

# 2b

## Nimokkha Sutta

The Discourse on Release | S 1.2 of the **Nala Vagga**,<sup>1</sup> The Reed Group  
 Theme: The Buddha knows and teaches true spiritual freedom  
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### 1 Sutta significance

**1.1 SUTTA PARAPHRASE.** The **Nimokkha Sutta** (S 1.2) relates a deity's questioning the Buddha whether he knows "the release, freedom, singleness for beings"? The Buddha answers he does. When questioned further, the Buddha replies with a verse, epitomizing the 5 aggregates, especially how "feelings cease and are stilled" [§4 = S 2\*].

### 1.2 Sutta key words

#### 1.2.0 Nimokkham̐ pāmokkham̐ vivekam̐

**1.2.0.1** The Commentary explains these 3 terms as follows:

"**Release** (*nimokkha*) is the path; for, beings are *released* from the bondage of defilements by the path; **freedom** (*pamokkha*) is the fruit; for, at the moment of fruition, beings freed are from the bondage of defilements; **singleness** (*viveka*) is nirvana; for, when they attain nirvana beings are separated from all suffering.

Or, alternatively, all three are designations for nirvana: for, having attained nirvana, beings are released, free, singled out [separated] from all suffering." (SA 1:20,23-21,8).

**1.2.0.2** In simple terms,

- (1) The 3 words refer to the path, fruition and nirvana, that is, *nimokkha* = the path; *pāmokkha* = fruition; and *viveka* = nirvana. [1.2.0.3]
- (2) They are all synonyms for nirvana. [1.2.1.1]

Although the 2<sup>nd</sup> meaning fits the verse context better, the first sense is useful in explaining the whole process of the path leading to nirvana.

**1.2.0.3** The Commentary glosses it, "along with the other terms (*pamokkha* + *viveka*) as names for the path and so on; for, beings are released from the bondage of defilements by the path and so on" (*nimokkhan'ti ādīni magg'ādīnaṃ nāmāni; maggena hi sattā kilesa,bandhanato nimuccanti*) (SA 1:20,33).

"The path and so on" (*magg'ādīni*) in the commentarial gloss refers to "the path (*magga*), its fruition (*phala*) and nirvana," which encompass the whole of the Buddha's path of awakening. It is also called the 9 supermundane states (*nava lok'uttara dhamma*) comprising the 4 paths (those of streamwinning, once-returning, non-returning and arhathood), the respective fruitions and nirvana.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Naḷa*: A 4:169; J 1:392; VvA 43. Cf (1) *naḷī*, a hollow stalk, tube, pipe; a measure of capacity; (2) *nāḷikā*, a stalk, shaft; a tube, pipe or cylinder for holding anything; a small measure of capacity. On **Naḷa Vagga**, see SD 54.2a (1).

<sup>2</sup> SD 15.9 (2.0).

Essentially, arhathood and nirvana are the same; their only difference is that the arhat is a “person” in a conventional sense. Nirvana is simply the “unconditioned,” which the arhat attains upon passing away.

### **1.2.1 Nimokkha**

**1.2.1.1 Nimokkha** (Skt *nirmokṣa*) means “release, deliverance, emancipation.” It seems to be a hapax legomenon—a word or phrase that occurs only once in the whole of the Pali Canon, that is, in **the Nimokkha Sutta** (S 1.2/1:2). It actually occurs 4 times in the Sutta itself.<sup>3</sup> [1.2.0.1]

The last of the 4 occurrences of *nimokkha* may be an alternate reading or even a misreading of the more familiar *vimokkha* or *vimokha* (from *vi-*, a distributive or expansive prefix with an idea of “analysis,” as in *vi, bhaṅga*, “analysis,” and *vipassana*, “insight,” literally, seeing things in their component parts).<sup>4</sup>

In fact, *nimokkha* and *vimokkha* are synonyms. As we have noted, the Saṃyutta Commentary takes all the 3 words—*nimokkha*, *pamokkha* and *viveka*—as synonyms of nirvana. [1.2.0.1]

**1.2.1.2 Nimokkha** comes from the prefix *ni-*, basically meaning “out” (see below) + *√MUC/MOKṢ*, to release, giving the literal sense of “letting out, setting free.” *Ni-* is a directional prefix giving the sense of “out,” with the extended senses of “away from, opposite, without,” pointing out the finishing, completion or vanishing of an action. Through the latter idea, it often assumes the sense of the reverse, disappearance or the contrary of an action.

