

# Nibbāna: The Supreme Peace of Humanity <sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

The Buddha teaches only suffering and the end of suffering. The First Noble Truth indicates the suffering; birth, decay, death etc., as the problem of humanity. Then the Second Noble Truth indicates the cause of suffering; craving, as the cause of problem. Next, the Third Noble Truth indicates the cessation of suffering as the total fading away of the problem. At last, the Fourth Noble Truth indicates the path leading to the cessation of suffering. It is clear that Buddha expounds the Third Noble Truth as the extinction of craving, the ultimate state of realization of the truths for humanity. The extinction of craving, therefore, closer related to nibbāna in some aspects.

Even though the Buddhist textual scriptures (the Pāli canon as well as later texts) exhibit the scattered explanations regarding nibbāna, But there are some crucial evidences for the academic studies and interpretation, that we shall deal briefly with, the *Anguttaranikāya*, and the *Ittivuttaka*.

## 2. The *Anguttaranikāya* <sup>2</sup>

The state of final deliverance is called “Nibbāna”<sup>3</sup>. Etymologically, Nibbāna derives from the prefix ni- (‘out’, ‘without’, ‘finished’ or ‘ended’), and vāna, (‘to blow’, ‘to go’, ‘to move’, or in another sense a ‘restraint’). Literally, Nibbāna means the extinguishing of a flame. The word “Nibbāna” used by the Buddha means the extinguishing of the flame of craving, the extinguishing of the fires of greed, hatred and delusion, as the Venerable Sāriputta replied to the question of Jambukhādaka in the following words: “Nibbāna, Nibbāna, they say. But what, friend, is this Nibbāna? Extinction of greed, extinction of hatred, extinction of delusion-that, friend, is called Nibbāna”.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst, the synonymous definitions of Nibbāna taken from many Buddhist canonical textual sources<sup>5</sup>, are listed below:

1. **Akaṇha-asukka**: not black, not white (not confined to social class or caste; neither good nor bad; neither puñña nor pāpa).

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<sup>1</sup> Sanu Mahatthanadull, Ph.D., “**Nibbāna: The Supreme Peace of Humanity**”, Selected Works in Buddhist Scriptures, Teaching Document, (IBSC: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2014) (Mimeographed).

<sup>2</sup> A.IV.379.

<sup>3</sup> “Nirvana” in Sanskrit.

<sup>4</sup> S.IV 251.

<sup>5</sup> M.I. 173; S.IV. 359-373; A.II. 247-8; Ud. 80-1; S.IV. 210.

2. **Akata**: not made; not built.
3. **Akiñcana**: nothing lingering in the mind; free from anxiety.
4. **Akuto-bhaya**: fearless.
5. **Accuta**: immovable; undeparting.
6. **Acchariya**: marvellous.
7. **Ajara, Ajajjara**: ageless; undecaying.
8. **Ajāta**: not born.
9. **Anata**: not swayed; absence of craving.
10. **Ananta**: limitless.
11. **Anādāna**: no grasping.
12. **Anāpara**: sublime; foremost.
13. **Anālaya**: without longing; absence of clinging.
14. **Anāsava**: without āsava (effluents/taints).
15. **Anidassana**: not seen with the eye; signless.
16. **Anītika**: without calamity.
17. **Anuttara**: unsurpassed; supreme.
18. **Apalokita** (-na): not disintegrating; not dissolving.
19. **Abbhūta**: ‘has not been before’; wonderful.
20. **Abyādhī**: without disease.
21. **Abyāpajjha**: without oppression.
22. **Abhūta**: not coming to be.
23. **Amata**: deathless.
24. **Amosa-dhamma**: imperishable.
25. **Asaṅkiliṭṭha**: undefiled.
26. **Asaṅkappa**: unshakeable.
27. **Asaṅkhata**: not constructed.
28. **Asaṅhira**: unshifting.
29. **Asoka**: sorrowless.
30. **Ārogya**: without sickness; perfect health.
31. **Issariya**: freedom; mastership.
32. **Khema**: security; safety.
33. **Taṇhakkhaya**: the end of craving.
34. **Tāṇa**: defender; protection.
35. **Dīpa**: island; refuge.
36. **Dukkakkhaya**: the end of suffering.
37. **Duddasa**: difficult to see.
38. **Dhuva**: enduring.
39. **Nipuna**: subtle.
40. **Nippapañca**: without obstructive defilements; without papañca.
41. **Nibbāna**: the cessation of defilements and all suffering.
42. **Nibbuti**: cooling; the allayment of affliction.
43. **Nirodha**: cessation of suffering.
44. **Paṇīta**: excellent.
45. **Paramattha**: the supreme benefit.
46. **Parama-sacca**: the supreme truth.
47. **Pāra**: the other shore; safe destination.
48. **Mutti**: release; emancipation.

