1 Insight of the masters

1.1 During meditation, when the mind is utterly still and the bright sign (nimitta) has arisen, we no more see the body in its everyday virtual reality, but as it really is, by way of true reality. Such a special way of knowing at this level provides the basis for wise attention and rise of insight. At this point, Ajahn Chah advises thus:

You should bring this kind of insight right inside your heart: as you do this more and more, it becomes the cause for insight knowledge to arise by itself. Sometimes, when you turn your attention to reflecting on the subject of asubha [the impurities], images of different unattractive aspects of the body can manifest in the mind automatically. These images are clearer than any you could try to summon up with your imagination and lead to insight of a far more penetrating nature than that gained through the ordinary kind of discursive thinking.

This kind of clear insight has such a striking impact that the activity of the mind is brought to a stop, followed by the experience of a deep sense of dispassion. The reason it is so clear and piercing is that it originates from a completely peaceful mind.

Investigating from within a state of calm leads you to clearer and clearer insight, the mind becoming more peaceful as it is increasingly absorbed in the contemplation. The clearer and more conclusive the insight, the deeper inside the mind penetrates with its investigation, constantly supported by the calm of samādhi. This is what the practice of kammatṭhāna [meditation] involves. Continuous investigation in this way helps you to repeatedly let go of and ultimately destroy attachment to personality view [sakkāya, diṭṭhi]. It brings an end to all remaining doubt and uncertainty about this heap of flesh we call the body, and letting go of blind attachment to rites and practices. (Chah 2001:4; Pali normalized & paragraphed)

1.2 Ajahn Chah then explains how this level of insight allows us to see a clear distinction between the mind and the body, which means that we are seeing its true nature, and which leads us to experience a strong sense of revulsion (Nibbidā) towards it:

Even in the event of serious illness, tropical fevers or different health problems that normally have a strong physical impact and shake the body up, your practice of calm and insight remains firm and imperturbable. Your understanding and insight allow you to make a clear distinction between mind and body—the mind is one phenomenon, the body another. Once you

1 See Nimitta, SD 19.7.
2 Asubha, in the Suttas, refers to the 31 (or 32) parts of the body, ie asubha, saññā (perception of foulness): see Giri-m-ananda S (A 10.60,6/5:109), SD 19.16. On details of practice, see Satipaṭṭhāna Ss (D 22.5/2:293 = M 10,10), SD 13.2-3; Kāya,gatā,sati S (M 119,7/3:90), SD 12.21 (S). See also Vibhaṅga S (S 51.29/5:277 f), on the analysis of will or desire (chanda).
3 This mind-body distinction although explicitly stated here is implicitly but clearly evident in such discourses as Roga S (A 4.157,1.2:142 f) + SD 5.4 (S), Nakula,pitā S (S 22.1/3:1-5), SD 5.4; cf Sn 1120-1123. The term asubha,-nimitta (the sign of foulness) in Comys, refers to one or other of the 10 foul objects, ie bodily remains in one of the 10 stages of decomposition (Vism 6.1-11/178 f).
see body and mind as completely and indisputably separate from each other, it means that the practice of insight has brought you to the point where your mind sees for certain the true nature of the body.

Seeing the way the body truly is, clearly and beyond doubt from within the calm of samādhi, leads to the mind experiencing a strong sense of weariness and detachment (nibbidā). This weariness comes from the sense of sadness and dispassion that is the natural result of seeing the way things are. It’s not the same as ordinary worldly moods such as fear, revulsion or other unwholesome qualities like envy or aversion. It’s not coming from the same root as those defiled mental states.

This is weariness that has a spiritual quality to it and is different from the normal moods of boredom and tiredness experienced by ordinary unenlightened human beings (puthujjana). Those more common moods of boredom and feeling fed up with life that people experience, don’t lead to insight, a desire to see images of unattractive parts of the body or to contemplation of impermanence. The experience is not the same.

The sense of world-weariness that grows with insight leads to detachment and aloofness that comes naturally from investigating and seeing the truth of the way things are. It is free from attachment to a sense of self that attempts to control and force things to go according to your desires. Rather, you let go with an acceptance of the way things are. The clarity of insight is so strong that you don’t experience any sense of a self that has to go against the grain of its desires or endure through attachment.

The three fetters of personality view, doubt and blind attachment to rites and practices that are normally present underlying the way you view the world can’t delude you or cause you to make any serious mistakes in practice. This is the very beginning of the path; the first clear insight into ultimate truth and paves the way for further insight.

You could describe it as penetrating the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are things to be realized through insight. Every monk and nun, who has ever realized them, has experienced such insight into the truth of the way things are. You know suffering, know the cause of suffering, know the cessation of suffering and know the path leading to the cessation of suffering. Understanding of each Noble Truth emerges at the same place within the mind. They come together and harmonize as the factors of the Eightfold Noble Path, which the Buddha taught are to be realized within the mind. As the path factors converge in the center of the mind, they cut through any doubt and uncertainty you still have concerning practice.