Take the famous case of *nibbana* (*ni-*, “out,” + *vana*, “forest, woods,” a play on forest/desire). This wordplay is evident in **Dh 283**, where *nibbana*, “out of the woods (of desire)” = *nibbana*, “freedom from desire, etc.”<sup>5</sup> We also see a wordplay with *nibbana* (“out of the woods of craving”) and *nibbana* (“nirvana”).<sup>6</sup>

Another example of the usage of *ni-* is in *nikkāma*, etc (Tha 691; Sn 1131).<sup>7</sup> He *ni-* has the sense of “out”; thus, *nikkāma* means literally “out of lust,” that is, “without craving,” “lust-free.”

**1.2.1.3** If we take *nimokkha*, *pamokkha* and *viveka* as constituting the path of awakening, then *nimokkha* refers to **moral training** (*sīla, sikkhā*). Moral training should yield moral virtue (*sīla*), which is basically a cultivated mind (*bhāvita, citta*) in a cultivated body (*bhāvita, kāya*),<sup>8</sup> that is to say, a healthy mind in a healthy body.<sup>9</sup> By “healthy” is meant both morally pure and psychologically wholesome in terms of speech and action.

Such a cultivated mind is one that is, as a rule, free from greed, hate and delusion; hence, with wholesome intentions. Such a cultivated body is where our 5 sense-faculties or bodily acts, that is, “deeds” and speech, are restrained, proper and timely.

The qualities of a cultivated body and a cultivated mind, are fully stated in **the Piṇḍola Bhāra, dvāja Sutta** (S 35.127) as “cultivated in body,<sup>10</sup> cultivated in moral conduct,<sup>11</sup> cultivated in mind, cultivated in

<sup>3</sup> Ie, not counting the title and the vl for its last occurrence (S 2e\*) as *vimokkha*.

<sup>4</sup> Like *ni-*, *vi-* also has the sense of “out.”

<sup>5</sup> On Dh 283 (cf Dh 344), see SD 53.7 (2.1.4.1). See Tha:N 224 n691.

<sup>6</sup> See eg Vv 47 (VvA 213); AA 3:371. See Tha:N 224 n691.

<sup>7</sup> See Sn:N 211 n228.

<sup>8</sup> See **Piṇḍola Bhāra, dvāja S** (S 35.127,7), SD 27.6a.

<sup>9</sup> **Nakula, pitā S** (S 22.1), SD 5.4.

<sup>10</sup> “Cultivated in body” (*bhāvita, kāya*) means developed in the “body” of the 5 sense-doors (*bhāvita, pañca, dvāri-ka, kāya*), ie, having sense-restraint: see n on “uncultivated in body,” below here.

<sup>11</sup> If we take “cultivated in body” as referring to sense-restraint, then “cultivate in moral conduct” refers to being mindful and proper in action, incl speech, upholding Vinaya rules and a renunciant’s propriety.

wisdom” (*bhāvita, kāyā bhāvita, sīlā bhāvita, cittā bhāvita, paññā*).<sup>12</sup> These 4 characteristics encompass the total and true quality of one walking the path of awakening.

In terms of *nimokkha*, when we are “cultivated in body, in moral conduct,” we are thus “released” from the effects of unwholesome karma of body and speech since we have not created them. Such a conduct is the basis for mental concentration: it helps in our meditation. It also inspires in others faith in the Dharma, especially those who do not yet have faith in the Dharma, and deepens the faith of those who are practising it.

### 1.2.2 Pamokkha

**1.2.2.1 Pamokkha**, “freedom,” is the noun from the verb *pamuñcati*, from *pa-* + *VMUC*, to free. It has the following meanings:

- (1) to let loose, give out, emit, as “to voice out” (*vacam*, Sn 973); emit flames (*aggim*, J 1:216);
- (2) to shake off, give up, shed, as in “shed (withered) flowers” (*pupphāni*, Dh 377); to renounce one’s faith (*saddham* *pamuñcantu*, V 1:7 = D 2:39 = S 1:138), but this interpretation is doubtful;<sup>13</sup>
- (3) to deliver, (set) free: “free your faith” (*pamuñcantu saddham*, A 10.177);<sup>14</sup> “release me from my doubt” (*pamuñcassu mam* ... *katham, kathāhi*, Sn 1063); “declare your faith!” (*pamuñcassu saddham*, Sn 1146).<sup>15</sup>

In our Sutta context, that is, in connection with *pamokkha*, the 3<sup>rd</sup> meaning applies: *pamokkha* means “deliverance, freedom.”

