aham bhikkhave, n'eva āgatiṃ vadāmi na gatiṃ na ihitiṃ na cutiṃ na upapattiṃ, appatittham appavattam anārammaṇam eva tam. Es'ev'anto dukkhassā'ti.*²⁰

Incidentally, this happens to be the most controversial passage on *Nibbāna*. Scholars, both ancient and modern, have put forward various interpretations of this much vexed passage. Its riddle-like presentation has posed a challenge to many a philosopher bent on determining what *Nibbāna* is.

This brief discourse comes in the *Udāna* as an inspired utterance of the Buddha on the subject of *Nibbāna*, *Nibbānapaṭisamyuttasutta*. To begin with, we shall try to give a somewhat literal translation of the passage:

"Monks, there is that sphere, wherein there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor air; neither the sphere of infinite space, nor the sphere of infinite consciousness, nor the sphere of nothingness, nor the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; neither this world nor the world beyond, nor the sun and the moon. There, monks, I say, is no coming, no going, no staying, no passing away and no arising; it is not established, it is not continuing, it has no object. This, itself, is the end of suffering."

Instead of getting down to the commentarial interpretation at the very outset, let us try to understand this discourse on the lines of the interpretation we have so far developed. We have already come across two references to *Nibbāna* as an *āyatana* or a sphere. In the present context, too, the term *āyatana* is an allusion to *arahattaphalasamādhī*. Its significance, therefore, is psychological.

First of all we are told that earth, water, fire and air are not there in that

āyatana. This is understandable, since in a number of discourses dealing with *anidassana viññāṇa* and *arahattaphalasamādhī* we came across similar statements. It is said that in *anidassana viññāṇa*, or non-manifestative consciousness, earth, water, fire and air do not find a footing. Similarly, when one is in *arahattaphalasamādhī*, one is said to be devoid of the perception of earth in earth, for instance, because he does not attend to it. So the peculiar negative formulation of the above *Udāna* passage is suggestive of the fact that these elements do not exercise any influence on the mind of one who is in *arahattaphalasamādhī*.

The usual interpretation, however, is that it describes some kind of a place or a world devoid of those elements. It is generally believed that the passage in question is a description of the 'sphere' into which the *arahant* passes away, that is, his after death 'state'. This facile explanation is often presented only as a tacit assumption, for fear of being accused of heretical views. But it must be pointed out that the allusion here is to a certain level of experience of the living *arahant*, namely the realization, here and now, of the cessation of existence, *bhavanirodha*.

The four elements have no part to play in that experience. The sphere of infinite space, the sphere of infinite consciousness etc. also do not come in, as we have already shown with reference to a number of discourses. So it is free from both form and formless.

The statement that there is neither this world nor a world beyond could be understood in the light of the phrase, *na idhaloke idhalokasaññī, na paraloke paralokasaññī*, "percipient neither of a this world in this world, nor of a world beyond in a world beyond" that came up in a passage discussed above.

The absence of the moon and the sun, *na ubho candima sūriyā*, in this sphere, is taken as the strongest argument in favour of concluding that *Nibbāna* is some kind of a place, a place where there is no moon or sun.

But as we have explained in the course of our discussion of the term *anidassana viññāṇa*, or non-manifestative consciousness, with the cessation of the six sense-spheres, due to the all lustrous nature of the mind, sun and moon lose their lustre, though the senses are all intact. Their lustre is superseded by the lustre of wisdom. They pale away and fade into insignificance before it. It is in this sense that the moon and the sun are said to be not there in that sphere.

Why there is no coming, no going, no staying, no passing away and no

arising, can be understood in the light of what we have observed in earlier sermons on the question of relative concepts. The verbal dichotomy characteristic of worldly concepts is reflected in this reference to a coming and a going etc. The *arahant* in *arahattaphalasamādhī* is free from the limitations imposed by this verbal dichotomy.

The three terms *appatiṭṭham*, *appavattam* and *anārammaṇam*, "not established", "not continuing" and "objectless", are suggestive of the three doorways to deliverance. *Appatiṭṭham* refers to *appaṇihita vimokkha*, "undirected deliverance", which comes through the extirpation of craving. *Appavattam* stands for *suññata vimokkha*, the "void deliverance", which is the negation of continuity. *Anārammaṇam* is clearly enough a reference to *animitta vimokkha*, the "signless deliverance". Not to have an object is to be signless.

The concluding sentence "this itself is the end of suffering" is therefore a clear indication that the end of suffering is reached here and now. It does not mean that the *arahant* gets half of *Nibbāna* here and the other half 'there'.

Our line of interpretation leads to such a conclusion, but of course, in case there are shortcomings in it, we could perhaps improve on it by having recourse to the commentarial interpretation.

Now as to the commentarial interpretation, this is how the *Udāna* commentary explains the points we have discussed:²¹ It paraphrases the term *āyatana* by *kāraṇa*, observing that it means reason in this context. Just as much as forms stand in relation of an object to the eye, so the *asaṅkhata dhātu*, or the "unprepared element", is said to be an object to the *arahant's* mind, and here it is called *āyatana*.

Then the commentary raises the question, why earth, water, fire and air are not there in that *asaṅkhata dhātu*. The four elements are representative of things prepared, *saṅkhata*. There cannot be any mingling or juxtaposition between the *saṅkhata* and the *asaṅkhata*. That is why earth, water, fire and air are not supposed to be there, in that *āyatana*.

The question why there are no formless states, like the sphere of infinite space, the sphere of infinite consciousness, the sphere of nothingness, the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, is similarly explained, while asserting that *Nibbāna* is nevertheless formless.

Since in *Nibbāna* one has transcended the sensuous sphere, *kāmaloka*, the concepts of a this world and a world beyond are said to be irrelevant. As to why the sun and the moon are not there, the commentary gives the following explanation:

In realms of form there is generally darkness, to dispel which there must be a sun and a moon. But *Nibbāna* is not a realm of form, so how could sun and moon come in?

Then what about the reference to a coming, a going, a staying, a passing away and an arising? No one comes to *Nibbāna* from anywhere and no one goes out from it, no one stays in it or passes away or reappears in it.

Now all this is mystifying enough. But the commentary goes on to interpret the three terms *appatiṭṭham*, *appavattam* and *anārammaṇam* also in the same vein. Only that which has form gets established and *Nibbāna* is formless, therefore it is not established anywhere. *Nibbāna* does not continue, so it is *appavattam*, or non-continuing. Since *Nibbāna* takes no object, it is objectless, *anārammaṇam*. It is as good as saying that, though one may take *Nibbāna* as an object, *Nibbāna* itself takes no object.

So this is what the traditional interpretation amounts to. If there are any shortcomings in our explanation, one is free to go for the commentarial. But it is obvious that there is a lot of confusion in this commentarial trend. Insufficient appreciation of the deep concept of the cessation of existence seems to have caused all this confusion.

More often than otherwise, commentarial interpretations of *Nibbāna* leaves room for some subtle craving for existence, *bhavataṇhā*. It gives a vague idea of a place or a sphere, *āyatana*, which serves as a surrogate destination for the *arahants* after their demise. Though not always explicitly asserted, it is at least tacitly suggested. The description given above is ample proof of this trend. It conjures up a place where there is no sun and no moon, a place that is not a place. Such confounding trends have crept in probably due to the very depth of this *Dhamma*.

Deep indeed is this *Dhamma* and hard to comprehend, as the Buddha once confided in Venerable *Sāriputta* with a trace of tiredness:

Saṅkhittenapi kho ahaṃ, Sāriputta, dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ, vitthārenapi kho ahaṃ, Sāriputta, dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ,

*saṅkhittena vitthārenapi kho ahaṃ, Sāriputta, dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ, aññātāro ca dullabhā.*²²

"Whether I were to preach in brief, *Sāriputta*, or whether I were to preach in detail, *Sāriputta*, or whether I were to preach both in brief or in detail, *Sāriputta*, rare are those who understand."

Then Venerable *Sāriputta* implores the Buddha to preach in brief, in detail and both in brief and in detail, saying that there will be those who understand. In response to it the Buddha gives the following instruction to Venerable *Sāriputta*:

Tasmātiha, Sāriputta, evaṃ sikkhitabbaṃ: 'Imasmiṅca saviññāṇake kāye ahaṅkāramamaṅkāramānānusayā na bhavissanti, bahiddhā ca sabbanimittesu ahaṅkāramamaṅkāramānānusayā na bhavissanti, yañca cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ upasampajja viharato ahaṅkāramamaṅkāramānānusayā na honti, tañca cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ upasampajja viharissāma'ti. Evañhi kho, Sāriputta, sikkhitabbaṃ,

"If that is so, *Sāriputta*, you all should train yourselves thus: In this conscious body and in all external signs there shall be no latencies to conceits in terms of I-ing and my-ing, and we will attain to and dwell in that deliverance of the mind and that deliverance through wisdom whereby no such latencies to conceits of I-ing and my-ing will arise. Thus should you all train yourselves!"

The Buddha goes on to declare the final outcome of that training: *Ayaṃ vuccati, Sāriputta, bhikkhu acchecchi taṅhaṃ vāvattayi saṃyojanaṃ sammā mānābhisaṃmayā antam akāsi dukkhassa.*

"Such a monk, *Sāriputta*, is called one who has cut off craving, turned back the fetters, and by rightly understanding conceit for what it is, has made an end of suffering."

We find the Buddha summing up his exhortation by quoting two verses from a *Sutta* in the *Pārāyanavagga* of the *Sutta Nipāta*, which he himself had preached to the Brahmin youth *Udaya*. We may mention in passing that among canonical texts, the *Sutta Nipāta* was held in high esteem so much so that in a number of discourses the Buddha is seen quoting from it, particularly from the two sections *Aṭṭhakavagga* and *Pārāyanavagga*. Now the two verses he quotes in this instance from the *Pārāyanavagga* are as follows:

*Pahānaṃ kāmacchandānaṃ,
domanassāna cūbhayaṃ,
thīṇassa ca panūdanaṃ,
kukkuccānaṃ nivāraṇaṃ,
Upekhāsatisaṃsuddhaṃ,
dhammatakkapurejayaṃ,
aññāvimokhaṃ pabrūmi,
avijjāyappabhedanaṃ.*²³

"The abandonment of both sensuous perceptions,
And unpleasant mental states,
The dispelling of torpidity,
And the warding off of remorse,
The purity born of equanimity and mindfulness,
With thoughts of *Dhamma* forging ahead,
And blasting ignorance,
This I call the deliverance through full understanding."

This is ample proof of the fact that the *arahattaphalasamādhī* is also called *aññāvimokkha*. Among the *Nines* of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* we come across another discourse which throws more light on the subject. Here Venerable *Ānanda* is addressing a group of monks.

Acchariyaṃ, āvuso, abbhutaṃ, āvuso, yāvañcidaṃ tena Bhagavatā jānatā passatā arahatā sammāsambuddhena sambādhe okāsādhigamo anubuddho sattānaṃ visuddhiyā sokapariddavaṇaṃ samatikkamāya dukkhadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamāya ñāyassa adhigamāya nibbānassa sacchikiriyāya.

*Tadeva nāma cakkhuṃ bhavissati te rūpā tañcāyatanā no paṭisaṃvedissati. Tadeva nāma sotaṃ bhavissati te saddā tañcāyatanā no paṭisaṃvedissati. Tadeva nāma ghānaṃ bhavissati te gandhā tañcāyatanā no paṭisaṃvedissati. Sā ca nāma jivhā bhavissati te rasā tañcāyatanā no paṭisaṃvedissati. So ca nāma kāyo bhavissati te phoṭṭhabbā tañcāyatanā no paṭisaṃvedissati.*²⁴

"It is wonderful, friends, it is marvellous, friends, that the Exalted One who knows and sees, that Worthy One, fully enlightened, has discovered an opportunity in obstructing circumstances for the purification of beings, for the transcending of sorrow and lamentation, for the ending of pain and

unhappiness, for the attainment of the right path, for the realization of *Nibbāna*.

In as much as that same eye will be there, those forms will be there, but one will not be experiencing the appropriate sense-sphere. That same ear will be there, those sounds will be there, but one will not be experiencing the appropriate sense-sphere. That same nose will be there, those smells will be there, but one will not be experiencing the appropriate sense-sphere. That same tongue will be there, those flavours will be there, but one will not be experiencing the appropriate sense-sphere. That same body will be there, those tangibles will be there, but one will not be experiencing the appropriate sense-sphere."

What is so wonderful and marvellous about this newly discovered opportunity is that, though apparently the senses and their corresponding objects come together, there is no experience of the appropriate spheres of sense contact. When Venerable *Ānanda* had described this extraordinary level of experience in these words, Venerable *Udāyī* raised the following question:

Saññīmeva nu kho āvuso Ānanda, tadāyatanaṃ no paṭisaṃvedeti udāhu asaññī? "Friend, is it the fact that while being conscious one is not experiencing that sphere or is he unconscious at that time?"

Venerable *Ānanda* affirms that it is while being conscious, *saññīmeva*, that such a thing happens. Venerable *Udāyī*'s cross-question gives us a further clue to the riddle like verse we discussed earlier, beginning with *na sañña saññī na visañña saññī*.

It is indeed puzzling why one does not experience those sense-objects, though one is conscious. As if to drive home the point, Venerable *Ānanda* relates how he once answered a related question put to him by the nun *Jaṭilagāhiyā* when he was staying at the Deer park in *Añjanavana* in *Sāketa*. The question was:

Yāyaṃ, bhante Ānanda, samādhi na cābhinato na cāpanato na ca sasankhāraniggayhavāritavato, vimuttattā ḥhito, ḥhitattā santusito, santusitattā no paritassati. Ayaṃ, bhante, samādhi kiṃphalo vutto Bhagavatā?

"That concentration, Venerable *Ānanda*, which is neither turned towards nor turned outwards, which is not a vow constrained by preparations, one that is steady because of freedom, contented because of

steadiness and not hankering because of contentment, Venerable Sir, with what fruit has the Exalted One associated that concentration?"

The question looks so highly compressed that the key words in it might need some clarification. The two terms *abhinata* and *apanata* are suggestive of lust and hate, as well as introversion and extroversion. This concentration is free from these extreme attitudes. Whereas in ordinary concentration *sankhāras*, or preparations, exercise some degree of control as the term *vikkhambhana*, "propping up", "suppression", suggests, here there is no implication of any forcible action as in a vow. Here the steadiness is born of freedom from that very constriction.

Generally, the steadiness characteristic of a level of concentration is not much different from the apparent steadiness of a spinning top. It is the spinning that keeps the top up. But here the very freedom from that spinning has brought about a steadiness of a higher order, which in its turn gives rise to contentment.

The kind of peace and contentment that comes with *samādhi* in general is brittle and irritable. That is why it is sometimes called *kuppa paṭicca santi*, "peace subject to irritability".²⁵ Here, on the contrary, there is no such irritability.

We can well infer from this that the allusion is to *akuppā cetovimutti*, "unshakeable deliverance of the mind". The kind of contentment born of freedom and stability is so perfect that it leaves no room for hankering, *paritassanā*.

However, the main point of the question posed by that nun amounts to this: What sort of a fruit does a *samādhi* of this description entail, according to the words of the Exalted One? After relating the circumstances connected with the above question as a flash back, Venerable *Ānanda* finally comes out with the answer he had given to the question:

Yāyaṃ, bhagini, samādhi na cābhinato na cāpanato na ca sasankhāraniggayhavāritavato, vimuttattā ḥhito, ḥhitattā santusito, santusitattā no paritassati, ayaṃ, bhagini, samādhi aññāphalo vutto Bhagavatā.

"Sister, that concentration which is neither turned towards nor turned outwards, which is not a vow constrained by preparations, one that is steady because of freedom, contented because of steadiness and not

hankering because of contentment, that concentration, sister, has been declared by the Buddha to have full understanding as its fruit."

Aññā, or full understanding, is one that comes with realization conferring certitude and it is the fruit of the concentration described above. Then, as if coming back to the point, Venerable Ānanda adds: *Evaṃ saññīpi kho, āvuso, tad āyatanam no paṭisaṃvedeti*. "Being thus conscious, too, friend, one does not experience an appropriate sphere of sense."

So now we have garnered sufficient evidence to substantiate the claims of this extraordinary *arahattaphalasangāhī*. It may also be mentioned that sometimes this realization of the *arahant* is summed up in a sentence like *anāsavaṃ cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ diṭṭheva dhamme sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharati*,²⁶ "having realized by himself through higher knowledge here and now the influx-free deliverance of the mind and deliverance through wisdom, he dwells having attained to it."

There is another significant discourse in the section of the Fours in the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* which throws some light on how one should look upon the *arahant* when he is in *arahattaphalasangāhī*. The discourse deals with four types of persons, namely:

- 1) *anusotagāmī puggalo* "downstream bound person"
- 2) *paṭisotagāmī puggalo* "upstream bound person"
- 3) *thitatto puggalo* "stationary person"
- 4) *tiṇṇo pāragato thale tiṭṭhati brāhmaṇo* "the Brahmin standing on dry ground having crossed over and gone beyond".²⁷

The first type of person indulges in sense pleasures and commits evil deeds and is thus bound downstream in *saṃsāra*. The second type of person refrains from indulgence in sense pleasures and from evil deeds. His upstream struggle is well expressed in the following sentence: *Sahāpi dukkhena sahāpi domanassena assumukhopi rudamāno paripuṇṇam parisuddham brahmacariyaṃ carati*, "even with pain, even with displeasure, with tearful face and crying he leads the holy life in its fullness and perfection."