(Chah 2001:4; Pali normalized & paragraphed)

2 Definition and context of nibbidā

2.1 Translation

2.1.1 True spirituality

2.1.1.1 If there is a single word that could be a shibboleth that separates the truly spiritually inclined from the more worldly, it would be nibbidā, that is, in terms of both its meaning and how it is translated.

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4 Shibboleth (IPA: 'ʃɪbəleθ) (Hebrew שִבְּלֶת, “stream, torrent”) is any language usage indicative of one’s social or regional origin, or more broadly, any word, catch-phrase or practice that identifies members of a group. Its origin is Judaic: the word was used by Jephthah to distinguish the Ephraimites, who were unable to pronounce it, from his own men, the Gileadites (Judges 12:4-6). The Ephraimite dialect lacked the post-alveolar [ʃ] sound (as in shoe),
The meaning of nibbidā is easier to fathom after we have discussed how it should be translated. The commoner or more “polite” translation of nibbidā is “disillusionment, disenchantment” but the more serious spiritual practitioners generally prefer “revulsion,” even “disgust.” The reasons, evidence and significance for this will be examined in this essay.

2.1.1.2 Hence, true spiritual attainment entails a turning away from worldliness, that is, we are no longer emotionally dependent on it, and a re-turning of the consciousness into inner stillness. Such a life-change is initiated by a powerful vision of the nature of true reality, so that we must only shrink back from the suffering and dangers that is the world. The term revulsion aptly describes such a mental state.

2.1.2 Medically, revulsion refers to “an act or technique of turning or diverting a disease or blood from a diseased region in one part of the body to another (as by counter-irritation).” Similarly, with growing spiritual maturity, our minds are gradually or dramatically diverted from unwholesome states and distractions to wholesome habits and greater mindfulness. Our growing awareness of our spiritual potential commensurably directs our energies to self-betterment culminating in spiritual freedom.

2.1.3 SPIRITUAL EXERCISE. If you find the translation “revulsion” for nibbidā “revolting,” that is, you do not like it, put this book down for a moment. Close your eyes and ask yourself: “What am I really disliking here?” Do not make any attempt to answer it, the answer will come on its own. Simply examine this answer, and ask why you feel this way, and so on. Go on doing this spiritual exercise until you discover the answer for yourself. You will know it for sure, when the right answers come.

2.2 THE NIBBIDĀ FORMULA

2.2.1 Word explanation. The term nibbidā forms the first of a well-known phrase describing the spiritual turning-point and process [2.2.2] to sainthood: nibbidā (revulsion), virāga (dispassion), vimutti (freedom) and nibbāna (nirvana), as in the well-known nibbidā formula:

it conduces [leads] to utter revulsion, to dispassion, to ending (of suffering), to peace [stilling], to direct knowledge, to self-awareness, to nirvana.

etam ekanta,nibbidāyā virāgāya nirodhaṁ upasamāya abhiśiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya sarvavattantī.6

(D 9,28; M 63,8; S 47.32; S 51.4, 55.12/5:361; A 5.69, 7.79, 10.107)7

The verb for nibbidā is nibbindati, resolved as nis (prefix meaning “out, away from”) + vindati, “he finds,” from vīd, “to find.” The literal English translation, “he finds out,” hints at some kind of direct knowledge of true reality. Its translation as “revulsed (at),” “repelled (by),” or even “disgusted (with),” mispronouncing it as the alveolar [s]. The Ephraimites killed all those they caught who could not articulate Shibboleth according to their dialect.

5 Webster’s 3rd New International Dictionary. A “counter-irritant” is an agent applied locally to produce superficial inflammation with the object of reducing inflammation to deeper adjacent structures (as a mustard plaster applied to the chest in bronchitis (id).

6 These are the 7 criteria for the true Dharma-Vinaya (*dhamma,vinaya,jānana,lakkhāna). For other connections, see PED: nibbidā.

7 Poṭṭhapāda S (D 9,28/1:189), SD 11.14; Cūla Māluṅkyā,putta S (M 63,8/1:431), SD 5.8; (Bojjhaṅga) Nibbidā S (ś 46.20/5:82), (Magga) Paṭipanna S (ś 47.32/5:179), SD 47.21; (iddhi,pāda) Nibbidā S (ś 51.4/5:255), (ś 55.12/5:361); (Pañcaka) Nibbidā S (ś 5.69/3:83), Satthu,sāsana S (A 7.79/4:143), SD 104.1; Dhovana S (A 10.107/5:216). For a full list of nibbidā passages, see Appendix.

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may appear strong to some, but the Dharma-inspired or awakened mind apparently sees worldly experience just as we would recoil at seeing a rotting body or dung (MA 3:129)!

2.2.2 Meaning of the formula

2.2.2.1 The Majjhima Commentary explains the key sentences (actually only a single word each) of the nibbidā formula [2.2.1], as follows:

“He is revulsed” (nibbindati): He is discontented (ukkaṇṭhati) (with worldly reality). This revulsion marks the culmination of insight, just before the attainment of the supramundane path.

“He is dispassionate” (virajjati): He eliminates all the mental fetters, and attains the supramundane path (magga).

“It [the mind] is freed” (vimuttati) refers to the attainment of the supramundane fruition (phala).