**1.2.2.2** If we take *nimokkha*, *pamokkha* and *viveka* as constituting the path of awakening, then *pa-mokkha*, “freedom,” refers to **mental cultivation** or samadhi training (*samādhi, sikkhā*), the 2<sup>nd</sup> aspect of the path-training. Having cultivated “release” (*nimokkha*) as training in moral conduct [1.2.1.3], we are now ready for mental training, that is, mindfulness and meditation to focus our mind so that it is calm and clear.

When this **frees** our mind, at least, temporarily from sensual desires, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt—the **5 mental hindrances**<sup>16</sup>—then, we attain dhyana (*jhāna*). This is when the mind is fully free of the body so that it is blissfully calm and profoundly clear. Once we have mastered this mind-training, we are free and ready for the next level of the path-training.

### 1.2.3 Viveka

**1.2.3.1 Viveka**, “singleness,” is made up of *vi-*, a prefix “without” + *vic*, to sift (or sort out, divide). Literally, it means “undivided,” hence, “one, single.” Hence, he can informally take *viveka* as deriving from *vi + eka*, “one,” meaning “undivided one,” in the sense of being mentally focused.

The prefix *vi-* also has the sense of “in-” as in “insight” (*vi-passanā*), a penetrating vision *into* true reality [1.2.1.1]; hence, we have the sense of “singleness.” This describes our single-mindedness and true

<sup>12</sup> S 35.127,7/4:111 (SD 27.6a(2.4). The 4 terms, “cultivated body,” etc, recur in **Loṇa, kapalla S (A 3.99,2/1:249, 4/1:250, 5.3/251×2, 8.2/253)**, SD 3.5; **Mahā Cunda S (A 10.24/5:42, 43×2,44, 45)**, SD 72.12. See SD 49.4 (1.2.3).

<sup>13</sup> See Morris, JPTS 1885:46 f & D:RD 2:33.

<sup>14</sup> See **(Saddha) Jāṇussoṇi S (A 10.177)**, SD 2.61 (2); detailed study, see **Āyācana S (S 6.12)**, SD 12.2 (3).

<sup>15</sup> See PED for details.

<sup>16</sup> On the 5 mental hindrances (*pañca, nīvaraṇa*), see SD **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1.

individuality. One who is morally upright, mentally wholesome, or steeped in “singleness,” is said to be a **true individual**.<sup>17</sup> Let us now examine what “singleness” means.

**1.2.3.2** If we take *nimokkha*, *pamokkha* and *viveka* as constituting the path of awakening, then *viveka* refers to **wisdom training** (*paññā,sikkhā*). Theoretically, wisdom (*paññā*) or “spiritual knowledge” is the vision of true reality of people, beings and things—that all is **impermanent**; hence, unsatisfactory; what is impermanent is, non-self, that is without any abiding self or eternal essence.<sup>18</sup> However, in practice, we need to start with understanding and accepting, either with faith and through wisdom, the universality of impermanence, as taught in **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1), SD 16.7, and similar suttas.

**1.2.3.3** Basically, there are 3 kinds of **singleness** (*viveka*), sometimes translated as “solitude.” Here is a paraphrase of the explanation given in the Mahā Niddesa (Nm 27):

- (1) **Physical (or bodily) solitude** (*kaya,viveka*) is spiritual aloneness, that is, spending quiet time with oneself reflecting on the suttas or on impermanence; or meditating on the breath or cultivating lovingkindness, or some suitable method we have properly learned. Broadly, bodily solitude or “personal singleness” refers to properly keeping the precepts, inspired by the cultivation of lovingkindness.
- (2) **Mental solitude** (*citta,viveka*) begins with our working to clear our mind and life of the 5 mental hindrances [1.2.2.2], which prevents mental focus and clarity. Basically, this means we are able to feel the peace and joy of our mindfulness (such as the reflection on impermanence) or meditation practice (such as the breath meditation or the lovingkindness cultivation) pervading our life, work and socializing.
- (3) **Spiritual solitude** (*upadhi,viveka*), strictly speaking, refers to at least the attaining of streamwinning, without which we are still “outside” (*bāhiraka*) the path of awakening,<sup>19</sup> still caught in the worldly crowd or bound to it. Hence, it makes good sense—if we are to take the Buddha Dharma seriously—to aspire to streamwinning in this life itself, as taught in **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1) [1.2.3.2].<sup>20</sup>

**1.2.3.4** In summary, by way of the practice of **the path**, physical solitude or bodily singleness refers to training oneself in moral virtue, keeping to the 5 precepts, or for monastics, keeping to the Dharma,-vinaya true to their spirit.