The third type, the stationary, is the non-returner who, after death, goes to the *Brahma* world and puts an end to suffering there, without coming back to this world.

It is the fourth type of person who is said to have crossed over and gone to the farther shore, *tiṇṇo pāragato*, and stands there, *thale tiṭṭhati*. The word *brahmin* is used here as an epithet of an *arahant*. This riddle-like reference to an *arahant* is explained there with the help of the more thematic description *āsavānaṃ khayā anāsavaṃ cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ diṭṭheva dhamme sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharati*, "with the extinction of influxes he attains to and abides in the influx free deliverance of the mind and deliverance through wisdom".

This brings us to an extremely deep point in our discussion on *Nibbāna*. If the *arahant* in *arahattaphalasangāhī* is supposed to be standing on the farther shore, having gone beyond, what is the position with him when he is taking his meals or preaching in his every day life? Does he now and then come back to this side?

Whether the *arahant*, having gone to the farther shore, comes back at all is a matter of dispute. The fact that it involves some deeper issues is revealed by some discourses touching on this question.

The last verse of the *Paramatṭhakasutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*, for instance, makes the following observation:

*Na kappayanti na purekkharonti,
dhammā pi tesam na paṭicchitāse,
na brāhmaṇo silavatena neyyo,
pāraṃgato na pacceṭi tādi*.²⁸

"They, the *arahants*, do not formulate or put forward views,

They do not subscribe to any views,

The true Brahmin is not liable to be led astray by ceremonial rites and ascetic vows,

The Such like One, who has gone to the farther shore, comes not back."

It is the last line that concerns us here. For the *arahant* it uses the term *tādī*, a highly significant term which we came across earlier too. The rather literal rendering "such-like" stands for steadfastness, for the unwavering firmness to stand one's ground. So, the implication is that the *arahant*, once gone beyond, does not come back. The steadfastness associated with the epithet *tādī* is reinforced in one *Dhammapada* verse

by bringing in the simile of the firm post at the city gate: *Indakhīlūpamo tādi subbato*,²⁹ "who is steadfast and well conducted like the pillar at the city gate."

The verse in question, then, points to the conclusion that the steadfast one, the *arahant*, who has attained supramundane freedom, does not come back.

1. M I 436, *MahāMālunkyasutta*.
2. See especially sermon 7.
3. It 62, *Santatara Sutta*.
4. See sermon 7.
5. It-a II 42.
6. Ud 12, *Sakkārasutta*; see sermon 16.
7. This expression occurs e.g. at M I 35, *Ākaṅkheyyasutta*.
8. This expression occurs e.g. at S IV 297, *Godattasutta*.
9. Ps III 115, *aṭṭhakathā* on the *Bahavedanīyasutta*.
10. Ud 9, *Bāhiyasutta*; see sermon 15.
11. A V 8, *Sāriputtasutta*.
12. A III 379, *Soṇasutta*.
13. See sermon 1.
14. S IV 19, *Ādittasutta*.
15. See sermons 9 and 15.
16. S IV 98, *Kāmaguṇasutta*.
17. See sermon 5.
18. Spk II 391.
19. M III 217, *Salāyatanavibhaṅgasutta*.
20. Ud 80, *Paṭhamanibbānapaṭisaṃyuttasutta*.
21. Ud-a 389.
22. A I 133, *Sāriputtasutta*.
23. Sn 1106-1107, *Udayamāṇavapucchā*.
24. A IV 426, *Ānandasutta*.
25. Sn 784, *Duṭṭhaṭṭhakasutta*.
26. E.g. D I 156, *Mahālisutta*.
27. A II 5, *Anusotasutta*.
28. Sn 803, *Paramaṭṭhakasutta*.
29. Dh 95, *Arahantavagga*.

Sermon - 18

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa*

*Etaṃ santaṃ, etaṃ paṇītaṃ, yadidaṃ sabbaśaṅkhārasamatho
sabbūpadhipaṭṭhānissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ.*¹

"This is peaceful, this is excellent, namely the stilling of all preparations, the relinquishment of all assets, the destruction of craving, detachment, cessation, extinction."

With the permission of the Most Venerable Great Preceptor and the assembly of the venerable meditative monks. This is the eighteenth sermon in the series of sermons on *Nibbāna*.

We happened to mention, in our last sermon, that many of the discourses dealing with the subject of *Nibbāna*, have been misinterpreted, due to a lack of appreciation of the fact that the transcendence of the world and crossing over to the farther shore of existence have to be understood in a psychological sense.

The view that the *arahant* at the end of his life enters into an absolutely existing *asaṅkhata dhātu*, or 'unprepared element', seems to have received acceptance in the commentarial period. In the course of our last sermon, we made it very clear that some of the discourses cited by the commentators in support of that view deal, on the contrary, with some kind of realization the *arahant* goes through here and now, in this very life, in this very world - a realization of the cessation of existence, or the cessation of the six sense-spheres.

Even when the Buddha refers to the *arahant* as the Brahmin who, having gone beyond, is standing on the farther shore,² he was speaking of the *arahant* who has realized, in this very life, the influx-free deliverance of the mind and deliverance through wisdom, in his concentration of the fruit of *arahant*-hood.

Therefore, on the strength of this evidence, we are compelled to elicit a subtler meaning of the concept of 'this shore' and the 'farther shore' from these discourses dealing with *Nibbāna* than is generally accepted in the world. Our sermon today is especially addressed to that end.

As we mentioned before, if one is keen on getting a solution to the problems relating to *Nibbāna*, the discourses we are now taking up for discussion might reveal the deeper dimensions of that problem.

We had to wind up our last sermon while drawing out the implications of the last line in the *Paramatṭhakasutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*: *pāraṃgato na pacceṭi tādi*.³ We drew the inference that the steadfast one, the *arahant*, who is such-like, once gone to the farther shore, does not come back.

We find, however, quite a different idea expressed in a verse of the *Nālakasutta* in the *Sutta Nipāta*. The verse, which was the subject of much controversy among the ancients, runs as follows:

*Uccāvāca hi paṭipadā,
samaṇena pakāsitā,
na pāraṃ diguṇaṃ yanti,
na idaṃ ekaguṇaṃ mutaṃ.*⁴

"High and low are the paths,
Made known by the recluse,
They go not twice to the farther shore,
Nor yet is it to be reckoned a going once."

The last two lines seem to contradict each other. There is no going twice to the farther shore, but still it is not to be conceived as a going once.

Now, as for the first two lines, the high and low paths refer to the modes of practice adopted, according to the grades of understanding in different character types. For instances, the highest grade of persons attains *Nibbāna* by an easy path, being quick-witted, *sukhā paṭipadā khippābhiññā*, whereas the lowest grade attains it by a difficult path, being relatively dull-witted, *dukkhā paṭipadā dandhābhiññā*.⁵

The problem lies in the last two lines. The commentary tries to tackle it by interpreting the reference to not going twice to the farther shore, *na pāraṃ diguṇaṃ yanti*, as an assertion that there is no possibility of attaining *Nibbāna* by the same path twice, *ekamaggena dvikkhattuṃ nibbānaṃ na yanti*.⁶ The implication is that the supramundane path of a stream-winner, a once-returner or a non-returner arises only once. Why it is not to be conceived as a going once is explained as an acceptance of the norm that requires not less than four supramundane paths to attain *arahant*-hood.

However, a deeper analysis of the verse in question would reveal the fact that it effectively brings up an apparent contradiction. The commentary sidetracks by resolving it into two different problems. The two lines simply reflect two aspects of the same problem.

They go not twice to the farther shore, and this not going twice, *na idam*, is however not to be thought of as a 'going once' either. The commentary sidetracks by taking *idam*, 'this', to mean the farther shore, *pāraṃ*, whereas it comprehends the whole idea of not going twice. Only then is the paradox complete.

In other words, this verse concerns the such-like one, the *arahant*, and not the stream-winner, the once-returner or the non-returner. Here we have an echo of the idea already expressed as the grand finale of the *Paramatthakasutta*: *pāraṃgato na pacceṭi tādi*,⁷ the such-like one, "gone to the farther shore, comes not back".

It is the last line, however, that remains a puzzle. Why is this 'not going twice,' not to be thought of as a 'going once'? There must be something deep behind this riddle.

Now, for instance, when one says 'I won't go there twice', it means that he will go only once. When one says 'I won't tell twice', it follows that he will tell only once. But here we are told that the *arahant* goes not twice, and yet it is not a going once.

The idea behind this riddle is that the influx-free *arahant*, the such-like-one, gone to the farther shore, which is supramundane, does not come back to the mundane. Nevertheless, he apparently comes back to the world and is seen to experience likes and dislikes, pleasures and pains, through the objects of the five senses. From the point of view of the worldling, the *arahant* has come back to the world. This is the crux of the problem.

Why is it not to be conceived of as a going once? Because the *arahant* has the ability to detach himself from the world from time to time and re-attain to that *arahattaphalasamādhī*. It is true that he too experiences the objects of the five external senses, but now and then he brings his mind to dwell in that *arahattaphalasamādhī*, which is like standing on the farther shore.

Here, then, we have an extremely subtle problem. When the *arahant* comes back to the world and is seen experiencing the objects of the five senses, one might of course conclude that he is actually 'in the world'. This problematic situation, namely the question how the influx-free *arahant*, gone to the farther shore, comes back and takes in objects through the senses, the Buddha resolves with the help of a simple simile, drawn from nature. For instance, we read in the *Jarāsutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta* the following scintillating lines.

*Udabindu yathā pi pokkhare,
padume vāri yathā na lippati,
evaṃ muni nopalippati,
yadidaṃ diṭṭhasutamutesu vā.*⁸

"Like a drop of water on a lotus leaf,
Or water that taints not the lotus petal,
So the sage unattached remains,
In regard to what is seen, heard and sensed."

So the extremely deep problem concerning the relation between the supramundane and the mundane levels of experience, is resolved by the Buddha by bringing in the simile of the lotus petal and the lotus leaf.

Let us take up another instance from the *Māgandīyasutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*.

*Yehi vivitto vicareyya loke,
na tāni uggayha vadeyya nāgo,
elambujaṃ kaṇṭakaṃ vārijaṃ yathā,
jalena paṃkena anūpalittaṃ,
evaṃ munī santivādo agiddho,
kāme ca loke ca anūpalitto.*⁹

"Detached from whatever views, the *arahant* wanders in the world,

He would not converse, taking his stand on them,
Even as the white lotus, sprung up in the water,
Yet remains unsmearred by water and mud,
So is the sage, professing peace and free from greed,
Unsmearred by pleasures of sense and things of the world."

Among the Tens of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* we come across a discourse in which the Buddha answers a question put by Venerable *Bāhuna*. At that time the Buddha was staying near the pond *Gaggara* in the city of *Campa*. Venerable *Bāhuna*'s question was:

*Katīhi nu kho, bhante, dhammehi tathāgato nissaṭo viṣaṃyutto vippamutto vimariyādikatena cetasā viharati?*¹⁰ "Detached, disengaged and released from how many things does the *Tathāgata* dwell with an unrestricted mind?" The Buddha's answer to the question embodies a simile, aptly taken from the pond, as it were.

Dasahi kho, Bāhuna, dhammehi tathāgato nissaṭo viṣaṃyutto vippamutto vimariyādikatena cetasā viharati. Katamehi dasahi? Rūpena kho, Bāhuna, Tathāgato nissaṭo viṣaṃyutto vippamutto vimariyādikatena cetasā viharati, vedanāya ... saññāya ... saṅkhārehi ... viññāṇena ... jātiyā ... jarāya ... maraṇena ... dukkhehi ... kilesehi kho, Bāhuna, Tathāgato nissaṭo viṣaṃyutto vippamutto vimariyādikatena cetasā viharati.

Seyyathāpi, Bāhuna, uppalaṃ vā padumaṃ vā puṇḍarikaṃ vā udake jātaṃ udake saṃvaḍḍhaṃ udakā accugamma tiṭṭhati anupalittaṃ udakena, evaṃ eva kho Bāhuna Tathāgato imehi dasahi dhammehi nissaṭo viṣaṃyutto vippamutto vimariyādikatena cetasā viharati.

"Detached, disengaged and released from ten things, *Bāhuna*, does the *Tathāgata* dwell with a mind unrestricted. Which ten? Detached, disengaged and released from form, *Bāhuna*, does the *Tathāgata* dwell with a mind unrestricted; detached, disengaged and released from feeling ... from perceptions ... from preparations from consciousness ... from birth ... from decay ... from death ... from pains ... from defilements, *Bāhuna*, does the *Tathāgata* dwell with a mind unrestricted.

Just as, *Bāhuna*, a blue lotus, a red lotus, or a white lotus, born in the water, grown up in the water, rises well above the water and remains unsmearred by water, even so, *Bāhuna*, does the *Tathāgata* dwell detached, disengaged and released from these ten things with a mind unrestricted."

This discourse, in particular, highlights the transcendence of the *Tathāgata*, though he seems to take in worldly objects through the senses. Even the release from the five aggregates is affirmed.

We might wonder why the *Tathāgata* is said to be free from birth, decay and death, since, as we know, he did grow old and pass away. Birth, decay and death, in this context, do not refer to some future state either. Here and now the *Tathāgata* is free from the concepts of birth, decay and death.

In the course of our discussion of the term *papañca*, we had occasion to illustrate how one can be free from such concepts.¹¹ If concepts of birth, decay and death drive fear into the minds of worldlings, such is not the case with the *Tathāgata*. He is free from such fears and forebodings. He is free from defilements as well.

The discourse seems to affirm that the *Tathāgata* dwells detached from all these ten things. It seems, therefore, that the functioning of the *Tathāgata's* sense-faculties in his every day life also should follow a certain extraordinary pattern of detachment and disengagement. In fact,

Venerable *Sāriputta* says something to that effect in the *Salāyatanaśaṃyutta* of the *Śaṃyutta Nikāya*.

*Passati Bhagavā cakkhunā rūpaṃ, chandarāgo Bhagavato natthi, suvimuttacitto Bhagavā.*¹² "The Exalted One sees forms with the eye, but there is no desire or attachment in him, well freed in mind is the Exalted One."

We come across a similar statement made by the brahmin youth *Uttara* in the *Brahmāyusutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, after he had closely followed the Buddha for a considerable period to verify the good report of his extraordinary qualities.

*Rasapaṭisaṃvedī kho pana so bhavaṃ Gotamo āhāraṃ āhāreti, no rasarāgapaṭisaṃvedī.*¹³ "Experiencing taste Master *Gotama* takes his food, but not experiencing any attachment to the taste."

It is indeed something marvellous. The implication is that there is such a degree of detachment with regard to things experienced by the tongue, even when the senses are taking in their objects. One can understand the difference between the mundane and the supramundane, when one reflects on the difference between experiencing taste and experiencing an attachment to taste.

Not only with regard to the objects of the five senses, but even with regard to mind-objects, the emancipated one has a certain degree of detachment. The *arahant* has realized that they are not 'such'. He takes in concepts, and even speaks in terms of 'I' and 'mine', but knows that they are false concepts, as in the case of a child's language,

There is a discourse among the Nines of the *Ānguttara Nikāya* which seems to assert this fact. It is a discourse preached by Venerable *Sāriputta* to refute a wrong viewpoint taken by a monk named *Chandikāputta*.

*Evaṃ sammā vimuttacittassa kho, āvuso, bhikkhuno bhusā cepi cakkhaviññeyyā rūpā cakkhussa āpāthaṃ āgacchanti, nevassa cittaṃ pariyādiyanti, amissīkatamevassa cittaṃ hoti ṭhitaṃ āneñjappattaṃ, vayaṃ cassānupassati. Bhusā cepi sotaviññeyyā saddā ... bhūsa cepi ghānaviññeyyā gandhā ... bhūsa cepi jivhāviññeyyā rasā ... bhūsa cepi kāyaviññeyyā phoṭṭhabbā ... bhūsa cepi manoviññeyyā dhammā manassa āpāthaṃ āgacchanti, nevassa cittaṃ pariyādiyanti, amissīkatamevassa cittaṃ hoti ṭhitaṃ āneñjappattaṃ, vayaṃ cassānupassati.*¹⁴

"Friend, in the case of a monk who is fully released, even if many forms cognizable by the eye come within the range of vision, they do not

overwhelm his mind, his mind remains unalloyed, steady and unmoved, he sees its passing away. Even if many sounds cognizable by the ear come within the range of hearing ... even if many smells cognizable by the nose ... even if many tastes cognizable by the tongue ... even if many tangibles cognizable by the body ... even if many mind-objects cognizable by the mind come within the range of the mind, they do not overwhelm his mind, his mind remains unalloyed, steady and unmoved, he sees its passing away."

So here we have the ideal of the emancipated mind. Generally, a person unfamiliar with the nature of a lotus leaf or a lotus petal, on seeing a drop of water on a lotus leaf or a lotus petal would think that the water drop smears them.

Earlier we happened to mention that there is a wide gap between the mundane and the supramundane. Some might think that this refers to a gap in time or in space. In fact it is such a conception that often led to various misinterpretations concerning *Nibbāna*. The supramundane seems so far away from the mundane, so it must be something attainable after death in point of time. Or else it should be far far away in outer space. Such is the impression made in general.