(MA 2:114; Vism 21.43-44/650 f)

The 2nd and 3rd stages, working as a pair, as a rule, is understood to function progressively. A basic level of dispassion (vurāga) through seeing the reality of impermanence leads us to attain streamwinning. When this dispassion is strengthened with the weakening of the 3 unwholesome roots (lust, hate, delusion), we attain once-returning. Then, with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters, we gain non-returning. Finally, with the ending of all the 10 fetters, we gain arhathood, to which this formula, as it is, traditionally refers.

2.2.2.2 The nibbidā formula comprises 7 stages of spiritual transformation, beginning with nibbidā itself, that is, just before the attaining of the supramundane path. The other six stages refer to the gradual and rapid unfolding of the mind as it awakens. In short, the nibbidā formula summarizes the awakening process of an arhat.

The arhat’s subsequent review knowledge (pacca vekkhāna, niñāṇa)—after attaining arhathood, he reviews his state—is shown by the phrases, “there comes the knowledge” and “he understands: ‘Birth is destroyed ...’,” in the stock passage following a description of full awakening.

2.2.2.3 The term “review knowledge” or “retrospective knowledge” means that the arhat mindfully examines his spiritual state, that he is free of all defilements—just as someone who has eaten enough, stops eating and examines himself, and, knowing that he is satiated, stops eating. This suggests that the process (or moment, according to Abhidhamma) of awakening itself is a kind of affective experience: it is always a profoundly joyful state.

As such, he does not know (cognitively experience) his transformation—just as we enjoy eating, but does not know the exact moment of being satiated. Then, examining his state, the arhat finally ascertains

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8 Mental fetters (saṁyojanā). There are 10 of them: (1) self-identity view (sakkāya, diṭṭhi), (2) spiritual doubt (vicikicchā), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa), (4) sensual lust (kāma, rāga), (5) repulsion (paṭigha), (6) greed for form existence (rūpa, rāga), (7) greed for formless existence (arūpa, rāga), (8) conceit (māna), (9) restlessness (uddhacca), (10) ignorance (avijjā) (S 45.179+180/5:61 f; A 10.13/5:13; Vbh 377). In some places, (5) paṭigha, is replaced by illwill (vyāpāda). The first 5 are the lower fetters (oram, bhāgiya) that bind one to the “lower” realm, ie the sense world, and the rest, the higher fetters (uddham, bhāgiya) that bind one to the “higher” realms, ie the form and formless worlds.

9 “Knowing” here refers to a lower level of experience involving the physical senses and the objectifying function (or simply, thoughts) of the mind. There is neither subject nor object, no duality, in the awakening experience. This
his awakening. Clearly, the time between his awakening and his awareness of it takes only minutes, even
seconds, but can be longer if the awakening occurs while he is in deep meditation, and continues in that
joyful state.10

2.2.2.4 When the full nibbidā cycle or pericope is referred to outside of the awakening event itself,
it is stated in connection with a certain teaching or practice, that it leads
to revulsion, nibbidāya
to dispassion [letting go], virāgāya
to cessation (of suffering), nirodhāya
to inner peace, upasamāya
to direct knowledge, abhiññāya
to awakening, sambodhāya
to nirvana, nibbānāya saṁvattati

(A 7.83/4:143), SD 102.4 [3.2]

The shorter nibbidā cycle or pericope—for example, in the Alaggadûpama Sutta (M 22), goes thus:

Feeling revulsed, lust fades away.12
Through the fading away of lust, he is freed.13
When he is freed, there comes the knowledge: ‘It (the mind) is freed.’14
He knows: ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what is to be done, there is no more
of this state of being.’ (M 22,29/1:139), SD3.13

2.2.3 The nature of the body. The early Buddhists, however, do not regard the body as being impure or
bad, nor do they regard it as good and pleasurable in itself. They are well aware of its true nature as
being impermanent and in need of constant cleaning and maintenance. Even then, with the best care,
the body has to be discarded when it runs out of date, when its time is up.15

2.3 Stock phrase. As we shall see, nibbidā and its related forms are commonly found throughout the
eyear suttas. The stock phrase used in contexts which refer to nibbidā, is atṭiyati harāyati jigucchati,
(“he is troubled, ashamed, disgusted (with)”16 is explained as follows:

Atṭiyati means “(one is) troubled, distressed, horrified, worried, bored, incommoded, pained” and is
the denominative17 of āṭṭa (Skt ārta), “hurt, afflicted, tormented, desperate” (Sn 694). The Com-

understanding is clear from the fact that in a dhyana experience, or even a samadhi of some depth, there is no
duality. On the mind being thought-free during dhyana, see SD 33.1b (6.2.2 + 6.2.4).