Mental solitude is the practice of mindfulness or meditation to calm and clear our mind in preparation for cultivating insight wisdom. To expedite attaining such wisdom, we should aspire to streamwinning in this life itself.

Spiritual solitude, then, refers to attaining of insight wisdom (*vipassanā*), right knowledge (*sammā ñāṇa*) and right freedom (*sammā vimutti*), which constitute the full eightfold path or the tenfold rightness (*dasa sammatta*), which makes us arhats, just like the Buddha.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> On the true individual (*sappurisa*), see **Sappurisa S** (M 113), SD 23.7; **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129,27-50), SD 2.22.

<sup>18</sup> See eg **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59) + SD 1.2 (2).

<sup>19</sup> On *bāhiraka*, see **Cūḷa Hatthi,padōpama S** (M 27,25.4) n + SD 40a.5 (1.1.2); **Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 142,5-(11)) + nn, SD 1.9; SD 47.1 (1.1.2). Only streamwinners and saints are *not* “outsiders,” see **(Sotāpanna) Nandiya S** (S 55.40,4) + SD 47.1 (1.1.2).

<sup>20</sup> Nm 27. See **Viveka,nissita**, SD 20.4 (4.2).

<sup>21</sup> See SD 10.16 (10).

## 2 Sutta highlights

**2.0** The essence of the Buddha’s answer is given in the first 3 lines of the verse (**S 2abc\***), thus:

<i>Nandī,bhava,parikkhayā</i>	When delight in existence are fully destroyed;
<i>saññā,viññāṇa,saṅkhayā</i>	when perception and consciousness are destroyed;
<i>vedanānaṃ nirodhā upasamā</i>	when feelings cease and are stilled.

We shall here examine these lines in some useful details following the traditional Commentaries [2.1] and then reflect on these lines by way of a modern commentary [2.2].

### 2.1 COMMENTARIAL EXPLANATION

**2.1.0** The Commentary explains thus: “*Nandī,bhava,parikkhayā* means (1) the utter destruction of the karma-process existence rooted in delight. (2) It is also possible to take it as meaning ‘(the destruction) of delight and existence.’” (***Nandī,bhava,parikkhayāti nandī,mūlakassa kamma,bhavassa parikkhayena; nandiya ca bhavassa ca ti pi vattati***, SA 1:21,13-15)

Thus, the Commentary explains the term ***nandī,bhava*** in 2 ways, that is, as a bahuvrihi (P *bahu-b,-bīhi*, an adjective compound) and a dvandva (P *dvanda*, a twin compound) respectively:

- (1) as “delight in existence” [2.1.1]; and
- (2) as “delight and existence” [2.1.2].

#### 2.1.1 *Nandī,bhava* as “delight in existence”

**2.1.1.1** In the 1<sup>st</sup> explanation, the Commentary takes *nandī,bhava* as bahuvrihi or adjectival compound, meaning “**delight in existence**” or, following the commentarial gloss: “existence rooted in delight.” This is the threefold activity of karma-formation (*ti,vidha,kammābhisaṅkhāra*, S 12.51), in terms of the aggregate of volitional formations (*saṅkhāra-k,khandha*), that is, the karmic activities of the body, speech and mind. Perception and consciousness are the 2 aggregates associated with them. Feeling is associated with all these 3 aggregates.

With the non-occurrence of the 4 karmically active mental aggregates (*anupādiṇṇaka-arūpa-k,khandhā*) (of feeling, perception, formations and consciousness)—that is, when *clinging* has been overcome—we attain the “nirvana with residue” (*sa.upādi.sesa,nibbāna*), the awakening of the living arhat whose 5 aggregates are clinging-free (*anupādiṇṇaka*).<sup>22</sup>

**2.1.1.2** The phrase “**when feelings cease and are stilled**” (*vedanānaṃ nirodhā upasamā*) [§4c] refers to the karmically acquired (*upādiṇṇaka*) feeling, that is, how we are drawn to perceived pleasure, to be repulsed by perceived pain, and to be bored by neutral feeling. The mention of feeling implies the other 3 aggregates: perception, formations and consciousness. The aggregate of form functions as their physical basis as well as mental object.