But if we go by the simile of the drop of water on the lotus leaf, the distance between the mundane and the supramundane is the same as that between the lotus leaf and the drop of water on it.

We are still on the problem of the hither shore and the farther shore. The distinction between the mundane and the supramundane brings us to the question of this shore and the other shore.

The *arahant's* conception of this shore and the other shore differs from that of the worldling in general. If, for instance, a native of this island goes abroad and settles down there, he might even think of a return to his country as a 'going abroad'. Similarly, as far as the emancipated sage is concerned, if he, having gone to the farther shore, does not come back, one might expect him to think of this world as the farther shore.

But it seems the *arahant* has no such distinction. A certain *Dhammapada* verse alludes to the fact that he has transcended this dichotomy:

*Yassa pāraṃ apāraṃ vā,
pārāpāraṃ na vijjati,
vītaddaraṃ visaṃyuttaṃ,
tam ahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ.*¹⁵

This is a verse we have quoted earlier too, in connection with the question of the verbal dichotomy.¹⁶ *Yassa pāraṃ apāraṃ vā, pārāpāraṃ na vijjati*, "to whom there is neither a farther shore, nor a hither shore, nor both". That is to say, he has no discrimination between the two. *Vītaddaraṃ visaṃyuttaṃ, tam ahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ*, "who is free from pangs of sorrow and entanglements, him I call a Brahmin".

This means that the *arahant* is free from the verbal dichotomy, which is of relevance to the worldling. Once gone beyond, the emancipated one has no more use of these concepts. This is where the Buddha's dictum in the raft simile of the *Alagaddūpamasutta* becomes meaningful.

Even the concepts of a 'this shore' and a 'farther shore' are useful only for the purpose of crossing over. If, for instance, the *arahant*, having gone beyond, were to think 'ah, this is my land', that would be some sort of a grasping. Then there will be an identification, *tammayatā*, not a non-identification, *atammayatā*.

As we had mentioned earlier, there is a strange quality called *atammayatā*, associated with an *arahant*.¹⁷ In connection with the simile of a man who picked up a gem, we have already stated the ordinary norm that prevails in the world.¹⁸

If we possess something - we are possessed by it.

If we grasp something - we are caught by it.

This is the moral behind the parable of the gem. It is this conviction, which prompts the *arahant* not to grasp even the farther shore, though he may stand there. 'This shore' and the 'other shore' are concepts, which have a practical value to those who are still on this side.

As it is stated in the *Alagaddūpamasutta*, since there is no boat or bridge to cross over, one has to improvise a raft by putting together grass, twigs, branches and leaves, found on this shore. But after crossing over with its help, he does not carry it with him on his shoulder.

*Evameva kho, bhikkhave, kullūpamo mayā dhammo desito nittharaṇatthāya no gahaṇatthāya. Kullūpamaṃ vo bhikkhave ajānantehi dhammā pi vo pahātabbā, paṅ'eva adhammā.*¹⁹

"Even so, monks, have I preached to you a *Dhamma* that is comparable to a raft, which is for crossing over and not for grasping. Well knowing the *Dhamma* to be comparable to a raft, you should abandon even the good things, more so the bad things."

One might think that the *arahant* is in the sensuous realm, when, for

instance, he partakes of food. But that is not so. Though he attains to the realms of form and formless realms, he does not belong there. He has the ability to attain to those levels of concentration, but he does not grasp them egoistically, true to that norm of *atammayatā*, or non-identification.

This indeed is something extraordinary. Views and opinions about language, dogmatically entertained by the worldlings, lose their attraction for him. This fact is clearly illustrated for us by the *Uragasutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*, the significance of which we have already stressed.²⁰ We happened to mention that there is a refrain, running through all the seventeen verses making up that discourse. The refrain concerns the worn out skin of a snake. The last two lines in each verse, forming the refrain, are:

*So bhikkhu jahāti orapāraṃ,
urago jiṇṇamiva tacam purāṇam.*²¹

"That monk forsakes the hither and the thither,
Even as the snake its skin that doth wither".

The term *orapāraṃ* is highly significant in this context. *Oraṃ* means "this shore" and *paraṃ* is the "farther shore". The monk, it seems, gives up not only this shore, but the other shore as well, even as the snake sloughs off its worn out skin. That skin has served its purpose, but now it is redundant. So it is sloughed off.

Let us now take up one more verse from the *Uragasutta* which has the same refrain, because of its relevance to the understanding of the term *papañca*. The transcendence of relativity involves freedom from the duality in worldly concepts such as 'good' and 'evil'. The concept of a 'farther shore' stands relative to the concept of a 'hither shore'. The point of these discourses is to indicate that there is a freedom from worldly conceptual proliferations based on duality and relativity. The verse we propose to bring up is:

*Yo nāccasārī na paccasārī,
sabbam accagamā imam papañcam,
so bhikkhu jahāti orapāraṃ,
urago jiṇṇamiva tacam purāṇam.*²²

"Who neither overreaches himself nor lags behind,
And has gone beyond all this proliferation,
That monk forsakes the hither and the thither,

Even as the snake its slough that doth wither".

This verse is particularly significant in that it brings out some points of interest. The overreaching and lagging behind is an allusion to the verbal dichotomy. In the context of views, for instance, annihilationism is an overreaching and eternalism is a lagging behind. We may give another illustration, easier to understand. Speculation about the future is an overreaching and repentance over the past is a lagging behind. To transcend both these tendencies is to get beyond proliferation, *sabbam accagamā imam papañcam*.

When a banknote is invalidated, cravings, conceits and views bound with it go down. Concepts current in the world, like banknotes in transaction, are reckoned as valid so long as cravings, conceits and views bound with them are there. They are no longer valid when these are gone.

We have defined *papañca* with reference to cravings, conceits and views.²³ Commentaries also speak of *taṇhāpapañca*, *diṭṭhipapañca* and *mānapapañca*.²⁴ By doing away with cravings, conceits and views, one goes beyond all *papañca*.

The term *orapāraṃ*, too, has many connotations. It stands for the duality implicit in such usages as the 'internal' and the 'external', 'one's own' and 'another's', as well as 'this shore' and the 'farther shore'. It is compared here to the worn out skin of a snake. It is worn out by transcending the duality characteristic of linguistic usage through wisdom.

Why the Buddha first hesitated to teach this *Dhamma* was the difficulty of making the world understand.²⁵ Perhaps it was the conviction that the world could easily be misled by those limitations in the linguistic medium.

We make these few observations in order to draw attention to the relativity underlying such terms as 'this shore' and the 'other shore' and to show how *Nibbāna* transcends even that dichotomy.

In this connection, we may take up for comment a highly controversial *sutta* in the *Itivuttaka*, which deals with the two aspects of *Nibbāna* known as *sa-upādisesā Nibbānadhātu* and *anupādisesā Nibbānadhātu*. We propose to quote the entire *sutta*, so as to give a fuller treatment to the subject.

Vuttam hetam Bhagavatā, vuttam arahatā ti me suttaṃ:

Dve-mā, bhikkhave, nibbānadhātuyo. Katame dve? Sa-upādisesā ca

nibbānadhātu, anupādisesā ca nibbānadhātu.

Katamā, bhikkhave, sa-upadisesā nibbānadhātu? Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu araham hoti khīṇāsavo vusitavā katakaraṇīyo ohitabhāro anuppattasadattho parikkhīṇabhavasamyojano sammadaññāvimutto. Tassa tiṭṭhanteva pañcindriyāni yesam avighātattā manāpāmanāpam paccanubhoti, sukhadukkham paṭisaṃvediyati. Tassa yo rāgakkhayo dosakkhayo mohakkhayo, ayam vuccati, bhikkhave, sa-upadisesā nibbānadhātu.

Katamā ca, bhikkhave, anupādisesā nibbānadhātu? Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu araham hoti khīṇāsavo vusitavā katakaraṇīyo ohitabhāro anuppattasadattho parikkhīṇabhavasamyojano sammadaññāvimutto. Tassa idheva sabbavedayitāni anabhinanditāni sītibhavissanti, ayam vuccati, bhikkhave, anupādisesā nibbānadhātu.

Etam attham Bhagavā avoca, tatthetaṃ iti vuccati:

*Du ve imā cakkhumatā pakāsītā,
nibbānadhātū anissitena tādīnā,
ekā hi dhātu idha diṭṭhadhammikā,
sa-upadisesā bhavanettisaṅkhayā,
anupādisesā pana samparāyikā,
yamhi nirujjhanti bhavāni sabbaso.*

*Ye etad-aññāya padaṃ asaṅkhataṃ,
vimuttacittā bhavanettisaṅkhayā,
te dhammasārādhigamā khaye ratā,
pahaṃsu te sabbabhavāni tādīno.*

*Ayampi attho vutto Bhagavatā, iti me sutam.*²⁶

"This was said by the Exalted One, said by the Worthy One, so have I heard:

'Monks, there are these two *Nibbāna* elements. Which two? The *Nibbāna* element with residual clinging and the *Nibbāna* element without residual clinging.

And what, monks, is the *Nibbāna* element with residual clinging? Herein, monks, a monk is an *arahant*, with influxes extinct, one who has lived the holy life to the full, done what is to be done, laid down the burden, reached one's goal, fully destroyed the fetters of existence and released with full understanding. His five sense faculties still remain and due to the fact that they are not destroyed, he experiences likes and

dislikes, and pleasures and pains. That extirpation of lust, hate and delusion in him, that, monks, is known as the *Nibbāna* element with residual clinging.

And what, monks, is the *Nibbāna* element without residual clinging? Herein, monks, a monk is an *arahant*, with influxes extinct, one who has lived the holy life to the full, done what is to be done, laid down the burden, reached one's goal, fully destroyed the fetters of existence and released with full understanding. In him, here itself, all what is felt will cool off, not being delighted in. This, monks, is the *Nibbāna* element without residual clinging.'

To this effect the Exalted One spoke and this is the gist handed down as 'thus said'.

'These two *Nibbāna* elements have been made known,

By the one with vision, unattached and such,

Of relevance to the here and now is one element,

With residual clinging, yet with tentacles to becoming snapped,

But then that element without residual clinging is of relevance to the hereafter,

For in it surcease all forms of becoming.

They that comprehend fully this state of the unprepared,

Released in mind with tentacles to becoming snapped,

On winning to the essence of *Dhamma* they take delight in seeing to an end of it all,

So give up they, all forms of becoming, steadfastly such-like as they are."

The standard phrase summing up the qualification of an *arahant* occurs in full in the definition of the *sa-upādisesā Nibbānadhātu*. The distinctive feature of this *Nibbāna* element is brought out in the statement that the *arahant's* five sense faculties are still intact, owing to which he experiences likes and dislikes, and pleasure and pain. However, to the extent that lust, hate and delusion are extinct in him, it is called the *Nibbāna* element with residual clinging.

In the definition of the *Nibbāna* element without residual clinging, the same standard phrase recurs, while its distinctive feature is summed up in just one sentence: *Tassa idheva sabbavedayitāni anabhinanditāni sītibhavissanti*, "in him, here itself, all what is felt will cool off, not being delighted in". It may be noted that the verb is in the future tense and apart

from this cooling off, there is no guarantee of a world beyond, as an *asaṅkhata dhātu*, or 'unprepared element', with no sun, moon or stars in it.

The two verses that follow purport to give a summary of the prose passage. Here it is clearly stated that out of the two *Nibbāna* elements, as they are called, the former pertains to the here and now, *diṭṭhadhammika*, while the latter refers to what comes after death, *samparāyika*. The *Nibbāna* element with residual clinging, *sa-upādisesā Nibbānadhātu*, has as its redeeming feature the assurance that the tentacular craving for becoming is cut off, despite its exposure to likes and dislikes, pleasures and pains, common to the field of the five senses.

As for the *Nibbāna* element without residual clinging, it is definitely stated that in it all forms of existence come to cease. The reason for it is none other than the crucial fact, stated in that single sentence, namely, the cooling off of all what is felt as an inevitable consequence of not being delighted in, *anabhinanditāni*.

Why do they not take delight in what is felt at the moment of passing away? They take delight in something else, and that is: the very destruction of all what is felt, a foretaste of which they have already experienced in their attainment to that unshakeable deliverance of the mind, which is the very pith and essence of the *Dhamma*, *dhammasāra*.

As stated in the *Mahāsāropamasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the pith of the *Dhamma* is that deliverance of the mind,²⁷ and to take delight in the ending of all feelings, *khaye ratā*, is to revert to the *arahattaphalasamādhi* with which the *arahant* is already familiar. That is how those such-like ones abandon all forms of existence, *pahaṃsu te sabbabhavāni tādino*.

Let us now try to sort out the problems that are likely to be raised in connection with the interpretation we have given. First and foremost, the two terms *diṭṭhadhammika* and *samparāyika* have to be explained.

A lot of confusion has arisen, due to a misunderstanding of the meaning of these two terms in this particular context. The usual commentarial exegesis on the term *diṭṭhadhammika* amounts to this: *Imasmiṃ attabhāve bhavā vattamānā*,²⁸ "in this very life, that is, in the present". It seems all right. But then for *samparāyika* the commentary has the following comment: *samparāye khandhabhedato parabhāge*, "*samparāya* means after the breaking up of the aggregates". The implication is that it refers to the *arahant's* after death state.

Are we then to conclude that the *arahant* gets half of his *Nibbāna* here and the other half hereafter? The terms *diṭṭhadhammika* and *samparāyika*, understood in their ordinary sense, would point to such a conclusion.

But let us not forget that the most distinctive quality of this *Dhamma* is associated with the highly significant phrase, *diṭṭhevadhamme*, "in this very life". It is also conveyed by the expression *sandiṭṭhika akālika*, "here and now" and "timeless".²⁹ The goal of endeavour, indicated by this *Dhamma*, is one that could be fully realized here and now, in this very life. It is not a piecemeal affair. Granting all that, do we find here something contrary to it, conveyed by the two terms *diṭṭhadhammika* and *samparāyika*? How can we reconcile these two passages?

In the context of *kamma*, the meaning of the two terms in question can easily be understood. For instance, that category of *kamma* known as *diṭṭhadhammavedanīya* refers to those actions which produce their results here and now. *Samparāyika* pertains to what comes after death, as for instance in the phrase *samparāye ca duggati*, an "evil bourn after death".³⁰ In the context of *kamma* it is clear enough, then, that the two terms refer to what is experienced in this world and what comes after death, respectively.

Are we justified in applying the same criterion, when it comes to the so-called two elements of *Nibbāna*? Do the *arahants* experience some part of *Nibbāna* here and the rest hereafter?

At this point, we have to admit that the term *diṭṭhadhammika* is associated with *sa-upādisesā Nibbānadhātu* while the term *samparāyika* is taken over to refer to *anupādisesā Nibbānadhātu*. However, the fact that *Nibbāna* is explicitly defined elsewhere as the cessation of existence, *bhavanirodho Nibbānaṃ*,³¹ must not be forgotten. If *Nibbāna* is the cessation of existence, there is nothing left for the *arahant* to experience hereafter.

Nibbāna is solely the realization of the cessation of existence or the end of the process of becoming. So there is absolutely no question of a hereafter for the *arahant*. By way of clarification, we have to revert to the primary sense of the term *Nibbāna*. We have made it sufficiently clear that *Nibbāna* means 'extinction' or 'extinguishment', as of a fire.

All the commentarial jargon, equating *vāna* to *taṇhā*, is utterly irrelevant. If the idea of an extinguishment of a fire is brought in, the

whole problem is solved. Think of a blazing fire. If no more firewood is added to it, the flames would subside and the embers would go on smouldering before turning into ashes. This is the norm. Now this is not an analogy we are superimposing on the *Dhamma*. It is only an echo of a canonical simile, picked up from the *Nāgasutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. The relevant verse, we are quoting, recurs in the *Udāyi Theragāthā* as well.

*Mahāgini pajjalito,
anāhārūpasammati,
aṅgāresu ca santesu,
nibbuto ti pavuccati.*³²

"As a huge blazing fire, with no more firewood added,
Goes down to reach a state of calm,
Embers smouldering, as they are, could be reckoned,
So long as they last, as almost 'extinguished'."

Though we opted to render the verse this way, there is a variant reading, which could lead to a different interpretation. As so often happens in the case of deep *suttas*, here too the correct reading is not easily determined. Instead of the phrase *aṅgāresu ca santesu*, attested as it is, many editions go for the variant reading *saṅkhāresūpasantesu*. If that reading is adopted, the verse would have to be rendered as follows:

"As a huge blazing fire, with no more fire wood added,
Goes down to reach a state of calm,
When *saṅkhāras* calm down,
One is called 'extinguished'."

It maybe pointed out that this variant reading does not accord with the imagery of the fire presented by the first two lines of the verse. It is probably a scribe's error that has come down, due to the rhythmic similarity between the two phrases *aṅgāresu ca santesu*, and *saṅkhāresūpasantesu*.³³ Between the reciter and the scribe, phrases that have a similar ring and rhythm, could sometimes bring about a textual corruption. Be that as it may, we have opted for the reading *aṅgāresu ca santesu*, because it makes more sense.

From the particular context in which the verse occurs, it seems that this imagery of the fire is a restatement of the image of the lotus unsmearred by water. Though the embers are still smouldering, to the extent that they are

no longer hungering for more fuel and are not emitting flames, they may as well be reckoned as 'extinguished'.