10 See BDict: paccavekkhāna-ṇāṇa.
11 Etam hi upāli attha,saṁhitam etam dhamma,saṁhitam etam ādi,brahma,cariyakam etam nibbidāya virāgāya
niruddhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya sarivattati.
12 Or, “Feeling revulsed, he is dispassionate.” Comy: “Feeling revulsed, lust fades away,” here, “lust fades away
(virāga) is the path (magga) (MA 2:115,19).
13 Or, “Through dispassion, he is freed.” Here, he is freed by the path through dispassion (ettha virāgena magga
na vimuccati) (MA 2:115,20).
14 This line refers to a statement of “review” (idha paccavekkhāna latitā, MA 2:115,21).
15 See The body in Buddhism, SD 29.6a.
16 This is stock: V 1:87, 88, 2:292, 3:68; D 11,5/1:213 (SD 1.7); M 20,4,2/1:120 (SD 1.6), 62,13-16/1:423 f (SD 3.11)
≈ A 9.11,4/4:374-376 (SD 28.2a, used positively by Sāriputta); M 152,10,3/3:300 (SD 17.13) = S 35.88/4:62 (SD 92.8);
A 3,18/1:15 (SD 54.14), 9,40/4:435 (SD 75.7), 10,60/5:111 (SD 19.16, by all formations); U 22/21 (SD 43.7); It 49/43
(SD 97.12); J 202/2:143, 545/5:280. See (3.6) below.
mentary on the Amba,laṭṭhika Rāhulovāda Sutta (M 61) glosses atṭiyitabbam as āttena pilītena bhavitabbam, “one should be distressed, (feel) harassed” (MA 3:129). The Majjhima Commentary on the Vitakka,saṇṭhāna Sutta (M 20) explains atṭiyeyya as “(he) would be troubled” (atto dukkhoto bhāveyya, MA 2:90). The Vinaya Commentary says that one is troubled by such a situation, thus, “now when will I be free from the sickness?” (kadā nu kho gilānato mucissāmā ti atṭiyanti, VA 467).

Harāyati, meaning “ashamed,” is the denominative of hiri (moral shame). The Majjhima Commentary glosses harāyeyya as lajjeyya, “one would be ashamed” (MA 2:90), and harāyitabbam as lajjitabbam, “one should be ashamed” (MA 3:129).

Jigucchati (Skt jugutsati), “he shuns, avoids, loathes, detests, is revulsed at, is repelled by, is disgusted with, sickened by, horrified at,” is the desiderative (expressing desire) or reduplicative (expressing repetitiveness) of gūtha, “to protect.” The Majjhima Commentary explains jigucchitabbam as gūtham disvā viya jigucchā uppādetabbā, “one should arouse disgust (in oneself) as if looking at dung” (MA 3:129).18

2.4 NIBBĀNA AND ATAMMAYATĀ. There is another interesting aspect of nibbāna: it is closely connected with atammayatā (non-identification). The Majjhima Commentary on the Alagaddūpama Sutta (M 22), in glossing nibbāna (“revulsion, disenchantment”) as “the insight leading to the emerging (of the path)” (vutṭhāna, gamini, vipassanā), says that amongst its synonym is “the exhaustion of tammayatā” (tam, mayatā, pariyādānāti) (MA 2:114). Hence, understandably, nibbāna and atam, mayatā mean the same thing. Indeed, we can easily see that the explanation of atam, mayatā perfectly describes nibbāna, too.19

Above all, knowing the correct meaning of nibbāna is vital to understanding why the Buddha and the saints live in the world without being a part of the world. Although living apart from the world, the spirituality of their presence is always within the reach of anyone who seeks freedom, even to this very day. Indeed, the healer has to heal himself first, before he can truly heal others.

3 NIBBĀNA in the Suttas

3.1 THE ALAGADDŪPAMA SUTTA

3.1.1 The main purpose of the Buddha’s teaching is spiritual freedom. The path of progress to sainthood is clearly stated in these stock passages or pericopes found in such suttas as the Alagaddūpama Sutta (M 22), thus:

[Impermanence of the aggregate:]

26 (1) “Bhikhus, what do you think? Is form permanent or impermanent?”
“Impermanent, bhante.”

[Unsatisfactoriness of the aggregate:]
“Is what is impermanent painful or pleasurable?”
“Painful, bhante.”

[An aggregate has no “self”:]
“Is what is impermanent, painful, and subject to change, fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self?’”

17 Ie, a noun or verb derived from a noun or adjective, eg “man” (a fleet) or “localize” (from “local”).
18 See also SD 1.17 (3).
19 See Atammayatā, SD 19.3.
“No, bhante.”
(2) “...Is feeling permanent or impermanent?”...
(3) “...Is perception permanent or impermanent?”...
(4) “...Are formations permanent or impermanent?”...
(5) “...Is consciousness permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent painful or pleasurable?”

“Painful, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, painful, and subject to change, fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self?’”

“No, bhante.”

[Dealing with the 5 aggregates:] 27 Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of form whatsoever—whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near 21—all forms should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:

“This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.” 22

Any kind of feeling whatsoever...

Any kind of perception whatsoever...

Any kind of formations whatsoever...