Thus, by the non-occurrence of the 5 karmically acquired aggregates, we attain “nirvana without residue” (*anupādi,sesa,nibbāna*), the final nirvana of the arhat who has passed away.<sup>23</sup> (SA 1:21,14-27)

<sup>22</sup> On clinging-free aggregate, see (**Upādāna**) **Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56), SD 3.7 (2); **Mahā Hatthi,padōpama S** (M 28,27-28), SD 6.16 = SD 17.8a (13.2.2).

<sup>23</sup> On the 2 kinds of nirvana, see SD 45.18 (2.5.2.4).

## 2.1.2 *Nandi, bhava* as “delight and existence”

**2.1.2.1** In the 2<sup>nd</sup> explanation, the Commentary takes *nandi, bhava* as a dvandva (twin compound), that is, as “delight” and “existence.” **Delight** (*nandi*) refers to the aggregate of volitional formations, while **existence** (*bhava*) is the aggregate of form. The other 3 aggregates are present just as they are. Nirvana arises on account of the non-occurrence of these 5 aggregates. Thus, the Buddha concludes the teaching by alluding to nirvana itself. (SA 1:21,28-32)

**2.1.2.2** **Delight** (*nandi*) is said to be the root of **existence** (*bhava*). When delight is abandoned, existence ends. This means that we have, here and now, crossed over all forms of existence (*bhavassa pāragū*, Dh 348). Hence, it is said in **the Nibbāna Paṭisaṃyutta Sutta 3** (U 88.3) that the arhat’s consciousness is not established anywhere, that is, neither here (*n’ev’idha*) nor beyond (*na huraṃ*) nor in between (*na ubhayam antarena*)—not reborn in the sense-world nor in the form or the formless world, nor caught in the in-between state<sup>24</sup> (U 1.10,16).<sup>25</sup>

## 2.2 A MODERN COMMENTARY

### 2.2.1 “When delight in existence is utterly destroyed” (*nandi, bhava, parikkhayā*)

**2.2.1.1** The compound *nandi, bhava* seems to occur only a couple of times in the Nikāyas: here in **the Nimokkha Sutta** [§4a = S 2a\*], as *nandī, bhava, parikkhīṇo*, “who has destroyed delight in existence”; in S 300c of **the Candana Sutta** (S 2.15), SD 86.9; and at **Dh 413c**. However, *bhava, nandī* occurs in the following places in the Canon:

#### occurrences of *bhava, nandī*

**(Catukka) Yoga Sutta** (A 4.10/2:10 ×2)<sup>26</sup>

**Puṇṇaka, māṇava Pucchā Niddesa** (Nc:Be 57)

**Dhamma, saṅgāṇī** (Dhs 195)

**Dhamma, saṅgāṇī** (Dhs 198)

**Vibhaṅga** (Vbh 358)

#### *bhava, nandī* is denoted by the tilde: ~

*yo bhavesu bhava, rāgo ~ bhava, sneho ...*

*yo bhavesu bhava-c, chando bhava, rāgp ~ bhava, taṇhā ...*

gloss on *bhav’āsavo* (the influx of existence)

gloss on *bhava, raga, saṃyojana* (the fetter of existence)

gloss on *bhava, taṇhā* (the craving for existence)

From all this, we can conclude that *bhava* in itself is non-technical (has no fixed sense) but simply means “existence,” and that the phrase *bhava, nandī* (“delight in existence”) is more common in the Canon than *nandi, bhava* or *nandī, bhava*. Furthermore, all these occurrences of *bhava, nandī* are in the prose.

However, both *nandi, bhava parikkhayā* (S 2a\*) and *nandī, bhava parikkhīṇo* (S 300c) (noted above), not only have very similar meaning, but both occur in a verse. Hence, we may surmise that *nandi, bhava* or *nandī, bhava* is simply a metri causa inversion of *bhava, nandi/~ī*, with the sense of “delight in existence,” as shown in **the (Catukka) Yoga Sutta** (A 4.10) and the glosses in the Culla Niddesa and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka.