We can draw a parallel between this statement and the definition of *sa-upādisesā Nibbānadhātu* already quoted. As a full-fledged *arahant*, he still experiences likes and dislikes and pleasures and pains, owing to the fact that his five sense-faculties are intact.

The assertion made by the phrase beginning with *tassa tiṭṭhanteva pañcendriyāni yesaṃ aviḅhātattā ...*, "his five senses do exist, owing to the non-destruction of which ...", rather apologetically brings out the limitations of the living *arahant*. It is reminiscent of those smouldering embers in the imagery of the *Nāgasutta*. However, in so far as flames of lust, hate and delusion are quenched in him, it comes to be called *sa-upādisesā Nibbānadhātu*, even as in the case of those smouldering embers.

Craving is aptly called *bhavanetti*,³⁴ in the sense that it leads to becoming by catching hold of more and more fuel in the form of *upādāna*. When it is under control, the functioning of the sense-faculties do not entail further rebirth. The inevitable residual clinging in the living *arahant* does not precipitate a fresh existence.

This gives us a clue to the understanding of the term *anupādisesa*. The element *upādi* in this term is rather ambiguous. In the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta*, for instance, it is used as the criterion to distinguish the *anāgāmi*, the "non-returner", from the *arahant*, in the statement *diṭṭhevadhamme aññā, sati vā upādisese anāgāmitā*,³⁵ "either full convincing knowledge of *arahant*-hood here and now, or the state of non-return in the case of residual clinging".

But when it comes to the distinction between *sa-upādisesa* and *anupādisesa*, the element *upādi* has to be understood in a more radical sense, in association with the word *upādinna*. This body, as the product of past *kamma*, is the 'grasped' par excellence, which as an organic combination goes on functioning even in the *arahant* until his last moment of life.

Venerable *Sāriputta* once declared that he neither delighted in death nor delighted in life, *nābhinandāmi maraṇaṃ nābhinandāmi jīvitaṃ*.³⁶ So the embers go on smouldering until they become ashes. It is when the life span ends that the embers finally turn to ashes.

The popular interpretation of the term *anupādisesā Nibbānadhātu*

leaves room for some absolutist conceptions of an *asaṅkhata dhātu*, unprepared element, as the destiny of the *arahant*. After his *parinibbāna*, he is supposed to enter this particular *Nibbānadhātu*. But here, in this discourse, it is explained in just one sentence: *Tassa idheva, bhikkhave, sabbavedayitāni anabhinanditāni sītibhavissanti*, "in the case of him" (that is the *arahant*) ", O! monks, all what is felt, not having been delighted in, will cool off here itself."

This cooling off happens just before death, without igniting another spark of life. When *Māra* comes to grab and seize, the *arahant* lets go. The pain of death with which *Māra* teases his hapless victim and lures him into another existence, becomes ineffective in the case of the *arahant*. As he has already gone through the supramundane experience of deathlessness, in the *arahattaphalasamādhī*, death loses its sting when at last it comes. The influx-free deliverance of the mind and the influx-free deliverance through wisdom enable him to cool down all feelings in a way that baffles *Māra*.

So the *arahant* lets go of his body, experiencing ambrosial deathlessness. As in the case of Venerable *Dabba Mallaputta*, he would sometimes cremate his own body without leaving any ashes.³⁷ Outwardly it might appear as an act of self-immolation, which indeed is painful. But this is not so. Using his *jhānic* powers, he simply employs the internal fire element to cremate the body he has already discarded.

This, then, is the Buddha's extraordinary solution to the problem of overcoming death, a solution that completely outwits *Māra*.

1. MI436, *MahāMālunkyasutta*.
2. E.g. It 57, *Dutiyarāgasutta*: *tiṅṅo pāraṃ gato thale tiṅṅhati brāhmaṇo*.
3. Sn 803, *Paramaṅṅhakasutta*.
4. Sn 714, *Nālakasutta*.
5. Cf. e.g. A II 149, *Samkhittasutta*.
6. Pj II 498.
7. Sn 803, *Paramaṅṅhakasutta*.
8. Sn 812, *Jarāsutta*.
9. Sn 845, *Māgandīyasutta*.
10. A V 151, *Bāhunasutta*.
11. See sermon 12.
12. S IV 164, *Koṭṭhikasutta*.
13. M II 138, *Brahmāyusutta*.
14. A IV 404, *Silāyūpasutta*.
15. Dh 385, *Brāhmaṇavagga*.
16. See sermon 5.
17. See sermon 14.
18. See sermon 9.
19. M I 135, *Alagaddūpamasutta*.
20. See sermon 5.
21. Sn 1-17, *Uragasutta*.
22. Sn 8, *Uragasutta*.
23. See sermon 12.
24. E.g. Ps I 183, commenting on M I 40, *Sallekhasutta*: *n'etaṃ mama, n'eso haṃ asmi, na meso attā ti*.
25. M I 168, *Ariyapariyesanasutta*.
26. It 38, *Nibbānadhātusutta*.
27. M I 197, *Mahāsāropamasutta*.
28. It-a I 167.
29. In the standard formula for recollecting the *Dhamma*, e.g. at D II 93.
30. S I 34, *Maccharisutta*.
31. A V 9, *Sāriputtasutta*.
32. A III 347, *Nāgasutta* and Th 702, *Udāyitheragāthā*.
33. The corresponding verse in the Chinese parallel, *Madhyama Āgama* discourse 118 (Taishō I 608c27), does not mention *saṅkhāra* at all.
34. A II 1, *Anubuddhasutta*.
35. M I 62, *Satipaṅṅhānasutta*.
36. Th 1001, *Sāriputtatheragāthā*.
37. Ud 92, *Paṭhamadabbasutta*.

Sermon - 19

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
 Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
 Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa*

*Etaṃ santaṃ, etaṃ paṇītaṃ, yadidaṃ sabbasañkhārasamatho
 sabbūpadhipaṭṭinissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ.*¹

"This is peaceful, this is excellent, namely the stilling of all preparations, the relinquishment of all assets, the destruction of craving, detachment, cessation, extinction."

With the permission of the Most Venerable Great Preceptor and the assembly of the venerable meditative monks. This is the nineteenth sermon in the series of sermons on *Nibbāna*.

Towards the end of our last sermon, we started commenting on the two terms *sa-upādisesā Nibbānadhātu* and *anupādisesā Nibbānadhātu*. Our discussion was based on a discourse, which we quoted from the *Itivuttaka*. We also drew attention to a certain analogy found in the discourses, which shows that the two *Nibbāna* elements actually represent two stages of the extinguishment implicit in the term *Nibbāna*.

When no more firewood is added to a blazing fire, flames would subside and the logs of wood already burning go on smouldering as embers. After some time, they too get extinguished and become ashes. With regard to the *arahant*, too, we have to think in terms of this analogy. It can be taken as an illustration of the two *Nibbāna* elements. To the extent the living *arahant* is free from fresh graspings, lust, hate and delusions do not flare up. But so long as he has to bear the burden of this organic combination, this physical frame, the *arahant* has to experience certain afflictions and be receptive to likes and dislikes, pleasures and pains.

In spite of all that, mentally he has access to the experience of the extinguishment he has already won. It is in that sense that the *arahant* is said to be in the *Nibbāna* element with residual clinging in his everyday life, while taking in the objects of the five senses.

At the last moment of the *arahant's* life, even this organic body that had been grasped as *upādīṇṇa* has to be abandoned. It is at that moment, when he is going to detach his mind from the body, that *anupādisesā parinibbānadhātu* comes in. A brief hint to this effect is given in one of

the verses occurring in the *Nāgasutta* referred to earlier. The verse runs thus:

*Vītarāga vītadoso
 vītamoho anāsavo
 sarīraṃ vijahaṃ nāgo
 parinibbissati anāsavo.*²

"The one who has abandoned lust,
 Hate and delusion and is influx-free,
 That elephant of a man, on giving up his body,
 Will attain full appeasement, being influx-free."

If we define in brief the two *Nibbāna* elements this way, a more difficult problem confronts us relating to the sense in which they are called *diṭṭhadhammika* and *samparāyika*. *Diṭṭhadhammika* means what pertains to this life and *samparāyika* refers to what comes after death. What is the idea in designating *sa-upādisesā Nibbānadhātu* as *diṭṭhadhammika* and *anupādisesā Nibbānadhātu* as *samparāyika*?

In the context of *kamma*, the meaning of these two terms is easily understood. But when it comes to *Nibbāna*, such an application of the terms would imply two types of *Nibbānic* bliss, one to be experienced here and the other hereafter.

But that kind of explanation would not accord with the spirit of this *Dhamma*, because the Buddha always emphasizes the fact that *Nibbāna* is something to be realized here and now in toto. It is not a piecemeal realization, leaving something for the hereafter. Such terms like *diṭṭhevadhamme*, in this very life, *sandiṭṭhika*, here and now, and *akālika*, timeless, emphasize this aspect of *Nibbāna*.

In the context of *Nibbāna*, these two terms have to be understood as representing two aspects of a perfect realization attainable in this very life. Briefly stated, *anupādisesā Nibbānadhātu* is that which confers the certitude, well in time, that the appeasement experienced by an *arahant* during this life time remains unchanged even at death. To say that there is a possibility of realizing or ascertaining one's state after death might even seem contradictory. How can one realize one's after death state?

We get a clear-cut answer to that question in the following passage in the *Dhātuvibhaṅgasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*. *Seyyathāpi, bhikkhu, telañca paṭicca vaṭṭiñca paṭicca telappadīpo jhāyati, tasseva telassa ca*

*vaṭṭiyā ca pariyādānā aññassa ca anupahārā anāhāro nibbāyati, evameva kho, bhikkhu, kāyapariyantikaṃ vedanaṃ vediyamāno 'kāyapariyantikaṃ vedanaṃ vedayāmī'ti pajānati, jīvitapariyantikaṃ vedanaṃ vediyamāno 'jīvitapariyantikaṃ vedanaṃ vedayāmī'ti pajānati, 'kāyassa bhedaṃ paraṃ marañā uddhaṃ jīvitapariyādānā idheva sabbavedayitāni anabhinanditāni sītībhavissantī'ti pajānati.*³

"Just as, monk, an oil lamp burns depending on oil and the wick, and when that oil and the wick are used up, if it does not get any more of these, it is extinguished from lack of fuel, even so, monk, when he feels a feeling limited to the body, he understands 'I feel a feeling limited to the body', when he feels a feeling limited to life, he understands 'I feel a feeling limited to life', he understands 'on the breaking up of this body, before life becomes extinct, even here itself, all that is felt, not being delighted in, will become cool."

The last sentence is particularly noteworthy in that it refers to an understanding well beforehand that all feelings, not being delighted in, will become cool at death. The futuristic ending signifies an assurance, here and now, as the word *idheva*, even here itself, clearly brings out. The delighting will not be there, because all craving for a fresh existence is extirpated.

The *arahant* has won this assurance already in his *arahattaphalasamādhi*, in which he experiences the cooling off of all feelings. That is why we find the *arahants* giving expression to their *Nibbānic* bliss in the words *sītībhūto'smi nibbuto*, "gone cool am I, yea, extinguished".⁴

Since for the *arahant* this cooling off of feelings is a matter of experience in this very life, this realization is referred to as *anupādā parinibbāna* in the discourses. Here we seem to have fallen into another track. We opened our discussion with an explanation of what *anupādisesa parinibbāna* is, now we are on *anupādā parinibbāna*. How are we to distinguish between these two?

Anupādisesa parinibbāna comes at the last moment of the *arahant's* life, when this organic combination of elements, grasped par excellence, *upādiṇṇa*, is discarded for good. But *anupādā parinibbāna* refers to the *arahattaphalasamādhi* as such, for which even other terms like *anupādā vimokkha* are also applied on occasion.⁵

As the term *anupādā parinibbāna* signifies, the *arahant* experiences, even in this very life, that complete extinguishment, *parinibbāna*, in his *arahatta phalasamādhi*. This fact is clearly brought out in the dialogue between Venerable *Sāriputta* and Venerable *Puṇṇa Mantāniputta* in the *Rathavinūtasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.

Venerable *Sāriputta's* exhaustive interrogation ending with *kim atthaṃ carahāvuso, bhagavati brahmacariyaṃ vussati?*,⁶ "For the sake of what then, friend, is the holy life lived under the Exalted One?", gets the following conclusive answer from Venerable *Puṇṇa Mantāniputta*: *anupādāparinibbānatthaṃ kho, āvuso, bhagavati brahmacariyaṃ vussati*, "Friend, it is for the sake of perfect *Nibbāna* without grasping that the holy life is lived under the Exalted One".

As the goal of endeavour, *anupādā parinibbāna* surely does not mean the ending of life. What it implies is the realization of *Nibbāna*. It is that experience of the cooling off of feelings the *arahant* goes through in the *arahattaphalasamādhi*. It is sometimes also called *nirupadhi*, the "asset-less"⁷. Here we have a problem of a semantic type. At a later date, even the term *nirupadhisesa* seems to have come into vogue, which is probably a cognate formed after the term *anupādisesa*.⁸

Nowhere in the discourses one comes across the term *nirupadhisesa parinibbāna*. Only such terms as *nirupadhi*, *nirūpadhiṃ*, *nirupadhi dhammaṃ* are met with. They all refer to that *arahattaphalasamādhi*, as for instance in the following verse, which we had occasion to quote earlier too:

*Kāyena amataṃ dhātuṃ,
phusayitvā nirūpadhiṃ,
upadhipaṭinissaggam,
sacchikatvā anāsavo,
deseti sammāsambuddho,
asokaṃ virajaṃ padaṃ.*⁹

"Having touched with the body,
The deathless element, which is asset-less,
And realized the relinquishment of assets,
Being influx-free, the perfectly enlightened one,
Proclaims the sorrow-less, taintless state."

To proclaim, one has to be alive. Therefore *nirupadhi* is used in the discourses definitely for the *arahattaphalasangāmi*, which is a living experience for the *arahant*. *Anupādā parinibbāna*, *anupādā vimokkha* and *nirupadhi* all refer to that experience of the cooling off of feelings. This fact is clearly revealed by the following two verses in the *Vedanāsaṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*:

*Samāhito sampajāno,
sato Buddhassa sāvako,
vedanā ca pajānāti,
vedanānañca sambhavaṃ.*

*Yattha cetā nirujjhanti,
maggañca khayagāminam,
vedanānaṃ khayā bhikkhu,
nicchāto parinibbuto.*¹⁰

In this couplet, the experience of the fruit of *arahant*-hood is presented under the heading of feeling. The disciple of the Buddha, concentrated, fully aware and mindful, understands feelings, the origin of feelings, and the point at which they surcease and the way leading to their extinction. With the extinction of feelings, that monk is hunger-less and perfectly extinguished. The reference here is to that bliss of *Nibbāna* which is devoid of feeling, *avedayita sukha*.¹¹ It is hunger-less because it is free from craving.

The perfect extinguishment mentioned here is not to be understood as the death of the *arahant*. In the discourses the term *parinibbuta* is used as such even with reference to the living *arahant*. Only in the commentaries we find a distinction made in this respect. The *parinibbāna* of the living *arahant* is called *kilesaparinibbāna*, the perfect extinguishment of the defilements, while what comes at the last moment of an *arahant's* life is called *khandhāparinibbāna*, the perfect extinguishment of the groups or aggregates.¹² Such a qualification, however, is not found in the discourses.

The reason for this distinction was probably the semantic development the term *parinibbāna* had undergone in the course of time. The fact that this perfect extinguishment is essentially psychological seems to have been ignored with the passage of time. That is why today, on hearing the word *parinibbāna*, one is immediately reminded of the last moment of the life of the Buddha or of an *arahant*. In the discourses, however,

parinibbāna is clearly an experience of the living *arahant* in his *arahattaphalasangāmi*.

This fact is clearly borne out by the statement in the *Dhātuvibhaṅgasutta* already quoted: *idheva sabbavedayitāni anabhinanditāni sūtibhavissanti'ti pajānati*,¹³ "he understands that all what is felt will cool off here itself". It is this very understanding that is essential. It gives the certitude that one can defeat *Māra* at the moment of death through the experience of the cooling off of feelings.

The phrase *jīvitapariyantikaṃ vedanaṃ* refers to the feeling which comes at the termination of one's life. For the *arahant*, the *arahattaphalasangāmi* stands in good stead, particularly at the moment of death. That is why it is called *akuppā cetovimutti*, the unshakeable deliverance of the mind. All other deliverances of the mind get shaken before the pain of death, but not this unshakeable deliverance of the mind, which is the REAL-ization of extinguishment that is available to the *arahant* already in the *arahattaphalasangāmi*, in the experience of the cooling off of feelings. It is this unshakeable deliverance of the mind that the Buddha and the *arahants* resort to at the end of their lives, when *Māra* comes to grab and seize.

So now we can hark back to that verse which comes as the grand finale in the long discourse from the *Itivuttaka* we have already quoted.

*Ye etad aññāya padaṃ asaṅkhataṃ,
vimuttacittā bhavanettisaṅkhayā,
te dhammasārādhigamā khaye ratā,
pahaṃsu te sabbabhavāni tādino.*¹⁴

This verse might appear problematic, as it occurs at the end of a passage dealing with the two *Nibbāna* elements. *Ye etad aññāya padaṃ asaṅkhataṃ*, "those who having fully comprehended this unprepared state", *vimuttacittā bhavanettisaṅkhayā*, "are released in mind by the cutting off of tentacles to becoming", *te dhammasārādhigamā khaye ratā*, "taking delight in the extirpation of feelings due to their attainment to the essence of *dhamma*", that is the unshakeable deliverance of the mind, *pahaṃsu te sabbabhavāni tādino*, "being steadfastly such like, they have given up all forms of becoming".