Any kind of consciousness whatsoever—whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all consciousnesses should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

[Revulsion (nibbidā):] 23 28 Evam passam bhikkhave sutavā ariya,śāvako rūpasmiṁ nibbindati Seeing thus, bhikshus, an instructed noble disciple is revulsed at form;

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20 On this and the following section, Norman says: “It is important to note that this answer can only be given by those who know, in advance, that the term attā is by definition nīcca [permanent] and sukha [pleasant], and therefore anything which is anicca and dukkha cannot be attā. This gives us a clear indication of the type of attā that is being discussed. It is the Upanishadic idea of an ātman which is nitya and sukha, and this is in complete agreement with the fact...that some of the phraseology of the non-Buddhist view which is being rejected has Upanishadic echoes.” (Norman 1981:22)

21 See Khandha S (S 22.48/3:47), SD 17.1. This “totality formula” classification of the aggregates (see prec n) is explained in detail in Vībhāṅga and briefly in Visuddhi, magga: “internal” = physical sense-organs; “external” = physical sense-objects; “gross” = that which impinges (physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, wind, fire); “subtle” = that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water); “far” = subtle objects (“difficult to penetrate”); “near” = gross objects (“easy to penetrate”) (Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7). “Whether or not the details of the Vībhāṅga exposition are accepted as valid for the nikāyas, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each khandha is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable variety and also a certain hierarchy” (Gethin 1986:41). See Gethin 1986:40 f; Karunadasa 1967:38f; Boisvert 1995:43-48. As regards the terms “internal” (ajjhatta) and “external” (bahiddhā), it should be noted that they have two applications: (1) the aggregates (khandhā) composing a particular “person” are “internal” to them and anything else is “external”; (2) the sense-organs are “internal” and their objects—which may include aspects of the person’s own body or mind, which are “internal” in the first sense—are “external.” Boisvert (1995: 43, 47), however overlooks these applications.

22 See Anatta Lakkhaṇa S (S 22.59.27), SD 1.2.

23 For an application of the 6 sense-faculties (saḷāyatana), instead of the 5 aggregate—with a wordplay on indriya—see Indriya Sampanna S (S 35.153), SD 10.4(4.6).
vedanāya nibbindati  
sahānāya nibbindati  
sankhāresu nibbindati  
viññānasmiṁ nibbindati.

he is revulsed at feeling;  
he is revulsed at perception;  
he is revulsed at formations;  
he is revulsed at consciousness.

29 Nibbindam virajjati,

Revulsed, he is dispassionate [lust fades away].

virāga vimuccati,

Through dispassion [the fading away of lust],

(his mind) is freed.

vimittasmiṁ vimuttam iti When it is freed, he knows: “It is freed.”

nānam hoti There is the knowledge,

“Birth is destroyed,

kusala brahma, cariyāṁ, the holy life has been lived,

katarṁ karāṇyaṁ what should be done is done,

nāparam itthattāyā ti pajānāti. there is no more of this state of being,” so he knows.

(M 22,26-29/1:138 f), SD 3.13

3.1.2 A shorter version of this statement is found in the (Sabb'upādāna) Pariññā Sutta (S 35.60):

Seeing thus, the learned noble disciple is revulsed (nibbindati) at the eye, at forms, at eye-consciousness, at eye-contact, at feeling...[and at each of the other respective sense-bases, sense-objects, sense-consciousnesses, sense-contacts, and feelings]...

Being revulsed (at reality) (nibbindam), he becomes dispassionate.

Through dispassion (virāga), (his mind) is freed.

With liberation (vimokkha), he understands, “Clinging has been fully understood by me.”

(S 35.60/4:33), SD 6.17

The Pali of the highlighted (bold) line simply reads nibbindam virajjati. The word nibbindam, “revulsed (at)” is the present participle of nibbindati, “he is revulsed at, is wearied with, is disgusted with, disenchanted with, disillusioned, indifferent towards, averse to,” and is usually applied to the awake to true reality.25 Here, Buddhist practitioners often translate nibbidā with the strongest of the sense here, namely, “revulsion” [6.2]. Other suttas with this stock passage include the Sabb'upādāna Pariññā Sutta (S 35.60)26 and the Sabb'upādāna Pariyādāna Sutta 1 (S 35.61).27 [6.1]

3.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NIBBIDĀ FORMULA

3.2.1 The definitive teaching. The nibbidā formula is used in the Satthu, sāsana Sutta (A 7.83) to define the Dharma, vinaya, that is, the early collection of the Buddha’s teaching and discipline. This reflects a time when both the Dharma (the teachings) and the Vinaya (the training-rules) are more fully formed, but when the canon is still not closed.28

The Satthu, sāsana Sutta, however, is an early text, probably belonging to the first period of the Buddha’s public ministry.29 The reason that it is it likely to be an early text is that it centres around the

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24 “Liberation,” vimokkha. On the usu application of this term here, in (Sabb'upādāna) Pariññā 5 (S 35-60), see SD 7.4 n.
25 Skt & BHS nirvid or nirveda.
26 S 35.60/4:33 f (SD 6.17).
27 S 35.61/4:34.
28 The Pali Canon (the Theravāda scripture) was prob closed by Asoka’s time (3rd century BCE): see K R Norman, “Pāli Literature,” in Jan Gonda (ed), A History of Indian Literature 7,2, Wiesbaden, 1983:7-10.
29 On the 2 periods of the Buddha’s ministry, see SD 40a.1 (1.3).
old nibbidā formula. When the elder Upāli requests the Buddha to teach him Dharma in brief for his solitary practice (leading to his awakening), the Buddha admonishes him thus:

Upāli, whatever things that you may know, that these things do not lead to revulsion, to dispassion [letting go], to inner peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana, you should definitely take it that “This is not the Dharma, this is not the Vinaya, this is not the Teacher’s teaching.”