In other words, *nandi, bhava* in *nandi, bhava, parikkhayā* (S 2a\*) and *nandī, bhava parikkhīṇo* (S 300c) have become “inverted compounds” for *bhava, nandi/~ī* for the sake of proper rhythm in their respective

<sup>24</sup> On the “in-between state,” see SD 2.17 (9.1).

<sup>25</sup> SD 33.7. A similar teaching is found in **(Arahatta) Māluṅkyaputta S** (S 35.95,12/4:73) + SD 5.9 (3).

<sup>26</sup> SD 105.1.

verses. A synonym, *taṇha,bhava* (“craving for existence”) occurs in **Sn 640**. However, as we shall see, the Commentaries generally interpret these compounds occurring here as dvandvas [2.2.1.2].

**2.2.1.2** The phrase *nandi,bhava,parikkhayā* and its parallels occur in the Commentaries, too, where *bhava,nandi* is taken as a dvandva (twin compound): “existence and delight [craving].” It is so interpreted by **SnA 469,14** on *taṇhā,bhava,parikkhīṇaṃ*, “the utter destruction of craving and existence” (Sn 640).

However, **DhA 4:192,7-8** explains *nandi,bhava,parikkhīṇaṃ* (Dh 413c) as a bahuvrihi<sup>27</sup> compound as *tisu bhavesu parikkhīṇa,taṇhaṃ*, “one who has destroyed craving for the 3 realms of existence.”<sup>28</sup> From the contexts for *nandi,bhava*, translating it as “delight in existence” (and so on) is clearly more germane than taking it as a dvandva, “delight and existence,” which simply sounds technical but with little significance.

## **2.2.2 “When perception and consciousness are destroyed”** (*saññā,viññāṇa,saṅkhayā*)

**2.2.2.1** This line, referring to an arhat’s experience of the cessation of consciousness (*viññāṇa,nirodha*), is closely related to the Buddha’s statement at the close of **the Kevaḍḍha Sutta** (D 11).<sup>29</sup> There, he declares that, without the support of name-and-form (*nāma,rūpa*), consciousness ceases, thus:

85.3 Where do earth, water, fire, wind find no footing?  
Here long and short, small and great, fair and foul,  
Name and form totally cease with a trace?

85.4 And the answer to that is this:<sup>30</sup>

The consciousness without attribute [non-manifesting],<sup>31</sup> without end, radiant all around<sup>32</sup>—

- |   |           |                  |
|---|-----------|------------------|
| (1) Here, earth, water, fire and wind find no footing;            | [2.2.2.2] |                  |
| (2) here, long and short, small and great, fair and foul;         | [2.2.2.3] |                  |
| (3) here, name and form are destroyed traceless:                  | [2.2.2.4] |                  |
| (4) with consciousness’ cessation this stops here.” <sup>33</sup> | [2.2.2.2] | (D 11,85), SD1.7 |

<sup>27</sup> Bahuvrihi (Skt *bahu,vrhi*; P *bahubbīhi*), an adjectival compound.

<sup>28</sup> On these technical difficulties, further see S:B 389 n165 (on S 300c\*).

<sup>29</sup> D 11,85/1:223 (SD 1.7).

<sup>30</sup> The first stanza line, *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato,pabhaṃ*, as in **Brahma,nimantanika S** (M 49,-25/1:329), SD 11.7. On the unestablished consciousness, see **Viññāṇa**, SD 17.8a(11.3).

<sup>31</sup> “Without attribute [signless],” *anidassana*, “invisible.” Ñāṇananda renders it as “non-manifesting” (*Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Soc, 1971:59). See Bodhi’s important n at M:ÑB 1249 n513. See also Thanissaro’s nn: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.11.0.than.html> & <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.049.than.html>.

<sup>32</sup> “Radiant all around,” *sabbato,pabhaṃ*, where *pabhaṃ*, vl *pahaṃ*. Ñāṇamoli, in his *Majjhima tr*, takes *pabhaṃ* to be the negative present participle of *pabhavati* (“to be able”)—*apabhaṃ*—the negative-prefix *a* elided in conjunction with *sabbato*: “The sense can be paraphrased freely by ‘not predicating being in relation to “all,”’ or ‘not assuming of “all” that it is or is not in an absolute sense’” (M:ÑB 1249 n513). But, argues Bodhi. “if we take *pabhaṃ* as ‘luminous,’ which seems better justified, the [Majjhima] verse links up with the idea of the mind as being intrinsically luminous [A 1:10]” (id). See D:W 557 n241. Cf A 1.10 (SD 8.3) where the mind is said to by nature radiant (*pabhassara*) & A 2:139 where the light of wisdom (*paññā,pabha*) is called the best of lights. See Bodhi’s important n at M:ÑB 1249 n513. See also Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, 1996:100 f. On the radiant mind, see also SD 54.2a (4.3.3).