The last line is an allusion to the experience of the cessation of existence here and now, which in effect is the realization of *Nibbāna*, true

to the definition *bhavanirodho nibbānaṃ*, "cessation of existence is *Nibbāna*".¹⁵ It is that very cessation of existence that is called *asaṅkhata dhātu*, the "unprepared element". If *bhava*, or existence, is to be called *saṅkhata*, the 'prepared', the cessation of existence has to be designated as *asaṅkhata*, the 'unprepared'. Here lies the difference between the two.

So we have here two aspects of the same unprepared element, designated as *sa-upādisesā parinibbānadhātu* and *anupādisesā parinibbānadhātu*. The mind is free even at the stage of *sa-upādisesa*, to the extent that the smouldering embers do not seek fresh fuel. *Anupādisesa* refers to the final experience of extinguishment. There the relevance of the term *parinibbāna* lies in the fact that at the moment of death the *arahants* direct their minds to this unshakeable deliverance of the mind. This is the 'island' they resort to when *Māra* comes to grab.

The best illustration for all this is the way the Buddha faced death, when the time came for it. Venerable *Anuruddha* delineates it beautifully in the following two verses:

*Nāhu assāsapassāso,
 ̥hītacittassa tādino,
 anejo santimārabba,
 yaṃ kālamakarī muni.
 Asallīnena cittena,
 vedanaṃ ajjhavāsaya,
 pajjotass'eva nibbānaṃ,
 vimokkho cetaso ahu.*¹⁶

"Adverting to whatever peace,
 The urgeless sage reached the end of his life span,
 There were no in-breaths and out-breaths,
 For that steadfastly such-like one of firm mind.
 With a mind fully alert,
 He bore up the pain,
 The deliverance of the mind was like
 The extinguishment of a torch."

The allusion here is to the deliverance of the mind. This is a description of how the Buddha attained *parinibbāna*. Though there is a great depth in these two verses, the commentarial exegesis seems to have gone at a

tangent at this point. Commenting on the last two lines of the first verse, the commentary observes: *Buddhamuni santiṃ gamissāmīti, santiṃ ārabba kālamakari*, "the Buddha, the sage, passed away for the sake of that peace with the idea 'I will go to that state of peace'".¹⁷

There is some discrepancy in this explanation. Commentators themselves usually give quite a different sense to the word *ārabba* than the one implicit in this explanation. Here it means "for the sake of". It is for the sake of that peace that the Buddha is said to have passed away.

In such commentaries as *Jātaka-aṭṭhakathā* and *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*, commentators do not use the word *ārabba* in the introductory episodes in this sense. There it only means "in connection with", indicating the origin of the story, as suggested by the etymological background of the word itself. When for instance it is said that the Buddha preached a particular sermon in connection with *Devadatta Thera*, it does not necessarily mean that it was meant for him.¹⁸ He may not have been there at all, it may be that he was already dead by that time. The term *ārabba* in such contexts only means that it was in connection with him. It can refer to a person or an incident, as the point of origin of a particular sermon.

Granted this, we have to explain the verse in question not as an allusion to the fact that the Buddha, the sage, passed away for the sake of that peace with the idea 'I will attain to that state of peace'. It only means that the Buddha, the sage, passed away having brought his mind into that state of peace. In other words, according to the commentary the passing away comes first and the peace later, but according to the *sutta* proper, peace comes first and the passing away later.

There is a crucial point involved in this commentarial divergence. It has the presumption that the Buddha passed away in order to enter into 'that *Nibbāna* element'. This presumption is evident quite often in the commentaries. When hard put to it, the commentaries sometimes concede the *sutta's* standpoint, but more often than otherwise they follow a line of interpretation that comes dangerously close to an eternalist point of view, regarding *Nibbāna*.

Here too the commentarial exegesis, based on the term *ārabba*, runs the same risk. On the other hand, as we have pointed out, the reference here is to the fact that the Buddha adverted his mind to that peace well before the onset of death, whereby *Māra's* attempt is foiled, because

feelings are already cooled off. It is here that the unshakeable deliverance of the mind proves its worth.

As a 'real'-ization it is already available to the Buddha and the *arahants* in the *arahattaphalasamādhī*, and when the time comes, they put forward this experience to beat off *Māra*. That is why we find a string of epithets for *Nibbāna*, such as *tāṇaṃ*, *leṇaṃ*, *dīpaṃ*, *saraṇaṃ*, *parāyanaṃ*, *khemamaṃ* and *amataṃ*. When faced with death, or the pain of death, it gives 'protection', *tānaṃ*. It provides shelter, like a 'cave', *leṇaṃ*. It is the 'island', *dīpaṃ*, within easy reach. It is the 'refuge', *saraṇaṃ*, and the 'resort', *parāyanaṃ*. It is the 'security', *khemamaṃ*, and above all the 'deathless', *amataṃ*.¹⁹ This deathlessness they experience in this very world, and when death comes, this realization stands them in good stead.

Why Venerable *Anuruddha* brought in the profane concept of death with the expression *kālamakari* into this verse, describing the Buddha's *parinibbāna*, is also a question that should arrest our attention. This particular expression is generally used in connection with the death of ordinary people. Why did he use this expression in such a hallowed context? It is only to distinguish and demarcate the deliverance of the mind, couched in the phrase *vimokkha cetaso ahu*, from the phenomenon of death itself.

The Buddhas and *arahants* also abandon this body, like other beings. The expression *kālamakari*, "made an end of time", is an allusion to this phenomenon. In fact, it is only the Buddhas and *arahants* who truly make an 'end' of time, being fully aware of it. Therefore the most important revelation made in the last two lines of the first verse, *anejo santimārabhā, yaṃ kālamakarī muni*, is the fact that the Buddha passed away having brought his mind to the peace of *Nibbāna*.

All this goes to prove that an *arahant*, even here and now in this very life, has realized his after death state, which is none other than the birthless cessation of all forms of existence that amounts to deathlessness itself.

In all other religions immortality is something attainable after death. If one brings down the Buddha's *Dhamma* also to that level, by smuggling in the idea of an everlasting *Nibbāna*, it too will suffer the same fate. That would contradict the teachings on impermanence, *aniccatā*, and insubstantiality, *anattatā*.

But here we have an entirely different concept. It is a case of overcoming the critical situation of death by directing one's mind to a

concentration that nullifies the power of *Māra*. So it becomes clear that the two terms *sa-upādisesā parinibbānadhātu* and *anupādisesā parinibbānadhātu* stand for two aspects of the same *asankhatadhātu*, or the unprepared element.

As a matter of fact, *arahants* have already directly realized, well in time, their after death state. That is to say, not only have they gone through the experience of extinguishment here and now, but they are also assured of the fact that this extinguishment is irreversible even after death, since all forms of existence come to cease.

This is an innovation, the importance of which can hardly be overestimated. Here the Buddha has transcended even the dichotomy between the two terms *sandiṭṭhika* and *samparāyika*. Generally, the world is inclined to believe that one can be assured only of things pertaining to this life. In fact, the word *sandiṭṭhika* literally means that one can be sure only of things visible here and now. Since one cannot be sure of what comes after death, worldlings are in the habit of investing faith in a particular teacher or in a god.

To give a clearer picture of the principle involved in this statement, let us bring up a simple episode, concerning the general *Sīha*, included among the Fives of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*. It happens to centre on *dānakathā*, or talks on liberality. Let it be a soft interlude - after all these abstruse discourses.

Sīha, the general, is a wealthy benefactor, endowed with deep faith in the Buddha. One day he approaches the Buddha and asks the question: *sakkā nu kho, bhante, sandiṭṭhikaṃ dānaphalaṃ paññāpetum?*²⁰ "Is it possible, Lord, to point out an advantage or fruit of giving visible here and now?"

What prompted the question may have been the usual tendency to associate the benefits of giving with the hereafter. Now the Buddha, in his answer to the question, gave four advantages visible here and now and one advantage to come hereafter. The four fruits of giving visible here and now are stated as follows:

- 1) *dāyako, sīha, dānapati bahuno janassa piyo hoti manāpo*, "Sīha, a benevolent donor is dear and acceptable to many people".
- 2) *dāyakaṃ dānapatiṃ santo sappurisā bhajanti*, "good men of integrity resort to that benevolent donor".

3) *dāyakassa dānapatino kalyāṇo kittisaddo abbhuggacchati*, "a good report of fame goes in favour of that benevolent donor".

4) *dāyako dānapati yaṃ yadeva parisam upasaṅkamati, yadi khattiyaparisam yadi brāhmaṇaparisam yadi gahapatiparisam yadi samaṇaparisam, visārado va upasaṅkamati amaṅkubhūto*, "whatever assembly that benevolent donor approaches, be it an assembly of kings, or brahmins, or householders, or recluses, he approaches with self confidence, not crestfallen".

These four fruits or advantages are reckoned as *sandiṭṭhika*, because one can experience them here and now. In addition to these, the Buddha mentions a fifth, probably by way of encouragement, though it is outside the scope of the question.

5) *dāyako, sīha, dānapati kāyassa bhedaṃ paraṃ maraṇā sugatiṃ saggam lokaṃ upapajjati*, "the benevolent donor, *Sīha*, when his body breaks up after death is reborn in a happy heavenly world."

This is a fruit of giving that pertains to the next world, *samparāyikaṃ dānaphalaṃ*. Then *Sīha* the general makes a comment, which is directly relevant to our discussion:

Yānimāni, bhante, bhagavatā cattāri sandiṭṭhikāni dānaphalāni akkhātāni, nāhaṃ ettha bhagavato saddhāya gacchāmi, ahaṃ petāni jānāmi. Yañca kho maṃ, bhante, bhagavā evamaṃha 'dāyako, sīha, dānapati kāyassa bhedaṃ paraṃ maraṇā sugatiṃ saggam lokaṃ upapajjati'ti, etāhaṃ na jānāmi, ettha ca panāhaṃ bhagavato saddhāya gacchāmi.

"Those four fruits of giving, visible here and now, which the Lord has preached, as for them, I do not believe out of faith in the Exalted One, because I myself know them to be so. But that about which the Exalted One said: '*Sīha*, a benevolent donor, when the body breaks up after death is reborn in a happy heavenly world', this I do not know. As to that, however, I believe out of faith in the Exalted One."

Regarding the first four advantages of giving, *Sīha* says "I do not believe out of faith in the Exalted One, because I myself know them to be so", *nāhaṃ ettha bhagavato saddhāya gacchāmi, ahaṃ petāni jānāmi*. It is because he knows out of his own experience that they are facts that he does not believe out of faith in the Exalted One. There is something deep, worth reflecting upon, in this statement.

Then with regard to the fruit of giving, mentioned last, that is to say the one that concerns the hereafter, *samparāyika*, *Sīha* confesses that he does not know it as a fact, but that he believes it out of faith in the Exalted One, *etāhaṃ na jānāmi, ettha ca panāhaṃ bhagavato saddhāya gacchāmi*. It is because he does not know, that he believes out of faith in the Exalted One.

Here then we have a good illustration of the first principle we have outlined earlier. Where there is knowledge born of personal experience, there is no need of faith. Faith is displaced by knowledge of realization. It is where one has no such experiential knowledge that faith comes in. That is why *Sīha* confesses that he has faith in the fifth fruit of giving. With regard to the first four, faith is something redundant for him.

Now that we have clarified for ourselves this first principle, there is a certain interesting riddle verse in the *Dhammapada*, to which we may apply it effectively, not out of a flair for riddles, but because it is relevant to our topic.

*Assaddho akataññū ca,
sandhicchedo ca yo naro,
hatāvakāso vantāso,
sa ve uttamaporiso.*²¹

This is a verse attributed to the Buddha that comes in the *Arahantavagga* of the *Dhammapada*, which puns upon some words. Such riddle verses follow the pattern of a figure of speech called double entendré, which makes use of ambiguous words. The above verse sounds blasphemous on the first hearing. The Buddha is said to have employed this device to arrest the listener's attention. The surface meaning seems to go against the *Dhamma*, but it provokes deeper reflection.

For instance, *assaddho* means faithless, to be *akataññū* is to be ungrateful, *sandhicchedo* is a term for a housebreaker, *hatāvakāso* is a hopeless case with no opportunities, *vantāso* means greedy of vomit. So the surface meaning amounts to this:

"That faithless ungrateful man,
Who is a housebreaker,
Who is hopeless and greedy of vomit,
He indeed is the man supreme."

For the deeper meaning the words have to be construed differently. *Assaddho* implies that level of penetration into truth at which faith

becomes redundant. *Akata*, the unmade, is an epithet for *Nibbāna*, and *akataññū* is one who knows the unmade. *Sandhicchedo* means one who has cut off the connecting links to *saṃsāra*. *Hatāvakāso* refers to that elimination of opportunities for rebirth. *Vantāso* is a term for one who has vomited out desires. The true meaning of the verse, therefore, can be summed up as follows:

"That man who has outgrown faith, as he is a knower of the unmade,
Who has sundered all shackles to existence and destroyed all possibilities of rebirth,
Who has spewed out all desires,
He indeed is the man supreme."

The description, then, turns out to be that of an *arahant*. *Assaddho* as an epithet for the *arahant* follows the same norm as the epithet *asekha*. *Sekha*, meaning "learner", is a term applied to those who are training for the attainment of *arahant*-hood, from the stream-winner, *soṭāpanna*, upwards. Literally, *asekha* could be rendered as "unlearned" or "untrained". But it is certainly not in that sense that an *arahant* is called *asekha*. He is called *asekha* in the sense that he is no longer in need of that training, that is to say, he is an adept. *Assaddho*, too, has to be construed similarly.

As we have mentioned before, the *arahant* has already realized the cessation of existence in his *arahattaphalasamādhi*, thereby securing the knowledge of the unmade, *akata*, or the unprepared, *asaṅkhata*. The term *akataññū* highlights that fact of realization. The most extraordinary and marvellous thing about the realization of *Nibbāna* is that it gives an assurance not only of matters pertaining to this life, *sandiṭṭhika*, but also of what happens after death, *samparāyika* - in other words, the realization of the cessation of existence.

Nibbāna as the realization here and now of the cessation of existence, *bhavanirodho nibbānaṃ*, carries with it the assurance that there is no more existence after death. So there is only one *asaṅkhataadhātu*. The verse we already quoted, too, ends with the words *pahaṃsu te sabbabhavāni tādino*, "those steadfastly such like ones have given up all forms of existence".²²

One thing should be clear now. Though there are two *Nibbāna* elements called *sa-upādisesā Nibbānadhātu* and *anupādisesā*

Nibbānadhātu, there is no justification whatsoever for taking *anupādisesā Nibbānadhātu* as a place of eternal rest for the *arahants* after death - an everlasting immortal state. The deathlessness of *Nibbāna* is to be experienced in this world itself. That is why an *arahant* is said to feast on ambrosial deathlessness, *amataṃ paribhuñjati*, when he is in *arahattaphalasamādhi*. When it is time for death, he brings his mind to this *samādhi*, and it is while he is partaking of ambrosial deathlessness that *Māra* quietly takes away his body.

An *arahant* might even cremate his own body, as if it is another's. Now we are at an extremely deep point in this *Dhamma*. We have to say something in particular about the two terms *saṅkhata* and *asaṅkhata*. In our last sermon, we happened to give a rather unusual explanation of such pair-wise terms like the 'hither shore' and the 'farther shore', as well as the 'mundane' and the 'supramundane'. The two terms in each pair are generally believed to be far apart and the gap between them is conceived in terms of time and space. But we compared this gap to that between the lotus leaf and the drop of water on it, availing ourselves of a simile offered by the Buddha himself.

The distance between the lotus leaf and the drop of water on it is the same as that between the hither shore and the farther shore, between the mundane and the supramundane. This is no idle sophistry, but a challenge to deeper reflection.

The *Dhammapada* verse we quoted earlier beginning with *yassa pāraṃ apāraṃ vā, pārāpāraṃ na vijjati*,²³ "to whom there is neither a farther shore nor a hither shore nor both", is puzzling enough. But what it says is that the *arahant* has transcended both the hither shore and the farther shore. It is as if he has gone beyond this shore and the other shore as well, that is to say, he has transcended the dichotomy.

We have to say something similar with regard to the two terms *saṅkhata* and *asaṅkhata*. *Saṅkhata*, or the prepared, is like a floral design. This prepared floral design, which is *bhava*, or existence, is made up, as it were, with the help of the glue of craving, the tangles of views and the knots of conceits. If one removes the glue, disentangles the tangles and unties the knots, the *saṅkhata*, or the prepared, itself becomes *asaṅkhata*, the unprepared, then and there. The same floral design, which was the *saṅkhata*, has now become the *asaṅkhata*. This itself is the cessation of existence, *bhavanirodho*. When one can persuade oneself to think of

Nibbāna as an extinguishment, the term *parinibbāna* can well be understood as 'perfect extinguishment'.