But, Upāli, whatever things that you may know, that these things do lead to revulsion, nibbidāya to dispassion [letting go], virāgāya to cessation (of suffering), nirodhāya to inner peace, upasamāya to direct knowledge, abhiññāya to awakening, sambodhāya to nirvana.30

3.2.2 The 4 noble truths and nibbidā. In the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (D 9), we see how the 4 noble truths are related to nibbidā. At the climax of the Sutta, when Poṭṭhapāda questions the Buddha on the ten indeterminable points (avyākata), the Buddha explains why:

“Why, bhante, has the Blessed One left them [the 10 indeterminable points]31 undeclared?”

“Because it [their declaration] is not connected to the goal; it is not connected to the Dharma; it does not belong to the fundamentals of the holy life; it does not lead to revulsion, nor to dispassion, nor to cessation (of suffering), nor to inner peace, nor to direct knowledge, nor to awakening, nor to nirvana.”32

Then, the Buddha, when further questioned by Poṭṭhapāda on what he actually teaches, declares that he teaches the 4 noble truths, and his reasons are:

Because it [their declaration] is connected to the goal; it is connected to the Dharma; it belongs to the fundamentals of the holy life; it leads to revulsion, nibbidāya to dispassion [letting go], virāgāya to cessation (of suffering), nirodhāya to inner peace, upasamāya to direct knowledge, abhiññāya

30 Etam hi upāli attha, saṁhitaṁ etāṁ dhamma, saṁhitaṁ etāṁ ādi, brahma, cariyakāṁ etāṁ nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṁvattati.

31 Kasmā bhante bhagavatā avyākatan ti. | Na h’etaṁ Poṭṭhapāda attha, saṁhitaṁ na dhamma, saṁhitaṁ na ādi, brahma, cariyakāṁ na nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya saṁvattati.

32 Kasmā bhante bhagavatā avyākatan ti. | Na h’etaṁ Poṭṭhapāda attha, saṁhitaṁ na dhamma, saṁhitaṁ na ādi, brahma, cariyakāṁ na nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya saṁvattati.
3.2.3 Commentarial explanation. The Majjhima Commentary to the Alaggadûpama Sutta (M 22) explains nibbândati and nibbidâ quite comprehensively thus:

Nibbîndati (v) means “he is discontented” (uccaṇṭhati), and here by nibbidâ (n) “the insight leading to emergence (of the path)” (vuṭṭhâna, gâmini, vipassanâ) is meant. However, the insight leading to path-emergence has many names.

1. In some places, it is called “the peak of consciousness” (saññî’agga) [D 9.17+19/1:184 ff].

2. In some places, it is “the knowledge of the fixity of reality [true nature of things] (dhamma-ţ, thiti, ūnāna).”

3. In some places, it is “the factors of the effort for purity” [ie effort for the purity of moral virtue, of mind, of view, of liberation] (pârisuddhi, padhâniy’âṅga).

4. In some places, it is “the insight that is the knowledge and vision of the path-progress” (patipadâ, ūnāna, dassana, visuddhi, padhâniy’âṅga).

5. In some places, it is “the exhaustion of thatness” [letting go of identification] (tam, mayatā pariyâdâna).34

6. In some places, it has three terms [names] (tiḥi nāmehi).

7. In some places, it has two terms (dvîhi nāmehi).

1. Here, in the Poṭṭhapâda Sutta, it refers to just this: “It is consciousness, Poṭṭhapâda, that arises first, and then knowledge” [D 9.20/1:185], thus it is said in reference to “the peak of consciousness.”

2. In the Susima Sutta [S 12.70/2:124]: “Susima, first comes the knowledge of the fixity of reality [the stability of the Dharma], then knowledge arises,” thus it is said in reference to “the knowledge of the fixity of reality” (dhamma-ţ, thiti, ūnāna).

3. In the Das’uttara Sutta [D 34.2.2(1)/3:288]: “the factor of the effort for purification by knowledge and vision of path-progress,” thus it is said in reference to “the factor of effort for purity” (pârisuddhi, padhâniy’âṅga).

4. In the Rathâ, vinîtha (Sutta) [M 24.9/1:147]: “What then, friend, is it for the sake of purification by knowledge and vision of the path-progress that the holy life in lived under the Blessed One?” thus it is said in reference to “the insight that is the knowledge and vision of the path-progress” (patipadâ, ūnāna, dassana, visuddhi, padhâniy’âṅga).

5. In the Salâyatana Vibhanga (Sutta) [M 137.20/3:220], “Bhikshus, by depending and relying on not-thatness [non-identification] (atam, mayatā), abandon and go beyond equanimity that is unified, based on unity, thus it is said in reference to “the exhaustion of thatness” [letting go of identification] (tam, mayatâ pariyâdâna).35

6. In the Paṭisambhidâ, magga [Pm 5.84/2:64]: “The desire for deliverance, the contemplation of reviewing, and the equanimity regarding formations—these dhammas are one in meaning, but only different in the letter,” thus it is called in three terms.