**2.2.2.2 In line (1) of the Kevaḍḍha Sutta** verse [2.2.2.1], “earth, water, fire and wind” are the 4 elements. Here, they do not refer to the physical universe of solidity, fluidity, heat and gaseousness—the universe still exists when we attain nirvana. These 4 elements here refer to our 5 physical sense-faculties (*pañc’indriya*) that senses “matter” on the energy or molecular levels. In simple terms, then, this line refers to the absence of the processing of sense-bases and sense-data—the respective sense-consciousnesses each “find no footing” (*na gādhati*). They cease to function. We do not have to process sight, sound, smell, taste or touch (not the way we do in our unawakened lives, anyway).

**2.2.2.3 Line (2)** [2.2.2.1] refers to dimensions and subjective evaluations. “Fair and foul” (*subhā-subham*) alludes to our perceptions of the pleasant, the unpleasant and the neutral on account of our feelings for various sense-objects. In other words, these are mental processes. It should be understood that the mind is directly involved in the functioning of the physical senses [2.2.2.2], but this refers to the processing of external data by the mind. In nirvana, all mental processes cease. Hence, there is no more experience of pleasure, pain or boredom—all sufferings end.

**2.2.2.4 Line (3)** [2.2.2.1], on “name-and-form” (*nāma,rūpa*) is a familiar topic.<sup>34</sup> **Consciousness** (*viññāṇa*) is, simply, how we make sense of things. Through our physical senses, we process our experiences of “forms” (*rūpa*) out there. The mind names these experiences, measures them against a database of memories evaluating them as pleasant or unpleasant, or when they do not “compute,” then, they are taken to be “neutral.” This process feeds our latent tendencies, respectively, of lust, repulsion and ignorance.<sup>35</sup>

With the attainment of nirvana, all name-and-form processes end. When name-and-form end, our consciousness of things ends, too. In other words, we stop feeding our mind with sense-data that builds up the virtual world that we inhabit and forms our habits.<sup>36</sup>

**2.2.2.5 Line (4)** [2.2.2.1] means that when **consciousness** ends, name-and-form end, too—since the two of them work intimately together. This is spoken in reference to an arhat who has passed finally away: he ceases to be caught in the samsaric cycle of rebirths and redeaths. However, for a living arhat, **the 5 aggregates**—form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness—still exist in them.<sup>37</sup>

The 5 aggregates of an unawakened person is the bases for **clinging** (*upādāna*): they fuel our physical and mental lives. On the other hand, for an arhat (such as the Buddha), the 5 aggregates have no clinging at all. They are merely the functional bodily and mental processes that support life. The arhat still has a body. With a body, he still feels physical pleasure and pain, but he does not react unwholesomely to any such feelings.

Thus, an arhat only perceives such feelings as they arise, without creating any new karma. His formation (or *saṅkhāra*, singular)—the activity of body, speech and mind—functions without any greed, hate or delusion since he has uprooted all his latent tendencies [2.2.2.4]. Hence, he is conscious of his body and the world around him, but it is merely perception of constantly blissful calm and clarity.

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<sup>33</sup> The Buddha makes a similar statement by way of an Udāna (inspired utterance) on the parinirvana of **Bāhiya Dāru,cīriya**: “Where water, earth, fire and wind find no footing, | There neither brightness burns nor sun shines | There neither moon gleams nor darkness reigns. | When a sage, a brahmin, through wisdom has known this by himself. | Then, he is freed from form and formless, from joy and pain.” (U 9). A similar verse is found at S 1.69/1:15, and a similar teaching is given by Mahā Cunda to Channa (S 35.87/4:59. On this verse in **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11,85), SD 1.7, see D:W 557 n242 & **Mahā Parinibbāna S**, SD 9 (9.8.6).

<sup>34</sup> On *nāma,rūpa*, see SD 54.2a (4.2).

<sup>35</sup> On the latent tendencies (*anusaya*), see **Sammā Ditṭhi S** (M 9,65-67), SD 11.14; **Anusaya** SD 31.3 (8.2).