49. **Mokkha**: salvation.
50. **Yogakkhema**: freedom from bondage.
51. **Leṇa**: **sanctuary**; shelter from danger.
52. **Vimutti**: liberation; freedom.
53. **Vimokkha**: liberation.
54. **Viraja**: stainless.
55. **Virāga**: the fading, cooling off, and expiration of lust.
56. **Visuddhi**: purity; impeccable.
57. **Sacca**: truth.
58. **Santa**: peaceful; still.
59. **Santi**: peace.
60. **Saraṇa**: refuge.
61. **Siva**: highest bliss.
62. **Suddhi**: purity.
63. **Sududdasa**: exceedingly difficult to see.

Moreover, there are many more references and descriptions for Nibbāna in the scriptures containing verses by disciples and in the commentaries (e.g., Niddesa, Paṭisambhidāmagga, Theragāthā, Therīgāthā, Apadāna), as well as in later scriptures, (e.g., Abhidhānappadīpikā). Examples are listed below:<sup>6</sup>

- Akkhara**: imperishable; interminable.
- Akhalita**: unfaltering.
- Acala**: unwavering.
- Anārammaṇa**: free from constraints; independent of sense objects.
- Anuppāda**: not born.
- Apavagga**: without formations (saṅkhāra); final emancipation.
- Amaraṇa**: deathless.
- Arūpa**: without rūpa; formless.
- Asapatta**: without enemies.
- Asambādha**: unconfined; unoppressed.
- Kevala**: unadulterated; inherently complete.
- Nicca**: constant; certain.
- Nirupatāpa**: free from distress.
- Paṭipassaddhi**: tranquillity; calm.
- Pada**: place to be reached; destination.
- Para**: the beyond; the ultimate.
- Pariyosāna**: conclusion; goal.
- Pahāna**: the abandonment of defilements.
- Vivaṭṭa**: deliverance from the round of rebirth (vaṭṭa); without vaṭṭa.
- Vūpasama**: stillness.

Some of these terms are significant for they are constantly used as direct definitions for Nibbāna, for example: asaṅkhata, nirodha, vimutti, virāga, santa and santi. Other words are used infrequently according to their particular context. Some are used in only one location, others in two or three locations, so they should not be regarded as highly significant. However, they are shown here in order to support the clearer understanding.

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<sup>6</sup> Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A.Payutto), **Nibbāna: The Supreme Peace**, tr. Robin Moore, (Bangkok: Chandrapen Publishing House, 2010), pp. 25-26.

Nibbāna is, sometimes, referred as an “āyatana”. This means realm, plane or sphere. It is a sphere where there is nothing at all that corresponds to our mundane experience, and therefore it has to be described by way of negations as the negation of all the limited and determinate qualities of conditioned things.

Nibbāna can also be referred as a “dhatu”, an element, the “deathless element” (amata-dhatu). The Buddha compares the element of Nibbāna to an ocean. He says that just as the great ocean remains at the same level no matter how much water pours into it from the rivers, without increase or decrease, so the Nibbāna element remains the same, no matter whether many or few people attain Nibbāna.

The Buddha also refers to Nibbāna as a “state” (pada), as “amatapada” - the deathless state - or “accutapada”, the imperishable state.

In addition, Another word used by the Buddha to refer to Nibbāna is “sacca”, which means “truth”, an existing reality. This refers to Nibbāna as the truth, a reality that the Noble Ones have known through direct experience.

So all these terms, considered as a whole, clearly establish that Nibbāna is an actual reality and not the mere destruction of defilements or the cessation of existence. Nibbāna is unconditioned, without any origination and is timeless.

In fact, what really stated in the Aṅguttaranikāya, is the attainment of Nibbāna in two stages, the two referred to as the two elements of Nibbāna (Nibbānadhātu). One is the Nibbāna element with the substratum of life remaining (saupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu). The other the Nibbāna element without any substratum of life remaining (anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu). As such, the Exalted One states about two kinds of Noble Individuals<sup>7</sup>: a person who dying with some attached remainder (saupādisesa-puggala), and a person who dying with no attachment (anupādisesa-puggala).