The *parinibbāna* of the *arahant Dabba Mallaputta* is recorded in the *Udāna* as a special occasion on which the Buddha uttered a paean of joy. Venerable *Dabba Mallaputta* was an *arahant*, gifted with marvellous psychic powers, specializing in miracles performed by mastering the fire element, *tejo dhātu*. His *parinibbāna*, too, was a marvel in itself.

When he found himself at the end of his life span, he approached the Buddha and informed him of it, as if begging permission, with the words: *parinibbāna kālo me dāni, sugata*,²⁴ "it is time for me to attain *parinibbāna*, O well-gone one". And the Buddha too gave permission with the words: *yassa dāni tvam, Dabba, kālaṃ maññasi*, "*Dabba*, you may do that for which the time is fit".

As soon as the Buddha uttered these words, Venerable *Dabba Mallaputta* rose from his seat, worshipped the Buddha, circumambulated him, went up into the sky and, sitting cross-legged, aroused the concentration of the fire element and, rising from it, attained *parinibbāna*. As his body thus miraculously self-cremated burnt in the sky, it left no ashes or soot.

This was something significant that fits in with the definition of *Nibbāna* so far given. That is probably why the Buddha is said to have uttered a special verse of uplift or paean of joy at this extinguishment, which was perfect in every sense.

*Abhedi kāyo, nirodhi saññā,
vedanā sītirahaṃsu sabbā,
vūpasamiṃsu saṅkhārā,
viññānaṃ attham agamā.*

"Body broke up, perceptions ceased,
All feelings cooled off,
Preparations calmed down,
Consciousness came to an end."

This event was of such a great importance that, though it occurred at *Veluvana ārāma* in *Rājagaha*, the Buddha related the event to the congregation of monks when he returned to *Sāvattihī*. It was not an incidental mention in reply to a particular question, but a special peroration recounting the event and commemorating it with the following

two *Udāna* verses, which so aptly constitute the grand finale to our *Udāna* text.

*Ayoghanahatass'eva,
jalato jātavedaso,
anupubbūpasantassa,
yathā na ñāyate gati.*

*Evaṃ sammāvimuttānaṃ,
kāma-bandhohatāriṇaṃ,
paññāpetuṃ gatīn'atthi,
pattānaṃ acalaṃ sukhaṃ.*²⁵

"Just as in the case of a fire
Blazing like a block of iron in point of compactness,
When it gradually calms down,
No path it goes by can be traced.

Even so of those who are well released,
Who have crossed over the floods of shackles of sensuality,
And reached Bliss Unshaken,
There is no path to be pointed out."

We have deviated from the commentarial interpretation in our rendering of the first two lines of the verse. The commentary gives two alternative meanings, probably because it is in doubt as to the correct one. Firstly it brings in the idea of a bronze vessel that is being beaten at the forge with an iron hammer, giving the option that the gradual subsidence mentioned in the verse may apply either to the flames or to the reverberations of sound arising out of it.²⁶ Secondly, as a 'some say so' view, *kecidvāda*, it gives an alternative meaning, connected with the ball of iron beaten at the forge.

In our rendering, however, we had to follow a completely different line of interpretation, taking the expression *ayoghanahatassa* as a comparison, *ayoghanahatassa* + *iva*, for the blazing fire, *jalato jātavedaso*. On seeing a fire that is ablaze, one gets a notion of compactness, as on seeing a red hot block of solid iron.

In the *Dhammapada* verse beginning with *seyyo ayogulo bhutto, tatto aggisikhūpamo*,²⁷ "better to swallow a red hot iron ball, that resembles a flame of fire", a cognate simile is employed somewhat differently. There

the ball of iron is compared to a flame of fire. Here the flame of fire is compared to a block of iron.

All in all, it is highly significant that the Buddha uttered three verses of uplift in connection with the *parinibbāna* of the *arahant* Venerable *Dabba Mallaputta*. The most important point that emerges from this discussion is that *Nibbāna* is essentially an extinction or extinguishment.

An extinguished fire goes nowhere. In the case of other *arahants*, who were cremated after their *parinibbāna*, there is a left over as ashes for one to perpetuate at least the memory of their existence. But here Venerable *Dabba Mallaputta*, as if to drive a point home, through his psychic powers based on the fire element, saw to it that neither ashes nor soot will mar his perfect extinguishment in the eyes of the world. That is why the Buddha celebrated it with these special utterances of joy.

So then the cessation of existence is itself *Nibbāna*. There is no everlasting immortal *Nibbāna* awaiting the *arahants* at their *parinibbāna*.

That kind of argument the commentaries sometimes put forward is now and then advanced by modern day writers and preachers, too, in their explanations. When it comes to *Nibbāna*, they resort to two pet parables of recent origin, the parable of the tortoise and the parable of the frog.

In the former, a tortoise goes down into the water and the fishes ask him where he came from. The tortoise replies that he came from land. In order to determine what sort of a thing land is, the fishes go on asking the tortoise a number of questions based on various qualities of water. To each question the tortoise has to reply in the negative, since land has none of the qualities of water.

The parable of the frog is much the same. When it gets into water it has to say 'no no' to every question put by the toad, still unfamiliar with land. To make the parables convincing, those negative answers, the 'no-nos', are compared to the strings of negative terms that are found in the *sutta* passages dealing with the *arahattaphalasamādhī*, which we have already quoted.

For instance, to prove their point those writers and teachers would resort to the famous *Udāna* passage beginning with:

'*Atthi, bhikkhave, tad āyatanaṃ, yattha n'eva pathavī na āpo na tejo na vāyo na ākāśānañcāyatanaṃ na viññāṇānañcāyatanaṃ na ākiñcaññāyatanaṃ na nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ na ayaṃ loko na paraloko na ubho candimasūriyā ...*'²⁸ "There is, monks, that sphere, in

which there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor air; neither the sphere of infinite space, nor the sphere of infinite consciousness, nor the sphere of nothingness, nor the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; neither this world nor the world beyond, nor the sun and the moon ...".

But we have reasonably pointed out that those passages do not in any way refer to a non-descript realm into which the *arahants* enter after their demise, a realm that the tortoise and the frog cannot describe. Such facile explanations contradict the deeper teachings on the cessation of existence, dependent arising and not self. They create a lot of misconceptions regarding *Nibbāna* as the ultimate aim.

The purpose of all those arguments is to assert that *Nibbāna* is definitely not an annihilation. The ideal of an everlasting *Nibbāna* is held out in order to obviate nihilistic notions. But the Buddha himself has declared that when he is preaching about the cessation of existence, those who held on to eternalist views wrongly accused him for being an annihilator, who teaches about the annihilation, destruction and non-existence of a truly existing being, *sato satassa ucchedaṃ vināsaṃ vibhavaṃ paññāpeti*.²⁹

On such occasions, the Buddha did not in any way incline towards eternalism in order to defend himself. He did not put forward the idea of an everlasting *Nibbāna* to counter the accusation. Instead, he drew attention to the three signata and the four noble truths and solved the whole problem. He maintained that the charge is groundless and utterly misconceived, and concluded with the memorable declaration: *pubbe cāhaṃ, bhikkhave, etarahi ca dukkhañceva paññāpemi, dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ*, "formerly as well as now, I point out only a suffering and a cessation of that suffering".

Even the term *tathāgata*, according to him, is not to be conceived as a self. It is only a mass of suffering that has come down through *samsāra*, due to ignorance. The so-called existence, *bhava*, is an outcome of grasping, *upādāna*. When grasping ceases, existence comes to an end. That itself is the cessation of existence, *bhavanirodha*, which is *Nibbāna*.

As the term *anupādā parinibbāna* suggests, there is no grasping in the experience of the cessation of existence. It is only when one is grasping something that he can be identified with it, or reckoned by it. When one lets go of everything, he goes beyond reckoning. Of course, even the commentaries sometimes use the expression *apaññattikabhāvaṃ gatā*,³⁰

"gone to the state beyond designation" with regard to the *parinibbāna* of *arahants*.

Nevertheless, they tacitly grant a destination, which in their opinion defies definition. Such vague arguments are riddled with contradictions. They obfuscate the deeper issues of the *Dhamma*, relating to *paṭicca samuppāda* and *anattā*, and seek to perpetuate personality view by slanting towards eternalism.

It is to highlight some extremely subtle aspects of the problem of *Nibbāna* that we brought out all these arguments today.

1. MI 436, *MahāMālunkyasutta*.
2. A III 347, *Nāgasutta*.
3. M III 245, *Dhātuvibhaṅgasutta*.
4. Th 298, *Rāhulatheragāthā*.
5. E.g. M II 265, *Āneñjasappāyasutta*.
6. MI 147, *Rathavinītasutta*.
7. S I 194, *Moggallānasutta*.
8. Bv-a 252.
9. It 62, *Santatara Sutta*, see sermon 17.
10. S IV 204, *Samādhisutta*.
11. Ps III 115, *aṭṭhakathā* on the *Bahuvedanīyasutta*.
12. E.g. at Mp I 91.
13. M III 245, *Dhātuvibhaṅgasutta*.
14. It 39, *Nibbānadhātusutta*, see sermon 18.
15. A V 9, *Sāriputtasutta*.
16. D II 157, *Mahāparinibbānasutta*.
17. Sv II 595.
18. *Devadattaṃ ārabhha* at Dhp-a I 133 and Ja I 142.
19. S IV 371, *Asaṅkhataṣaṃyutta*.
20. A III 39, *Sīhasenāpattisutta*.
21. Dhp 97, *Arahantavagga*.
22. It 39, *Nibbānadhātusutta*.
23. Dhp 385, *Brāhmaṇavagga*; see sermon 18.
24. Ud 92, *Paṭhamadabbasutta*.
25. Ud 93, *Dutiyadabbasutta*.
26. Ud-a 435.
27. Dhp 308, *Nirayavagga*.
28. Ud 80, *Paṭhamanibbānapaṭisaṃyuttasutta*, see sermon 17.
29. MI 140, *Alagaddūpamasutta*.
30. Sv II 635.

Sermon - 20

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa*

*Etaṃ santaṃ, etaṃ paṇītaṃ, yadidaṃ sabbasañkhārasamatho
sabbūpadhipaṭṭinissaggo taṇhakkhaya virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ.*¹

"This is peaceful, this is excellent, namely the stilling of all preparations, the relinquishment of all assets, the destruction of craving, detachment, cessation, extinction."

With the permission of the Most Venerable Great Preceptor and the assembly of the venerable meditative monks. This is the twentieth sermon in the series of sermons on *Nibbāna*.

In our last sermon we described, as something of a marvel in the attainment of *Nibbāna*, the very possibility of realizing, in this very life, as *diṭṭhadhammika*, one's after death state, which is *samparāyika*. The phrase *diṭṭheva dhamme sayañ abhiññā sacchikatvā*, "having realized here and now by one's own higher knowledge",² occurs so often in the discourses because the emancipated one ascertains his after death state as if by seeing with his own eyes.

Natthi dāni punabbhavo, "there is no re-becoming now",³ *khīṇā jāti*, "extinct is birth",⁴ are some of the joyous utterances of the Buddha and the *arahants*, which were inspired by the realization of the cessation of existence in this very life. Through that realization itself, they experience a bliss devoid of feeling, which is called "the cooling off of feelings". That is why *Nibbāna* as such is known as *avedayita sukha*, a "bliss devoid of feeling".⁵

At the end of their lives, at the moment when death approaches, those emancipated ones, the *arahants*, put forward their unshakeable deliverance of the mind, *akuppā cetomivutti* (which remains unshaken even in the face of death), and become deathless well before their death, not after it.

On many an occasion the Buddha has spoken highly of this unshakeable deliverance of the mind, describing it as the supreme bliss, the supreme knowledge and the supreme freedom from death. For instance, among the Sixes of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, we come across the following two verses:

*Tassa sammā vimuttassa,
ñāṇaṃ ce hoti tādino,
'akuppā me vimuttī'ti,
bhavasamyojanakkhaye.*

*Etaṃ kho paramaṃ ñāṇaṃ,
etaṃ sukhamanuttaraṃ,
asokaṃ virajaṃ khemaṃ,
etaṃ ānaṇyamuttamaṃ.*⁶

"To that such like one, who is fully released,

There arises the knowledge:

'Unshakeable is my deliverance',

Upon his extinction of fetters to existence.

This is the highest knowledge,

This is the unsurpassed bliss,

This sorrow-less, taintless security,

Is the supreme debtless-ness."

Arahants are said to be debtless in regard to the four requisites offered by the laity out of faith, but when *Nibbāna* is regarded as a debtless-ness, it seems to imply something deeper.

Saṃsāra or reiterated existence is itself a debt, which one can never pay off. When one comes to think of *kamma* and its result, it is a debt that keeps on gathering an interminable interest, which can never be paid off.

But even from this debt the *arahants* have won freedom by destroying the seeds of *kamma*, by rendering them infertile. They are made ineffective beyond this life, as there is no rebirth. The meaningful line of the *Ratanasutta*, *khīṇaṃ purāṇaṃ, navaṃ natthi sambhavaṃ*,⁷ "whatever is old is extinct and there is no arising anew", has to be understood in that sense. The karmic debt is paid off and there is no fresh incurring.

All this is in praise of that unshakeable deliverance of the mind. It is a kind of extraordinary knowledge, almost unimaginable, a 'real'-ization of one's own after death state.

In almost all serious discussions on *Nibbāna*, the subtlest moot point turns out to be the question of the after death state of the emancipated one. A brief answer, the Buddha had given to this question, we already brought up in our last sermon, by quoting the two concluding verses of the *Udāna*, with which that collection of inspired utterances ends with a note of

exceptional grandeur. Let us recall them.

*Ayoghanahatass'eva,
jalato jātavedaso,
anupubbūpasantassa,
yathā na ñāyate gati.*

*Evaṃ sammāvimuttānaṃ,
kāma-bandhohatāriṇaṃ,
paññāpetuṃ gati natthi,
pattānaṃ acalaṃ sukhaṃ.*⁸

"Just as in the case of a fire,
Blazing like a block of iron in point of compactness,
When it gradually calms down,
No path it goes by can be traced.

Even so, of those who are well released,
Who have crossed over the flux of shackles of sensuality,
And reached bliss unshaken,
There is no path to be pointed out."

The last two lines are particularly significant. There is no path to be pointed out of those who have reached bliss unshaken. *Acalaṃ sukhaṃ*, or "unshakeable bliss", is none other than that unshakeable deliverance of the mind. *Akappa* means "unassailable" or "unshakeable". Clearly enough, what the verse says is that after their death the emancipated ones leave no trace of a path gone by, even as the flames of a raging fire.

The flame may appear as something really existing due to the perception of the compact, *ghanasaññā*, but when it goes down and disappears, no one can say that it went in such and such a direction.

Though this is the obvious meaning, some try to attribute quite a different meaning to the verse in question. The line *paññāpetuṃ gati natthi*, "there is no path to be pointed out", is interpreted even by the commentators (who take the word *gati* to mean some state of existence) as an assertion that, although such a bourne cannot be pointed out, the *arahants* pass away into some non-descript realm.

This kind of interpretation is prompted by an apprehension of the charge of annihilation. A clear instance of this tendency is revealed in the commentary to the following verse in the *Dhammapada*:

*Ahiṃsakā ye munayo,
niccaṃ kāyena saṃvutā,
te yanti accutaṃ thānaṃ,
yattha gantvā na socare.*⁹

"Innocent are the sages,
That are ever restrained in body,
They go to that state unshaken,
Wherein they grieve no more."

The commentator, in paraphrasing, brings in the word *sassataṃ*, "eternal", for *accutaṃ*, thereby giving the idea that the *arahants* go to an eternal place of rest.¹⁰ Because the verb *yanti*, "go", occurs there, he must have thought that this state unshaken, *accutaṃ*, is something attainable after death.

But we can give another instance in support of our explanation of the term *accutaṃ*. The following verse in the *Hemakamāṇavapucchā* of the *Pārāyanavagga* in the *Sutta Nipāta* clearly shows what this *accutaṃ* is:

*Idha diṭṭhasutamutaviññātesu,
piyarūpesu Hemaka,
chandarāgavinodanaṃ,
nibbānapadaṃ accutaṃ.*¹¹

"The dispelling here in this world of desire and lust,
In pleasurable things,
Seen, heard, sensed and cognized,
Is *Nibbāna* itself, O *Hemaka*."

This is further proof of the fact that there is no eternal immortal rest awaiting the *arahants* after their demise.

The reason for such a postulate is probably the fear of falling into the annihilationist view. Why this chronic fear? To the worldlings overcome by craving for existence any teaching that leads to the cessation of existence appears dreadful.

That is why they put forward two new parables, following the same commentarial trend. The other day we mentioned about those two parables, the parable of the tortoise and the parable of the frog.¹² When the fish and the toad living in water ask what sort of a thing land is, the tortoise and the frog are forced to say 'no, no' to every question they put. Likewise

the Buddha, so it is argued, was forced to give a string of negative terms in his discourses on *Nibbāna*.

But we have pointed out that this argument is fallacious and that those discourses have to be interpreted differently. The theme that runs through such discourses is none other than the cessation of existence.