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33 Etam hi poṭṭhapâda attha, saṁhitaṁ etam dhamma, saṁhitaṁ etam ādi, brahma, cariyakârin etam nibbidâya virâgâya nirodhâya upasamàyya abhiśiṣyâya sambodhâya nibbânâya saṁvattati.

34 Atammayatâ, lit “not-that making,” more fully, “non-fabrication of identity.” See Sn 846b, where Comy glosses as tanhâ, diṭthi, vasena tammayo, “tammayo is that which is under the power of craving and wrong view” (SnA 2:547). See Amarao 2003 and Santikaro 1991, 1993.

35 See Atammayatâ, SD 19.3.
(7) In the Paṭṭhāna [Paṭ 1.417/1:92, 159]: “Adaptation to change-of-lineage is related to the path by proximity condition; adaptation to purification is related to the path by proximity condition,” thus it is called in two terms.

(8) But in this Alagadda Sutta [Alagaddūpama Sutta, M 22.29/1:139], the term nibbidā [revulsion] occurs as nibbindati [“he is revulsed”]. Here, in “being revulsed, he is dispassionate,” dispassion (virāga) refers to the path. Here, in “being dispassionate, he is freed,” means that he is freed through dispassion on account of the path. Thus it is spoken as the fruit (of freedom).

(MA 2:114 f; cf Vism 21.135/671)

3.2.4 Abhidhamma definition. The Vibhaṅga, in its analysis of knowledge (ñāṇā, vatthu), succinctly describes how revulsion forms the basis for seeing true reality: “When there are perception and attention accompanied by dispassion and directed to fading away of lust [dispassion], it is the wisdom that partakes of penetration (into reality)” (Vbh 330). This is spoken of each of the four dhyanas and the 4 formless attainments (Vbh 330 f).

In the closing paragraph, the sentence “[his] lust fades away [he is dispassionate]” (virājati) marks the attainment of the supramundane path (magga), that is, sainthood, when the fetters are finally eliminated. “It [the mind] is freed” (vimmutan ti) refers to the attainment of the supramundane fruition (phala). The arhat’s subsequent review knowledge (paccavekkhāna, ñāna) is shown by the phrase “there comes the knowledge” and he understands: ‘Birth is destroyed ...’.”

3.3 The Giri-m-Ānanda Sutta. In the suttas, the term nibbidā frequently occurs (as we have seen above) [2.3 n] in a stock phrase describing conditional states, including virāga (dispassion) and vimutti (freedom) (that is, cessation of suffering), leading to the attainment of nirvana, that is, “it leads to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation (of suffering), to inner peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana.”

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Dasuttara, sutte “patipadā, ŋāna, dassana, visuddhipadhāniyā angan” ti [D 34.2.2(1)/3:288] evam pārisuddhi, padhāniyā angan ti vuṭṭṭha.

Rathavinīte “kin nu kho, ṭvusso, paṭipadā, ŋānadassana, visuddh-attathām bhagavati brahma, cariyam vussati” ti [M 24.9/1:147] evam paṭipadānānaddassana visuddhi ti vuṭṭṭha.


Paṭisambhidā, magge “yā ca muñcitu, kamyatā, yā ca paṭisaṅkhārāt, yā ca saṅkhārāte fujjī, ime dharmā ēkatthā vyajjanam eva ānānaṁ ti” [Pm 137.20/2:64] evam tihi nāmehi vuṭṭṭha.


Nibbidā virājati ti ettha virāga ti maggo virāga vimuccati ti ettha virāgagena maggaṁ vimuccati ti phalaṁ kathitam. Vimuttamim vimuttam iti ŋānam hoti ti idha paccavekkhanāṁ kathithā. See SD 17.1 (3.1.2).

37 Nibbidā, sahaṭṭhitā saññāṁ, manasikāraṁ sammādācarati virāgopasāṁ hiti nibbedhaṁ, bhāginī paññāṁ.

38 Nibbidāya virāgāya nirodāya upasmāya abhiññāya saṁbodhāya nibbāṇāya saṁvattati: D 9,32,2/1:189 (SD 7.14); M 63,8+10/1:431 (SD 5.8), S 46.20/5:82 (SD 20.1(4.2.8)), 47.32/5:179 (SD 47.20b), 51.4/5:255 (SD 10.3(3.4)).
These two important terms—virāga and vimutti—are explained in the Giri-mānanda Sutta (A 10.60) as the 6th and the 7th of 10 perceptions, thus:

(6) And what, Ānanda, is the perception of fading away (virāga, saññā)?

9 Here, Ānanda, a monk who has gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty place, sits down, and having crossed his legs and keeping his body upright, considers thus:

“This is peaceful! This is sublime! That is, the stilling of all formations, the letting go of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, the letting go [dispassion], nirvana.”

This, Ānanda, is called the perception of fading away.

(7) And what, Ānanda, is the perception of cessation (niruddha, saññā)?