### I. Saupādisesa-puggala / the learner (Sekha)

In the book of the Nines of the Aṅguttaranikāya Piṭaka, the Buddha speaks the verse, to the elder Sāriputta, about the nine persons of the learner (sekha):

*Sāriputta, there are these nine persons, who, when they die with some attached remainder, are altogether freed from hell, rebirth in the womb of an animal, the realm of ghosts, the untoward way. . . hell. What nine?*

*Consider, Sāriputta, the person who is accomplished in the precepts, accomplished in concentration, but not in wisdom-he destroys the five lower fetters and becomes completely cool after an interval. This, Sāriputta, is the first person, who, dying with some attached remainder, is altogether freed from hell, rebirth in the womb of an animal, the realm of ghosts, the untoward way. . .*

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<sup>7</sup> Noble one or noble individuals (ariyapuggala) can also be grouped into four as follows;

1. **Stream-Enterer**: one who has entered the Stream; one established in the Fruition of Stream-Entry.
2. **Once-Returner**: one who has established in the Fruition of Once-Returning.
3. **Non-Returner**: one who has established in the Fruition of Non-Returning.
4. **The Worthy One**: one who has established in the Fruition of Arahantship.

*... and becomes completely cool after lessening his period*  
*... without (karmic) residue*  
*... after some residue*  
*... he ascends the stream of existence up to the Akaniṭṭha heaven*  
*... by destroying the three fetters and reducing lust, hatred and delusion, he becomes a Once-returner*  
*... by destroying the three fetters he becomes a Once-issuer*  
*... by destroying the three fetters he becomes a Clan-to-clan-goer*  
*... by destroying the three fetters he becomes one, who will be reborn seven times at most*<sup>8</sup>

From the passages, it can be summarized that the Buddha's explanation towards the nine types of Saupādisesa-puggala comes in the following extent:

1. **Antarā-parinibbāyī**: one who attains Parinibbāna within the first half life-span
2. **Upahacca- parinibbāyī**: one who attains Parinibbāna after the first half life-span
3. **Asaṅkhāra- parinibbāyī**: one who attains Parinibbāna without exertion
4. **Sasaṅkhāra- parinibbāyī**: one who attains Parinibbāna with exertion
5. **Uddhaṁsotoakaniṭṭhagāmī**: one who goes upstream bound for the highest realm; up-streamer bound for the Not-Junior Gods
6. **Sakadāgāmī**: one who reduced of lust, hatred and delusion
7. **Ekabijī**: the Single-Seed
8. **Kolaṅkola**: the Clan-to-Clan
9. **Sattakkhattuṁparama**: the Seven-Times-at-Most

As these, the first five types called “Non-Returner”, the sixth type entitled “Once-Returner”, the last three types are “Stream-Enterer”. The Theravadan Buddhism called these types of Noble Individuals “the learner” (Sekha).

## II. Anupādisesa-puggala / the adept (Asekha)

At the end of the sutta Buddha mentioned about the last type of the Noble Individual “The Worthy One”, the one who has established in the Fruition of Arahantship; “. . . one who has no attachment-he has none [of attachment]”<sup>9</sup>

### 3. The Itivuttaka<sup>10</sup>

Nibbāna is the ultimate state that the Arahants attain. As Lord Buddha states in the Khuddaka-nikaya:

*Dve mā bhikkhave Nibbānadhātuyo katamā dve saupādisesā ca nibbānadhātu anupādisesā ca Nibbānadhātu.*

<sup>8</sup> A.IV.381.

<sup>9</sup> A.IV.381.

<sup>10</sup> It.38.

*Monks, there are two types of Nibbāna Elements (Nibbānadhātu). What are they? They are living with remainder [five aggregates] (saupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu) and without remainder (anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu).<sup>11</sup>*

Seeing from this angle, the two Elements of Nibbāna in which showing in the Itivuttaka (and the Aṅguttaranikāya) consist of two types, namely:- living with remainder; and without remainder.

### **1. Nibbāna with life remaining (saupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu)**

Saupādisesa-nibbānadhātu is the state that the Arahant attains while still possessing the five aggregates:

*Katamā ca bhikkhave saupādisesā nibbānadhātu idha bhikkhave bhikkhu araham hoti khīṇāsavo vusitavā katakaraṇīyo ohitabhāro anuppattasadattho parikkhīṇabhavasamyojano sammadaññā vimutto tassa tiṭṭhanteva pañcindriyāni yesaṃ avighātattā manāpāmanāpaṃ paccanubhoti sukhadukkhaṃ paṭisaṃvedayati tassa yo rāgakkhayo dosakkhayo mohakkhayo. Ayam vuccati bhikkhave saupādisesā nibbānadhātu. . . Ekā hi dhātu idha diṭṭhadhammikā Saupādisesā bhavanettisaṅkhayā.*