<sup>36</sup> On how consciousness works, see SD 54.2a (4.1.2).

<sup>37</sup> On the 5 aggregates, see **Dve Khandhā S** (S 22.48), SD 17.1a.



This experience of a living arhat is remarkably paradoxical and profound. He is thought-free yet percipient, or the perception is profoundly subtle.<sup>38</sup> However, while he lives, he is capable of thinking if he wants to, such as how to teach a person [2.2.3.2]. However, in final nirvana, all perception and consciousness are fully extinct; hence, there is no possibility of either rebirth or redeath. [2.2.3.2]

### **2.2.3 “When feelings cease and are stilled”** (*vedanānaṃ nirodhā upasamā*)

**2.2.3.1** The cessation and stilling of feeling is another profoundly remarkable aspect of the awakened experience. With this, the arhat realizes the cessation of all suffering, mental and physical, such as stated in **the Sakalika Sutta** (S 1.38/1:27), SD 61.4, which is, in fact, the bliss of nirvana as the liberation from all suffering.

**2.2.3.2 Dhyana** (*jhāna*), too, is a paradoxical state in the sense that, despite the extinction of all that constitutes our waking experience, the arhat in dhyana is still mindful and fully aware. Despite the absence of sense-activities and thinking, the arhat still subtly perceives or recognizes blissful calm and clarity [2.2.2.1]. Hence, it should be understood that despite the absence of sense-activities and thinking, the sense-bases (*āyatana*) are still present in the arhat, but he only subtly perceives blissful calm and clarity through them.

**Nirvana** (*nibbana*), too, is described as the total cessation of the 6 “sense-spheres” (*āyatana*) (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind) not subject to re-arising, as described in **the Kāma,guṇa Sutta** (S 35.117).<sup>39</sup> However, while the arhat (such as the Buddha) lives, he only experiences what arises before him: neither thoughts of the past nor of the future arise to trouble him.

While we are yet unawakened, we can only imagine that this is like when our mind is free of all the background “noises” of incessant mental chatter and sense-data processing. We only calmly and clearly process what arises before us. We are also able to recall, in an instant, any past event that we wish to recall. In that way, we are not distracted from the present.

### **2.2.4 Arhathood**

In **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2), the attainment of arhathood is described in a stock passage as follows. He fully understands the 4 noble truths, and is released from the 3 influxes, those of sensual desire, existence and ignorance.<sup>40</sup>

With release, there is the knowledge, ‘Freed! [It is freed!]

He understands, ‘Birth is ended,

the holy life has been lived,

done is that which needs to be done.

There is nothing further beyond this.’<sup>41</sup> (D 2,100/1:84), SD 8.10

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<sup>38</sup> See (**Navaka**) **Ānanda S** (A 9.37/4:427), SD 55.18; (**Dasaka**) **Samādhi S** (A 10.6/5:7), SD 53.18; (**Dasaka**) **Sāriputta S** (A 10.7/5:8), SD 53.19; **Saññā Manasikāra S 1** (A 11.7/5:318), SD 53.18; **Saññā Manasikāra S 2** (A 11.8/-5:321), SD 53.20b; **Sandha S** (A 11.10/5:324 f), SD 89.5; (**Ekādasaka**) **Samādhi S 1** (A 11.18/5:353); (**Ekādasaka**) **Samādhi S 2** (A 11.19/5:355); (**Ekādasaka**) **Samādhi S 3** (A 11.20/5:356); (**Ekādasaka**) **Samādhi S 4** (A 11.21/5:357); also SD 54.2a (4.2). On dhyana being thought-free, see SD 33.1b (6.2.2).

<sup>39</sup> S 35.117/4:98 (SD 88.6). Cf **Saḷ-āyatana Vibhaṅga S** (M 137,12/3:218), SD 29.5.

<sup>40</sup> In older parts of suttas, only 3 influxes (*āsava*) are mentioned. In later sections of the suttas, 4 influxes are often mentioned, often referred to as “the 4 floods” (*ogha*): see SD 54.2a (2.3).

<sup>41</sup> *Nāparam itthatāya*: lit. “there is no more of ‘thusness/here-ness,’” where *ittha* can mean either “thus” or “here.” Hence, *ittha* refers to *this* samsaric state of rebirth and redeath. See SD 53.1 (3.2.2).