In the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* the Buddha declares in unmistakable terms that some recluses and brahmins, on hearing him preaching the *Dhamma* for the cessation of existence, wrongly accuse him with the charge of being an annihilationist, *sato sattassa ucchedaṃ vināsaṃ vibhavaṃ paññāpeti*, "he is showing the way to the annihilation, destruction and non-existence of a truly existing being".¹³

He clearly states that some even grieve and lament and fall into despair, complaining *ucchijjissāmi nāma su, vinassissāmi nāma su, na su nāma bhavissāmi*, "so it seems I shall be annihilated, so it seems I shall perish, so it seems I shall be no more".¹⁴

Even during the lifetime of the Buddha there were various debates and controversies regarding the after death state of the emancipated person among recluses and brahmins. They were of the opinion that the after death state of the emancipated one in any particular religious system has to be explained according to a fourfold logic, or tetralemma. A paradigm of that tetralemma occurs quite often in the discourses. It consists of the following four propositions:

- 1) *hoti tathāgato paraṃ marañā*
 - 2) *na hoti tathāgato paraṃ marañā*
 - 3) *hoti ca na ca hoti tathāgato paraṃ marañā*
 - 4) *n'eva hoti na na hoti tathāgato paraṃ marañā*
- 1) "The *Tathāgata* exists after death"
 - 2) "The *Tathāgata* does not exist after death"
 - 3) "The *Tathāgata* both exists and does not exist after death"
 - 4) "The *Tathāgata* neither exists nor does not exist after death".¹⁵

This four-cornered logic purports to round up the four possible alternatives in any situation, or four possible answers to any question.

The dilemma is fairly well known, where one is caught up between two alternatives. The tetralemma, with its four alternatives, is supposed to

exhaust the universe of discourse in a way that one cannot afford to ignore it.

When it comes to a standpoint regarding a particular issue, one is compelled to say 'yes' or 'no', or at least to assert both standpoints or negate them altogether. The contemporary recluses and brahmins held on to the view that the *Tathāgata's* after death state has to be predicated in accordance with the four-cornered logic.

When we hear the term *Tathāgata*, we are immediately reminded of the Buddha. But for the contemporary society, it was a sort of technical term with a broader meaning. Those recluses and brahmins used the term *Tathāgata* to designate the perfected individual in any religious system, whose qualifications were summed up in the thematic phrase *uttamapuriso, paramapuriso, paramapattipatto*,¹⁶ "the highest person, the supreme person, the one who has attained the supreme state".

This fact is clearly borne out by the *Kutūhalasālāsutta* in the *Avyākata Saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*. In that discourse we find the wandering ascetic *Vacchagotta* coming to the Buddha with the following report.

Recently there was a meeting of recluses, brahmins and wandering ascetics in the debating hall. In that assembly, the following chance talk arose: 'Now there is this teacher, *Pūraṇa Kassapa*, who is widely acclaimed and who has a large following. When an ordinary disciple of his passes away, he predicates his destiny. So also in the case of a disciple who has attained the highest state of perfection in his religious system. Other well known teachers like *Makkhali Gosāla, Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta, Pakudha Kaccāyana* and *Ajita Kesakambali* do the same. They all declare categorically the after death state of both types of their disciples.

But as for this ascetic *Gotama*, who also is a teacher widely acclaimed with a large following, the position is that he clearly declares the after death state of an ordinary disciple of his, but in the case of a disciple who has attained the highest state of perfection, he does not predicate his destiny according to the above mentioned tetralemma. Instead he makes such a declaration about him as the following:

Accechchi taṇhaṃ, vāvattayi saññojanaṃ, sammā mānābhisamayā antam akāsi dukkhassa,¹⁷ "he cut off craving, disjoined the fetter and, by rightly understanding conceit for what it is, made an end of suffering".

Vacchagotta concludes this account with the confession that he himself was perplexed and was in doubt as to how the *Dhamma* of the recluse *Gotama* has to be understood. The Buddha grants that *Vacchagotta*'s doubt is reasonable, with the words *alañhi te, Vaccha, kaṅkhituṃ, alaṃ vicikicchituṃ, kaṅkhanīye ca pana te thāne vicikicchā uppannā*, "it behoves you to doubt, *Vaccha*, it behoves you to be perplexed, for doubt has arisen in you on a dubious point".

Then the Buddha comes out with the correct standpoint in order to dispel *Vacchagotta*'s doubt. *Sa-upādānassa kvāhaṃ, Vaccha, upapattiṃ paññāpemi, no anupādānassa*, "it is for one with grasping, *Vaccha*, that I declare there is an occurrence of birth, not for one without grasping."

He gives the following simile by way of illustration. *Seyyathāpi, Vaccha, aggi sa-upādāno jalati no anupādāno, evam eva kvāhaṃ, Vaccha, sa-upādānassa upapattiṃ paññāpemi, no anupādānassa*, "just as a fire burns when it has fuel to grasp and not when it has no fuel, even so, *Vaccha*, I declare that there is an occurrence of birth for one with grasping, not for one without grasping."

As we have mentioned before, the word *upādāna* has two meanings, it means both grasping as well as fuel. In fact fuel is just what the fire 'grasps'. Just as the fire depends on grasping in the form of fuel, so also the individual depends on grasping for his rebirth.

Within the context of this analogy, *Vacchagotta* now raises a question that has some deeper implications: *Yasmiṃ pana, bho Gotama, samaye acci vātena khittā dūrampi gacchati, imassa pana bhavaṃ Gotamo kim upādānasmiṃ paññāpeti*, "Master *Gotama*, at the time when a flame flung by the wind goes even far, what does Master *Gotama* declare to be its object of grasping or fuel?"

The Buddha's answer to that question is: *Yasmiṃ kho, Vaccha, samaye acci vātena khittā dūrampi gacchati, tamahaṃ vātupādānaṃ vadāmi; vāto hissa, Vaccha, tasmīṃ samaye upādānaṃ hoti*, "at the time, *Vaccha*, when a flame flung by the wind goes even far, that, I say, has wind as its object of grasping. *Vaccha*, at that time wind itself serves as the object of grasping."

Now this is only an analogy. *Vaccha* raises the question proper only at this point: *Yasmiṃca pana, bho Gotama, samaye imaṅca kāyaṃ nikkhipati satto ca aññataraṃ kāyaṃ anupatto hoti, imassa pana bhavaṃ Gotamo kim upādānasmiṃ paññāpeti*, "at the time, Master *Gotama*, when a being

lays down this body and has reached a certain body, what does Master *Gotama* declare to be a grasping in his case?"

The Buddha replies: *Yasmiṃca pana, Vaccha, samaye imaṅca kāyaṃ nikkhipati satto ca aññataraṃ kāyaṃ anupatto hoti, tam ahaṃ taṇhupādānaṃ vadāmi; taṇhā hissa, Vaccha, tasmīṃ samaye upādānaṃ hoti*, "at the time, *Vaccha*, when a being lays down this body and has reached a certain body, I say, he has craving as his grasping. At that time, *Vaccha*, it is craving that serves as a grasping for him."

With this sentence the discourse ends abruptly, but there is an intricate point in the two sections quoted above. In these two sections, we have adopted the reading *anupatto*, "has reached", as more plausible in rendering the phrase *aññataraṃ kāyaṃ anupatto*, "has reached a certain body".¹⁸ The commentary, however, seeks to justify the reading *anupapanno*, "is not reborn", which gives quite an opposite sense, with the following explanation *cutikkhaṇeyeva paṭisandhicittassa anuppannattā anupapanno hoti*,¹⁹ "since at the death moment itself, the rebirth consciousness has not yet arisen, he is said to be not yet reborn".

Some editors doubt whether the correct reading should be *anupatto*.²⁰ The doubt seems reasonable enough, for even syntactically, *anupatto* can be shown to fit into the context better than *anupapanno*. The word *aññataraṃ* provides us with the criterion. It has a selective sense, like "a certain", and carries definite positive implications. To express something negative a word like *aññaṃ*, "another", has to be used instead of the selective *aññataraṃ*, "a certain".

On the other hand, the suggested reading *anupatto* avoids those syntactical difficulties. A being lays down this body and has reached a certain body. Even the simile given as an illustration is in favour of our interpretation. The original question of *Vaccha* about the flame flung by the wind, reminds us of the way a forest fire, for instance, spreads from one tree to another tree some distance away. It is the wind that pushes the flame for it to catch hold of the other tree.

The commentarial explanation, however, envisages the situation in which a being lays down this body and is not yet reborn in another body. It is in the interim that craving is supposed to be the grasping or a fuel. Some scholars have exploited this commentarial explanation to postulate a theory of *antarābhava*, or interim existence, prior to rebirth proper.

Our interpretation, based on the reading *anuppatto*, rules out even the possibility of an *antarābhava*. Obviously enough, *Vacchagotta's* question is simple and straightforward. He is curious to know what sort of a grasping connects up the being that lays down the body and the being that arises in another body. That is to say, how the apparent gap could be bridged.

The answer given by the Buddha fully accords with the analogy envisaged by the premise. Just as the wind does the work of grasping in the case of the flame, so craving itself, at the moment of death, fulfils the function of grasping for a being to reach another body. That is precisely why craving is called *bhavanetti*, "the guide in becoming".²¹ Like a promontory, it juts out into the ocean of *saṃsāra*. When it comes to rebirth, it is craving that bridges the apparent gap. It is the invisible combustible fuel that keeps the raging *saṃsāric* forest fire alive.

All in all, what transpired at the debating hall (*Kutūhalasālā*) reveals one important fact, namely that the Buddha's reluctance to give a categorical answer regarding the after death state of the emancipated one in his dispensation had aroused the curiosity of those recluses and brahmins. That is why they kept on discussing the subject at length.

However, it was not the fact that he had refused to make any comment at all on this point. Only, that the comment he had made appeared so strange to them, as we may well infer from *Vacchagotta's* report of the discussion at the debating hall.

The Buddha's comment on the subject, which they had quoted, was not based on the tetralemma. It was a completely new formulation. *Acchecchi taṇhaṃ, vāvattayi saññojanaṃ, sammā mānābhisamayaṃ antam akāsi dukkhassa*, "he cut off craving, disjoined the fetter and, by rightly understanding conceit for what it is, made an end of suffering".

This then, is the correct answer, and not any one of the four corners of the tetralemma. This brief formula is of paramount importance. When craving is cut off, the 'guide-in-becoming', which is responsible for rebirth, is done away with. It is as if the fetter binding to another existence has been unhooked. The term *bhavasamyojanakkhaya*, "destruction of the fetter to existence", we came across earlier, conveys the same sense.²²

The phrase *sammā mānābhisamaya* is also highly significant. With the dispelling of ignorance, the conceit "am", *asmimāna*, is seen for what it is. It disappears when exposed to the light of understanding and that is the

end of suffering as well. The concluding phrase *antam akāsi dukkhassa*, "made an end of suffering", is conclusive enough. The problem that was there all the time was the problem of suffering, so the end of suffering means the end of the whole problem.

In the *Aggivacchagottasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* the Buddha's response to the question of the after death state of the *arahant* comes to light in greater detail. The question is presented there in the form of the tetralemma, beginning with *hoti tathāgato param maraṇā*.²³

While all the other recluses and brahmins held that the answer should necessarily take the form of one of the four alternatives, the Buddha put them all aside, *thapitāni*, rejected them, *patikkhattāni*, refused to state his view categorically in terms of them, *avyākatāni*. This attitude of the Buddha puzzled not only the ascetics of other sects, but even some of the monks like *Māluṅkyāputta*. In very strong terms, *Māluṅkyāputta* challenged the Buddha to give a categorical answer or else confess his ignorance.²⁴

As a matter of fact there are altogether ten such questions, which the Buddha laid aside, rejected and refused to answer categorically. The first six take the form of three dilemmas, while the last four constitute the tetralemma already mentioned. Since an examination of those three dilemmas would reveal some important facts, we shall briefly discuss their significance as well.

The three sets of views are stated thematically as follows:

- 1) *sassato loko*, "the world is eternal"
- 2) *asassato loko*, "the world is not eternal"
- 3) *antavā loko*, "the world is finite"
- 4) *anantavā loko*, "the world is infinite"
- 5) *taṃ jīvaṃ taṃ sarīraṃ*, "the soul and the body are the same"
- 6) *aññaṃ jīvaṃ aññaṃ sarīraṃ*, "the soul is one thing and the body another"

These three dilemmas, together with the tetralemma, are known as *abyākatavatthūni*, the ten undetermined points.²⁵ Various recluses and brahmins, as well as king *Pasenadi Kosala*, posed these ten questions to the Buddha, hoping to get categorical answers.

Why the Buddha laid them aside is a problem to many scholars. Some, like *Māluṅkyāputta*, would put it down to agnosticism. Others would

claim that the Buddha laid them aside because they are irrelevant to the immediate problem of deliverance, though he could have answered them. That section of opinion go by the *Siṃsapāvanasutta* in the *Saccasamyutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*.²⁶

Once while dwelling in a *siṃsapā* grove, the Buddha took up some *siṃsapā* leaves in his hands and asked the monks: "What do you think, monks, which is more, these leaves in my hand or those in the *siṃsapā* grove?" The monks reply that the leaves in the hand are few and those in the *siṃsapā* grove are greater in number. Then the Buddha makes a declaration to the following effect: "Even so, monks, what I have understood through higher knowledge and not taught you is far more than what I have taught you".

If we rely on this simile, we would have to grant that the questions are answerable in principle, but that the Buddha preferred to avoid them because they are not relevant. But this is not the reason either.

All these ten questions are based on wrong premises. To take them seriously and answer them would be to grant the validity of those premises. The dilemmas and the tetralemma seek arbitrarily to corner anyone who tries to answer them. The Buddha refused to be cornered that way.

The first two alternatives, presented in the form of a dilemma, are *sassato loko*, "the world is eternal", and *asassato loko*, "the world is not eternal". This is an attempt to determine the world in temporal terms. The next set of alternatives seeks to determine the world in spatial terms.

Why did the Buddha refuse to answer these questions on time and space? It is because the concept of 'the world' has been given quite a new definition in this dispensation.

Whenever the Buddha redefined a word in common usage, he introduced it with the phrase *ariyassa vinaye*, "in the discipline of the noble ones".

We have already mentioned on an earlier occasion that according to the discipline of the noble ones, 'the world' is said to have arisen in the six sense-spheres, *chasu loko samuppanno*.²⁷ In short, the world is redefined in terms of the six spheres of sense. This is so fundamentally important that in the *Saḷāyatana-samyutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* the theme comes up again and again.

For instance, in the *Samiddhisutta* Venerable *Samiddhi* poses the

following question to the Buddha: '*Loko, loko'ti, bhante, vuccati. Kittāvatā nu kho, bhante, loko vā assa lokapaññatti vā?*'²⁸ "The world, the world', so it is said Venerable sir, but how far, Venerable sir, does this world or the concept of the world go?"

The Buddha gives the following answer: *Yattha kho, Samiddhi, atthi cakkhu, atthi rūpā, atthi cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ, atthi cakkhuvīññāṇaviññātabbā dhammā, atthi tattha loko vā lokapaññatti vā*, "where there is the eye, *Samiddhi*, where there are forms, where there is eye-consciousness, where there are things cognizable by eye-consciousness, there exists the world or the concept of the world".

A similar statement is made with regard to the other spheres of sense, including the mind. That, according to the Buddha, is where the world exists. Then he makes a declaration concerning the converse: *Yattha ca kho, Samiddhi, natthi cakkhu, natthi rūpā, natthi cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ, natthi cakkhuvīññāṇaviññātabbā dhammā, natthi tattha loko vā lokapaññatti vā*, "where there is no eye, *Samiddhi*, where there are no forms, where there is no eye-consciousness, where there are no things cognizable by eye-consciousness, there the world does not exist, nor any concept of the world".

From this we can well infer that any attempt to determine whether there is an end of the world, either in temporal terms or in spatial terms, is misguided. It is the outcome of a wrong view, for there is a world so long as there are the six spheres of sense. That is why the Buddha consistently refused to answer those questions regarding the world.

There are a number of definitions of the world given by the Buddha. We shall cite two of them. A certain monk directly asked the Buddha to give a definition of the world: *Loko, loko'ti bhante, vuccati. Kittāvatā nu kho, bhante, loko'ti vuccati?* "The world, the world', so it is said. In what respect, Venerable sir, is it called a world?"

Then the Buddha makes the following significant declaration: *Lujjati'ti kho, bhikkhu, tasmā loko'ti vuccati. Kiñca lujjati? Cakkhu kho, bhikkhu, lujjati, rūpā lujjanti, cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ lujjati, cakkhusamphasso lujjati, yampidaṃ cakkhusamphassapaccayā uppajjati vedayitaṃ sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkhamasukhaṃ vā tampi lujjati. Lujjati'ti kho, bhikkhu, tasmā loko'ti vuccati*.²⁹

"It is disintegrating, monk, that is why it is called 'the world'. And what is disintegrating? The eye, monk, is disintegrating, forms are

disintegrating, eye-consciousness is disintegrating, eye-contact is disintegrating, and whatever feeling that arises dependent on eye-contact, be it pleasant, or painful, or neither-pleasant-nor-painful, that too is disintegrating. It is disintegrating, monk, that is why it is called 'the world'."

Here the Buddha is redefining the concept of the world, punning on the verb *lujjati*, which means to "break up" or "disintegrate". To bring about a radical change in outlook, in accordance with the *Dhamma*, the Buddha would sometimes introduce a new etymology in preference to the old. This definition of 'the world' is to the same effect.

Venerable *Ānanda*, too, raises the same question, soliciting a redefinition for the well-known concept of the world, and the Buddha responds with the following answer: *Yaṃ kho, Ānanda, palokadhammaṃ, ayaṃ vuccati ariyassa vinaye loko.*³⁰ "Whatever, *Ānanda*, is subject to disintegration that is called 'the world' in the noble one's discipline".