*Monks, what is saupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu?*

*The monk in this Dhamma-vinaya who is an Arahant, a passionless one who has completed his holy life, done what is to be done, abandoned the burden, attained benefit for himself, extinguished the Fetters of existence, and attained release by right knowledge still experiences pleasant and unpleasant objects, still feels happiness and suffering because all his five indriyas, such as eye, still remain and are not destroyed. Monks, I call the extinction of lust, the extinction of hatred, and the extinction of delusion of that monk saupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu.<sup>12</sup>*

An element with extinction of craving for existence that is called Nibbānadhātu seen in this world [in the present body] while still having upādi [the five aggregates] remaining.

### **2. Nibbāna without life remaining (anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu)**

Anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu is the case of the Arahant who died [the five aggregates are destroyed], leaving only Nibbāna-dhātu (Nibbāna Element) naturally standing. It is not destroyed simultaneously with the five aggregates at death. Lord Buddha states:

*Katamā ca bhikkhave anupādisesā nibbānadhātu idha bhikkhave bhikkhu araham hoti khīṇāsavo vusitavā katakaraṇīyo ohitabhāro anuppattasadattho parikkhīṇabhavasamyojano sammadaññā vimutto tassa idheva bhikkhave*

<sup>11</sup> It.38.

<sup>12</sup> It.38.

*sabbavedayitāni anabhinanditāni sītibhavissanti. Ayam vuccati bhikkhave anupādisesā nibbānadhātu. . . Anupādisesā pana samparāyikā Yamhi nirujjhanti bhavāni sabbaso.*

*Monks, what is anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu?*

*The monk in this Dhamma-vinaya who is an Arahant, a passionless one who has completed the holy life, done what is to be done, abandoned the burden, attained benefit for himself, extinguished the Fetters of existence, and attained release by right knowledge. All feelings [defilements such as craving] in the body of that monk can no longer be enjoyed. They have cooled [been extinguished]. Monks, I call this anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu. . .*<sup>13</sup>

The Element that exists as a potential state in this world and will be attained in the future when all existences have been extinguished in all respects is Nibbāna-dhātu [Nibbāna Element] for which the upādi [the five aggregates] no longer remains. Of these two, Nibbāna with life remaining is as “the extinction of the defilements” (kilesa-parinibbāna).<sup>14</sup> Nibbāna without life remaining is as “the extinction of the aggregates” (khandha-parinibbāna).<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

Nibbāna, at the same time, can be referred as reality of nature or the destruction of defilements. The first context, Nibbāna can be interpreted as Ayatana, Dhatu, State, Sacca etc. The latter context, Nibbāna can be interpreted as the destruction of defilements.

The Aṅguttaranikāya, Buddha pointed us towards the context of “**types of Noble Individuals**”:- the one who has no attachment (Saupādisesa-puggala), and the one who has attached remainder (Anupādisesa-puggala). Whist in the Ittivuttaka showed the Nibbāna in the context of “**the two elements**”:- Nibbāna with life remaining (saupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu), and Nibbāna without life remaining (anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu).

The element of Nibbāna with the substratum of life remaining is the state of Nibbāna attained by the arahat (the liberated one) in this present life. Namely, the extinction of greed, hatred and ignorance and of all other defilements. The residue that remains in the arahant is the five aggregates that constitute his present life individuality, the psycho-physical organism produced from the past life. Upon attainment of Nibbāna, his body and mind continue until the end of the life span.

The second stage of the attainment of Nibbāna is called the Nibbāna element without any substratum of life remaining. This is the element of Nibbāna attained by an arahant with his passing away, with the breakup of his body, what we conventionally call death.

As a result, the passing away of an arahant is the final and complete passing out from conditioned existence. It does not lead to a new birth. In his own

<sup>13</sup> It.38.

<sup>14</sup> The Nibbāna of the Worthy One who still have feelings of pleasant and unpleasant through the five controlling faculties (indriya).

<sup>15</sup> The Nibbāna of the Worthy One who have no more feelings and aggregates.

experience, the arahant sees only the cessation of a process, not the death of a self. The experience for him is without subjective significance, without reference to 'me' or 'mine'. At this stage the residue of the five aggregates comes to an end.

Thus, Nibbāna is the ultimate goal of the Buddha's path. The Buddha says "Just as the water of a river plunges into the ocean and merges with the ocean, so the spiritual path, the Noble Eightfold Path, plunges into Nibbāna and merges with Nibbāna". Nibbāna cannot be conceived of; it must be known directly through spiritual practice.

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