

The Nibbāna Sermons 12 to 22 by Bhikkhu K Ñāṇananda

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Sermon 19

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

Etaṃ santaṃ, etaṃ paṇītaṃ, yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho
sabbūpadhipaṭinissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ.

"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 *upādiṇṇa* 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.*

"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."

Translation Bodhi (2012: 910):

“Devoid of lust, devoid of hatred,
Devoid of delusion, without taints,
The nāga, discarding his body,
Taintless, is utterly quenched
And attains final nibbāna.”

MĀ 118

“Free from sexual desire and hatred,
Having discarded ignorance, and attained the [state] without taints,
[When] the nāga abandons his body,
This nāga is said to have ceased.”

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 *diṭṭheva dhamme*, 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 paramaṃ maraṇā uddhaṃ jīvitapariyādānā idheva sabbavedayitāni anabhinanditāni sītībhavissantī'ti pajānati.*

" 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."

 Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 1093):

“Bhikkhu, just as an oil-lamp burns in dependence on oil and a wick, and when the oil and wick are used up, if it does not get any more fuel, it is extinguished from lack of fuel; so too when he feels a feeling terminating with the body... a feeling terminating with life, he understands: ‘I feel a feeling terminating with life.’ He understands: ‘On the dissolution of the body, with the ending of life, all that is felt, not being delighted in, will become cool right here.’”

MĀ 162

“Monk, it is just like a lamp that burns in dependence on oil and a wick. If nobody adds oil and supplies a wick, then once what had earlier [been supplied] comes to an end, the lamp does not continue [burning], having no more fuel.

“In the same way, when the monk experiences the last feeling to be experienced by the body, he will know that he is experiencing the last feeling to be experienced by the body. When he experiences the last feeling to be experienced in his life, he will know that he is experiencing the last feeling to be experienced in his life. With the breaking up of the body at the end of life, when the life span has been completed, all feelings completely cease and come to an end. He knows that they have 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 *arahattaphalasamādhī*, 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 *sītibhūto'smi nibbuto*, "gone cool am I, yea, extinguished".

Translation Norman (1969: 34):

"I ... have become cool, quenched."

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 *arahattaphalasamādhī* as such, for which even other terms like *anupādā vimokkha* are also applied on occasion.

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

Venerable *Sāriputta's* exhaustive interrogation ending with *kim atthaṃ carahāvuso, bhagavati brahmacariyaṃ vussati?*, "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".

Translation Ñāṇamoli (1995: 1093):

"Friend, it is for the sake of final *Nibbāna* without clinging that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One."

“In that case, for the sake of what are you practicing the holy life under the renunciant Gotama?”

[Puṇṇa Mantāṇiputta] replied: “Venerable friend, for the sake of Nirvāṇa without remainder.”

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 *arahattaphalasangāmi*. It is sometimes also called *nirupadhi*, the "asset-less". 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*.

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 *arahattaphalasangāmi*, as for instance in the following verse, which we had occasion to quote earlier too:

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

"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."

Translation Ireland (1991: 49):

“Having touched with his own person
The deathless element free from clinging,
Having realized the relinquishment
Of clinging, his taints all gone,
The Fully Enlightened One proclaims
The sorrowless state that is void of stain.”

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,
maggāñca khayagāminam,
vedanānam khayā bhikkhu,
nicchāto parinibbuto.*

Translation Bodhi (2000: 1260):

“A disciple of the Buddha, mindful,
Concentrated, comprehending clearly,
Understands feelings
And the origin of feelings,
Where they finally cease,
And the path leading to their destruction.
With the destruction of feelings
A bhikkhu is hungerless and fully quenched.”

SĀ 476

「知諸行無常，皆是變易法，
故說受悉苦，正覺之所知。
比丘勤方便，正智不傾動，
於諸一切受，黠慧能了知。
悉知諸受已，現法盡諸漏，
身死不墮數，永處般涅槃」
(CBETA, T02, no. 99, p. 121, a12-17)

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*. 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 *khandhaparinibbāna*, the perfect extinguishment of the groups or aggregates. 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 *arahattaphalasamādhī*.