He even goes on to substantiate his statement at length: *Kiñca, Ānanda, palokadhammaṃ? Cakkhuṃ kho, Ānanda, palokadhammaṃ, rūpā palokadhammā, cakkhuvīññānaṃ palokadhammaṃ, cakkhusamphasso palokadhammo, yampidaṃ cakkhusamphassapaccayā uppajjati vedayitaṃ sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkhamasukhaṃ vā tampi palokadhammaṃ. Yaṃ kho, Ānanda, palokadhammaṃ, ayaṃ vuccati ariyassa vinaye loko.*

"And what, *Ānanda*, is subject to disintegration? The eye, *Ānanda*, is subject to disintegration, forms are subject to disintegration, eye-consciousness is subject to disintegration, eye-contact is subject to disintegration, and whatever feeling that arises dependent on eye-contact, be it pleasant, or painful, or neither-pleasant-nor-painful, that too is subject to disintegration. Whatever is subject to disintegration, *Ānanda*, is called 'the world' in the noble one's discipline."

In this instance, the play upon the word *loka* is vividly apt in that it brings out the transcendence of the world. If the world by definition is regarded as transient, it cannot be conceived substantially as a unit. How then can an eternity or infinity be predicated about it? If all the so-called things in the world, listed above, are all the time disintegrating, any unitary concept of the world is fallacious.

Had the Buddha answered those misconceived questions, he would thereby concede to the wrong concept of the world current among other

religious groups. So then we can understand why the Buddha refused to answer the first four questions.

Now let us examine the next dilemma, *taṃ jīvaṃ taṃ sarīraṃ, aññaṃ jīvaṃ aññaṃ sarīraṃ*, "the soul and the body are the same, the soul is one thing and the body another". To these questions also, the other religionists insisted on a categorical answer, either 'yes' or 'no'.

There is a 'catch' in the way these questions are framed. The Buddha refused to get caught to them. These two questions are of the type that clever lawyers put to a respondent these days. They would sometimes insist strictly on a 'yes' or 'no' as answer and ask a question like 'have you now given up drinking?'. If the respondent happens to be a teetotaler, he would be in a quandary, since both answers tend to create a wrong impression.

So also in the case of these two alternatives, "the soul and the body are the same, the soul is one thing and the body another". Either way there is a presumption of a soul, which the Buddha did not subscribe to. The Buddha had unequivocally declared that the idea of soul is the outcome of an utterly foolish view, *kevalo paripūro bāladhammo*.³¹ That is why the Buddha rejected both standpoints.

A similar 'catch', a similar misconception, underlies the tetralemma concerning the after death state of the *Tathāgata*. It should be already clear to some extent by what we have discussed so far.

For the Buddha, the term *Tathāgata* had a different connotation than what it meant for those of other sects. The latter adhered to the view that both the ordinary disciple as well as the perfected individual in their systems of thought had a soul of some description or other.

The Buddha never subscribed to such a view. On the other hand, he invested the term *Tathāgata* with an extremely deep and subtle meaning. His definition of the term will emerge from the *Aggivaṃsagottasutta*, which we propose to discuss now.

In this discourse we find the wandering ascetic *Vacchagotta* trying to get a categorical answer to the questionnaire, putting each of the questions with legal precision one by one, as a lawyer would at the courts of law.

*Kiṃ nu kho, bho Gotamo, 'sassato loko, idam eva saccaṃ, moghaṃ aññaṃ'ti, evaṃ diṭṭhi bhavaṃ Gotamo?*³² "Now, Master *Gotama*, 'the world is eternal, this only is true, all else is false', are you of this view, Master *Gotama*?" The Buddha replies: *na kho ahaṃ, Vaccha, evaṃ diṭṭhi,*

"no, *Vaccha*, I am not of this view".

Then *Vacchagotta* puts the opposite standpoint, which too the Buddha answers in the negative. To all the ten questions the Buddha answers 'no', thereby rejecting the questionnaire in toto. Then *Vacchagotta* asks why, on seeing what danger, the Buddha refuses to hold any of those views. The Buddha gives the following explanation:

'Sassato loko'ti kho, Vaccha, diṭṭhigatam etaṃ diṭṭhigahanam diṭṭhikantāram diṭṭhivisūkaṃ diṭṭhivipphanditam diṭṭhisamyojanam sadukkhaṃ savighātaṃ sa-upāyāsaṃ sapariḷāhaṃ, na nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya samvattati.

"*Vaccha*, this speculative view that the world is eternal is a jungle of views, a desert of views, a distortion of views, an aberration of views, a fetter of views, it is fraught with suffering, with vexation, with despair, with delirium, it does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to tranquillity, to higher knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*." So with regard to the other nine views.

Now here we find both the above-mentioned reasons. Not only the fact that these questions are not relevant to the attainment of *Nibbāna*, but also the fact that there is something wrong in the very statement of the problems. What are the dangers that he sees in holding any of these views?

Every one of them is just a speculative view, *diṭṭhigatam*, a jungle of views, *diṭṭhigahanam*, an arid desert of views, *diṭṭhikantāram*, a mimicry or a distortion of views, *diṭṭhivisūkaṃ*, an aberration of views, *diṭṭhivipphanditam*, a fetter of views, *diṭṭhisamyojanam*. They bring about suffering, *sadukkhaṃ*, vexation, *savighātaṃ*, despair, *sa-upāyāsaṃ*, delirium, *sapariḷāhaṃ*. They do not conduce to disenchantment, *na nibbidāya*, to dispassion, *na virāgāya*, to cessation, *na nirodhāya*, to tranquillity, *na upasamāya*, to higher knowledge, *na abhiññāya*, to enlightenment, *na sambodhāya*, to extinguishment, *na nibbānāya*.

From this declaration it is obvious that these questions are ill founded and misconceived. They are a welter of false views, so much so that the Buddha even declares that these questions simply do not exist for the noble disciple, who has heard the *Dhamma*. They occur as real problems only to the untaught worldling. Why is that?

Whoever has a deep understanding of the four noble truths would not even raise these questions. This declaration should be enough for one to

understand why the Buddha refused to answer them.

Explaining that it is because of these dangers that he rejects them in toto, the Buddha now makes clear what his own stance is. Instead of holding any of those speculative views, he has seen for himself the rise, *samudaya*, and fall, *atthagama*, of the five aggregates as a matter of direct experience, thereby getting rid of all 'I'-ing and 'my'-ing and latencies to conceits, winning ultimate release.

Even after this explanation *Vacchagotta* resorts to the fourfold logic to satisfy his curiosity about the after death state of the monk thus released in mind. *Evam vimuttacitto pana, bho Gotamo, bhikkhu kuhiṃ uppajjati?* "When a monk is thus released in mind, Master *Gotama*, where is he reborn?" The Buddha replies: *Uppajjati'ti kho, Vaccha, na upeti*, "to say that he is reborn, *Vaccha*, falls short of a reply".

Then *Vacchagotta* asks: *Tena hi, bho Gotama, na uppajjati?* "If that is so, Master *Gotama*, is he not reborn?" - *Na uppajjati'ti kho, Vaccha, na upeti*, "to say that he is not reborn, *Vaccha*, falls short of a reply".

Tena hi, bho Gotama, uppajjati ca na ca uppajjati? "If that is so, Master *Gotama*, is he both reborn and is not reborn?" - *Uppajjati ca na ca uppajjati'ti kho, Vaccha, na upeti*, "to say that he is both reborn and is not reborn, *Vaccha*, falls short of a reply".

Tena hi, bho Gotama, neva uppajjati na na uppajjati? "If that is so, Master *Gotama*, is he neither reborn nor is not reborn?" - *Neva uppajjati na na uppajjati'ti kho, Vaccha, na upeti*, "to say that he is neither reborn nor is not reborn, *Vaccha*, falls short of a reply".

At this unexpected response of the Buddha to his four questions, *Vacchagotta* confesses that he is fully confused and bewildered. The Buddha grants that his confusion and bewilderment are understandable, since this *Dhamma* is so deep and subtle that it cannot be plumbed by logic, *atakkāvacaro*.

However, in order to give him a clue to understand the *Dhamma* point of view, he gives an illustration in the form of a catechism.

Taṃ kiṃ maññasi, Vaccha, sace te purato aggi jaleyya, jāneyyāsi tvaṃ 'ayaṃ me purato aggi jalati'ti? "What do you think, *Vaccha*, suppose a fire were burning before you, would you know 'this fire is burning before me'?" - *Sace me, bho Gotama, purato aggi jaleyya, jāneyyāhaṃ 'ayaṃ me purato aggi jalati'ti*. "If, Master *Gotama*, a fire were burning before me, I

would know 'this fire is burning before me'."

Sace pana taṃ, Vaccha, evaṃ puccheyya 'yo te ayaṃ purato aggi jalati, ayaṃ aggi kiṃ paṭicca jalatī'ti, evaṃ puṭṭho tvaṃ, Vaccha, kinti byākareyyāsi?' "If someone were to ask you, *Vaccha*, 'what does this fire that is burning before you burns in dependence on', being asked thus, *Vaccha*, what would you answer?" - *Evaṃ puṭṭho ahaṃ, bho Gotama, evaṃ byākareyyaṃ 'yo me ayaṃ purato aggi jalati, ayaṃ aggi tiṇakaṭṭhupādānaṃ paṭicca jalatī'ti.* "Being asked thus, Master *Gotama*, I would answer 'this fire burning before me burns in dependence on grass and sticks'."

Sace te, Vaccha, purato so aggi nibbāyeyya, jāneyyāsi tvaṃ 'ayaṃ me purato aggi nibbuto'ti? If that fire before you were to be extinguished, *Vaccha*, would you know 'this fire before me has been extinguished'?" - *Sace me, bho Gotama, purato so aggi nibbāyeyya, jāneyyāhaṃ 'ayaṃ me purato aggi nibbuto'ti.* If that fire before me were to be extinguished, Master *Gotama*, I would know 'this fire before me has been extinguished'."

Sace pana taṃ, Vaccha, evaṃ puccheyya 'yo te ayaṃ purato aggi nibbuto, so aggi ito katamaṃ disaṃ gato, puraṭṭhimaṃ vā dakkhiṇaṃ vā pacchimaṃ vā uttaraṃ vā'ti, evaṃ puṭṭho tvaṃ, Vaccha, kinti byākareyyāsi?' "If someone were to ask you, *Vaccha*, when that fire before you were extinguished, 'to which direction did it go, to the east, the west, the north or the south', being asked thus, what would you answer?" - *Na upeti, bho Gotama, yañhi so, bho Gotama, aggi tiṇakaṭṭhupādānaṃ paṭicca jalati, tassa ca pariyādānā aññassa ca anupahārā anāhāro nibbuto tveva saṅkhaṃ gacchati.* "That wouldn't do as a reply, Master *Gotama*, for that fire burnt in dependence on its fuel of grass and sticks. That being used up and not getting any more fuel, being without fuel, it is reckoned as extinguished."

At this point a very important expression comes up, which we happened to discuss earlier too, namely *saṅkhaṃ gacchati*.³³ It means "to be reckoned", or "to be known as", or "to be designated". So the correct mode of designation in this case is to say that the fire is reckoned as 'extinguished', and not to say that it has gone somewhere.

If one takes mean advantage of the expression 'fire has gone out' and insists on locating it, it will only be a misuse or an abuse of linguistic usage. It reveals a pervert tendency to misunderstand and misinterpret.

Therefore, all that can be said by way of predicating such a situation, is *nibbuto tveva saṅkhaṃ gacchati*, "it is reckoned as 'extinguished'".

Now comes a well-timed declaration in which the Buddha, starting right from where *Vacchagotta* leaves off, brings the whole discussion to a climactic end.

Evameva kho, Vaccha, yena rūpena tathāgataṃ paññāpayamāno paññāpeyya, taṃ rūpaṃ tathāgatassa pahīnaṃ ucchinnamūlaṃ tālavatthukataṃ anabhāvakataṃ āyatim anuppādadhammaṃ. Rūpasāṅkhavimutto kho, Vaccha, tathāgato, gambhīro appameyyo duppariyogāho, seyyathāpi mahāsamuddo. Uppajjati'ti na upeti, na uppajjati'ti na upeti, uppajjati ca na ca uppajjati'ti na upeti, neva uppajjati na na uppajjati'ti na upeti.

"Even so, *Vaccha*, that form by which one designating the *Tathāgata* might designate him, that has been abandoned by him, cut off at the root, made like an uprooted palm tree, made non-existent and incapable of arising again. The *Tathāgata* is free from reckoning in terms of form, *Vaccha*, he is deep, immeasurable and hard to fathom, like the great ocean. To say that he is reborn falls short of a reply, to say that he is not reborn falls short of a reply, to say that he is both reborn and is not reborn falls short of a reply, to say that he is neither reborn nor is not reborn falls short of a reply."

This declaration, which a fully convinced *Vacchagotta* now wholeheartedly hailed and compared to the very heartwood of a *Sāla* tree, enshrines an extremely profound norm of *Dhamma*.

It was when *Vacchagotta* had granted the fact that it is improper to ask in which direction an extinguished fire has gone, and that the only proper linguistic usage is simply to say that 'it is extinguished', that the Buddha came out with this profound pronouncement concerning the five aggregates.

In the case of the *Tathāgata*, the aggregate of form, for instance, is abandoned, *pahīnaṃ*, cut off at the root, *ucchinnamūlaṃ*, made like an uprooted palm tree divested from its site, *tālavatthukataṃ*, made non-existent, *anabhāvakataṃ*, and incapable of arising again, *āyatim anuppādadhammaṃ*.

Thereby the *Tathāgata* becomes free from reckoning in terms of form, *rūpasāṅkhāvimutto kho tathāgato*. Due to this very freedom, he becomes deep, immeasurable and unfathomable like the great ocean. Therefore he

cannot be said to be reborn, or not to be reborn, or both or neither. The abandonment of form, referred to above, comes about not by death or destruction, but by the abandonment of craving.

The fact that by the abandonment of craving itself, form is abandoned, or eradicated, comes to light from the following quotation from the *Rādhasaṃyutta* of the *Samyutta Nikāya*.

*Rūpe kho, Rādha, yo chando yo rāgo yā nandī yā taṇhā, taṃ pajahatha. Evaṃ taṃ rūpaṃ pahīnaṃ bhavissati ucchinnamūlaṃ tālāvattukataṃ anabhāvakataṃ āyatiṃ anuppādadhammaṃ.*³⁴ "Rādha, you give up that desire, that lust, that delight, that craving for form. It is thus that form comes to be abandoned, cut off at the root, made like an uprooted palm tree, made non-existent and incapable of arising again."

Worldlings are under the impression that an *arahant's* five aggregates of grasping get destroyed at death. But according to this declaration, an *arahant* is like an uprooted palm tree. A palm tree uprooted but left standing, divested of its site, might appear as a real palm tree to one who sees it from a distance. Similarly, an untaught worldling thinks that there is a being or person in truth and fact when he hears the term *Tathāgata*, even in this context too.

This is the insinuation underlying the above quoted pronouncement. It has some profound implications, but time does not permit us to go into them today.

1. MI436, *MahāMālunkyasutta*.
2. E.g. at MI 35, *Ākaṅkheyya Sutta*.
3. E.g. at MI 167, *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*.
4. E.g. at MI 23, *Bhayabherava Sutta*.
5. Ps III 115, *aṭṭhakathā* on the *Bahuvedanīyasutta*.
6. A III 354, *Iṇasutta*.
7. Sn 235, *Ratanasutta*.
8. Ud 93, *Dutiyaḍḍabbasutta*.
9. Dhp 225, *Kodhavagga*.
10. Dhp-a III 321.
11. Sn 1086, *Hemakamāṇavapucchā*.
12. See sermon 19.
13. MI 140, *Alagaddūpamasutta*.
14. MI 137, *Alagaddūpamasutta*.
15. E.g. at MI 484, *Aggivaḍḍagottasutta*.
16. S III 116, *Anurādhasutta*.
17. S IV 399, *Kutūhalasālāsutta*.
18. This suggestion finds support in the Chinese parallel to the *Kutūhalasālāsutta*, *Samyukta Āgama* discourse 957 (Taishō II 244b2), which speaks of the being that has passed away as availing himself of a mind-made body. (Anālayo)
19. Spk III 114.
20. Feer, L. (ed.): *Samyutta Nikāya*, PTS 1990 (1894), p 400 n 2.
21. E.g. S III 190, *Bhavanettisutta*.
22. It 53, *Indriyasutta*; see sermon 16,
23. MI 484, *Aggivaḍḍagottasutta*.
24. MI 427, *Cūḷa-Māluṅkyāputtasutta*.
25. The expression *abyākatavattu* occurs e.g. at A IV 68, *Abyākatasutta*.
26. S V 437, *Sīsapāvanasutta*.
27. S I 41, *Lokasutta*; see sermon 4.
28. S IV 39, *Samiddhisutta*.
29. S IV 52, *Lokapañhāsutta*.
30. S IV 53, *Palokadhammasutta*.
31. MI 138, *Alagaddūpamasutta*.
32. MI 484, *Aggivaḍḍagottasutta*.
33. See sermons 1, 12 and 13.
34. S III 193, *Chandarāgasutta*.

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