This fact is clearly borne out by the statement in the *Dhātuvibhaṅgasutta* already quoted: *idheva sabbavedayitāni anabhinanditāni sītībhavissanti'ti pajānati*, "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 *arahattaphalasamādhī* 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 *arahattaphalasamādhī*, 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 asaṅkhatam,
vimuttacittā bhavanettisaṅkhayā,
te dhammasārādhigamā khaye ratā,
pahaṃsu te sabbabhavāni tādino.*

Translation Ireland (1991: 32):

“Having understood the unconditioned state
Released in mind with the cord of being destroyed,
They have attained the Dhamma-essence.
Delighting in the destruction (of craving),
Those serene ones have abandoned all being.

This verse might appear problematic, as it occurs at the end of a passage dealing with the two *Nibbāna* elements. *Ye etad aññāya padaṃ asaṅkhatam*, "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*". 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,
ṭhitacittassa tādino,
anejo santimārabbha,
yaṃ kālamakarī muni.
Asallīnena cittena,
vedanaṃ ajjhavāsayaṃ,
pajjotass'eva nibbānaṃ,
vimokkho cetaso ahu.*

"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."

Translation Walshe (2000: 271):

"No breathing in and out – just with steadfast heart
The Sage who's free from lust has passed away to peace
With mind unshaken he endured all pains:
By Nibbāna the Illumined's mind is freed."

Translation Bodhi (2000: 253) of same verse in SN 6.15:

“There was no more in-and-out-breathing
In the Stable One of steady mind
When unstirred, bent on peace
The One with Vision attained final Nibbāna.

Note 426: “VĀT remarks: “The absence of in-and-out-breathing (in pāda a) refers to the state in the fourth jhāna, where breathing ceases, from which the Buddha passed away.”

DĀ 2

佛以無為住，不用出入息；
本由寂滅來，靈曜於是沒。」
(CBETA, T01, no. 1, p. 26, c26-28)

SĀ 1197

出息入息住，立心善攝護，
從所依而來，世間般涅槃」
(CBETA, T02, no. 99, p. 325, b25-26)

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 ārabha kālamakari*, "the Buddha, the sage, passed away for the sake of that peace with the idea 'I will go to that state of peace'".

There is some discrepancy in this explanation. Commentators themselves usually give quite a different sense to the word *ārabha* 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 *ārabha* 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. He may not have been there at all, it may be that he was already dead by that time. The term *ārabha* 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 *ārabbha*, 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*, *khemaṃ* and *amataṃ*. When faced with death, or the pain of death, it gives 'protection', *tāṇaṃ*. 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', *khemaṃ*, and above all the 'deathless', *amataṃ*. 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 *vimokkho 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 santimārabbha, 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 *asaṅkhatadhātu*, 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 *Aṅguttara 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 paññāpetuṃ?* "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 marañā sugatiṃ saggaṃ 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 evamāha 'dāyako, sīha, dānapati kāyassa bhedaṃ paraṃ marañā sugatiṃ saggaṃ 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."

Translation Bodhi (2012: 659):

"A donor, *Sīha*, a munificent giver, is dear and agreeable to many people. This is a directly visible fruit of giving.

"Again, good persons resort to a donor, a munificent giver. This, too, is a directly visible fruit of giving.

"Again, a donor, a munificent giver, acquires a good reputation. This, too, is a directly visible fruit of giving.

"Again, whatever assembly a donor, a munificent giver, approaches—whether of *khattiyas*, brahmins, householders, or ascetics—he approaches it confidently and composed. This too is a directly visible fruit of giving.

"Again, with the breakup of the body, after death, a donor, a munificent giver, is reborn in a good destination, in a heavenly world. This is a fruit of giving pertaining to future lives."

...

"I do not go by faith in the Blessed One concerning these four directly visible fruits of giving declared by him. I know them, too. But when the Blessed One tells me: '*Sīha*, with the breakup of the body, after death, a donor, a munificent giver, is reborn in a good destination, in a heavenly world,' I do not know this, and here I go by faith in the Blessed 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.*

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 entendre, 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 *samsāra*. *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."

Translation Norman (2004: 14):

"The man who is without desire [without faith], knows the uncreated [is ungrateful],
Cuts off rebirth [is a housebreaker], who has got rid of occasions [for quarrels or rebirth] [has destroyed his opportunity],
Has abandoned desire [is an eater of vomit, i.e. what has been abandoned by others],
Is the best person [is one of extreme audacity]."

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 *asekho*. *Sekha*, meaning "learner", is a term applied to those who are training for the attainment of *arahant*-hood, from the stream-winner, *sotāpanna*, 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 *arahattaphalasamādhī*, 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 *asaṅkhatadhātu*. 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".

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 *arahattaphalasamādhī*. When it is time for death, he brings his mind to this *samādhī*, 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 *sañkhata* and *asañkhata*. 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*, "to whom there is neither a farther shore nor a hither shore nor both", is puzzling enough.

Translation Norman (2004: 56):

“For whom there is neither the far shore nor the near shore nor both.”

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 *sañkhata* and *asañkhata*. *Sañkhata*, 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 *sañkhata*, or the prepared, itself becomes *asañkhata*, the unprepared, then and there. The same floral design, which was the *sañkhata*, has now become the *asañkhata*. 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 paeon 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*, "it is time for me to attain *parinibbāna*, O well-gone one". And the Buddha too gave permission with the words: *yassa dāni tvaṃ, 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 sītiraḥṃsu sabbā,
vūpasamiṃsu saṅkhārā,
viññānaṃ attham agamā.*

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

Translation Ireland (1990: 123):

"The body disintegrated, perception ceased.
All feelings were utterly consumed;
Mental activities were extinguished
And consciousness came to an end."

This event was of such a great importance that, though it occurred at *Veḷuvana 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-bandhoghatāriṇaṃ,
paññāpetuṃ gatī n'atthi,
pattānaṃ acalaṃ sukhaṃ.*

"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."

Translation Ireland (1990: 124):

“Just as the bourn is not known
Of the gradual fading glow
Given off by the furnace-heated iron
As it is struck with the smith’s hammer,
So there is no pointing to the bourn
Of those perfectly released,
Who have crossed the flood
Of bondage to sense desires
And attained unshakable bliss.”

Anālayo 2012: "Dabba's Self-cremation in the Saṃyukta-āgama", *Buddhist Studies Review*, 29.2: 153–174.

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. 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*, "better to swallow a red hot iron ball, that resembles a flame of fire", a cognate simile is employed somewhat differently.

Translation Norman (1969: 45):

“It is better that an iron ball heated like flames of fire be eaten ...”

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.

Sn 1076: *atthaṅgatassa na pamāṇam atthi, (upasīvāti bhagavā)*
yena naṃ vajjuṃ taṃ tassa natthi;
sabbesu dhammesu samuhatesu,
samūhatā vādapathāpi sabbe ti

Bodhi (2017: 335): “There is no measure of one who has gone out, (Upasīva,” said the Blessed One).

“There is no means by which they might speak of him.

When all phenomena have been uprooted,
all pathways of speech are also uprooted.”

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

'Atthi, bhikkhave, tad āyatanam, yattha n'eva pathavī na āpo na tejo na vāyo na ākāsañāncāyatanam na viññāṇāñāncāyatanam na ākiñcaññāyatanam na nevasaññānāsaññāyatanam na ayam loko na paraloko na ubho candimasūriyā ...'. "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 ...".

Translation Ireland (1990: 108):

“There is, bhikkhus, that state, where there is no earth, no water, no fire, no air, no base consisting of the infinity of space, no base consisting of the infinity of consciousness, no base consisting of nothingness, no base consisting of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, neither this world nor another world nor both, neither sun nor moon. Here, bhikkhus, I say there is no coming, no going, no staying, no deceasing, no uprising. Not fixed, not moveable, it has no support. Just this is the end of suffering.”

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 annihilationist, who teaches about the annihilation, destruction and non-existence of a truly existing being, *sato satassa ucchedaṃ vināsaṃ vibhavaṃ paññāpeti*.

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, O monks, 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*, "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.