10 Here, Ānanda, a monk who has gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty place, sits down, and having crossed his legs and keeping his body upright, considers thus:

“This is peaceful! This is sublime! That is, the stilling of all formations, the letting go of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, the cessation, nirvana.”

This, Ānanda, is called the perception of cessation. (A 10.60/5:110 f), SD 19.16

3.4 INDRIYA, BHĀVANĀ SUTTA

3.4.1 The “learner on the path” (sekha pāṭipada), that is, a saint short of an arhat, is defined by the Indriya, bhāvanā Sutta (M 152) in terms of the cultivation of the spiritual faculties and the arising of revulsion, as follows:

And how, Ānanda, is one a learner on the path?40

(1) Here, Ānanda, when a monk sees a form with the eye, (in him) the agreeable arises, the disagreeable arises, both the agreeable-and-disagreeable [the neutral] arises.

He is troubled, ashamed, revulsed by the agreeable that has arisen, by the disagreeable that has arisen, by the agreeable-and-disagreeable that has arisen.

(2) When he hears a sound with the ear, (in him) the agreeable arises, the disagreeable arises, both the agreeable-and-disagreeable arises.

He is troubled, ashamed, revulsed by the agreeable that has arisen, by the disagreeable that has arisen, by the agreeable-and-disagreeable that has arisen.

(3) When he smells a smell with the nose, (in him) the agreeable arises, the disagreeable arises, both the agreeable-and-disagreeable arises.

He is troubled, ashamed, revulsed by the agreeable that has arisen, by the disagreeable that has arisen, by the agreeable-and-disagreeable that has arisen.


39 Sometimes rendered as “the perception of dispassion.”

40 Sekho ... pāṭipado (sometimes wr as pāṭipada): see SD 21.14 (2), where sekha means “learner” and pāṭipada is an adj meaning “of the way,” i.e., one who has entered the noble eightfold path, and bound for an awakening, referring to all the saints except the arhat who is an adept (asekha). Here Ee & Se give an abridged reading, but Ce gives in full, which I follow. The sekha pāṭipada is the theme of Sekha S (M 53/1:353-359), SD 21.14 (2).

41 See SID: manāpāmanāpa.
(4) When he tastes a taste with the tongue, (in him) the agreeable arises, the disagreeable arises, both the agreeable-and-disagreeable arises.

He is troubled, ashamed, revulsed by the agreeable that has arisen, by the disagreeable that has arisen, by the agreeable-and-disagreeable that has arisen.

(5) When he feels a touch with the body, (in him) the agreeable arises, the disagreeable arises, both the agreeable-and-disagreeable arises.

He is troubled, ashamed, revulsed by the agreeable that has arisen, by the disagreeable that has arisen, by the agreeable-and-disagreeable that has arisen.

(6) When he cognizes a mind-object with the mind, (in him) the agreeable arises, the disagreeable arises, both the agreeable-and-disagreeable arises.

He is troubled, ashamed, revulsed by the agreeable that has arisen, by the disagreeable that has arisen, by the agreeable-and-disagreeable that has arisen.

This, Ānanda, is how one is a learner on the path. (M 152,10/3:300 f), SD 17.13

3.4.2 This Sutta passage [3.4.1] refers the learner (sekha), that is, a saint short of an arhat. Bodhi, in his translation of the Indriya,bhāvanā Sutta, notes: “Although the sekha has already entered upon the way to final deliverance, he is still prone to subtle states of liking, aversion, and dull indifference in regard to sense objects. He experiences these, however, as impediments to his progress, and thus becomes repelled, humiliated, and disgusted by them” (M:NB 1366 n1357).

3.4.3 The Indriya,bhāvanā Sutta instructs how the good worldling (kalyāṇa puthujjana) and the learner on the path (sekha pāṭipada) should cultivate, and how the arhat “cultivates,” the sense-faculties when sense-experiences occur. All this is summarized in this table (the details of (2) have been given above):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The practitioner</th>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Cultivation of the faculties</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) The supreme cultivation of the faculties in the noble one’s discipline (ariyassa vinayā anuttarā indriya, bhāvanā): a good worldling</td>
<td>When a monk (experiences a sense-object with (the sense-organ), (in him) the agreeable arises, the disagreeable arises, the agreeable-and-disagreeable [the neutral] arises.</td>
<td>He notes the sensation, and regards it as “conditioned, gross, and dependently arisen.” And he notes its momentariness or impermanence. [§§4-9]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) The learner on the path (sekha pāṭipada): [3.4.1] the stream-winner, once-returner, or non-returner</td>
<td>“He is troubled, ashamed, disgusted” by the sensation (whether they are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral). [§10]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) The noble one developed in the cultivation of the faculties (ariya bhāvita indriya, bhāvanā): the adept or arhat</td>
<td>He is a master of the 5 perceptions, applying them “as he wishes.” [42] [§§11-16]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 The 5 perceptions (See Indriya,bhāvanā Sutta, M 152 @ SD 17.13)

42 Here the 5 perceptions are powers accomplished in the arhat. Elsewhere, the Buddha teaches them to his unawakened disciples as a way to overcome the three unwholesome roots (greed, hate and delusion). See Indriya,bhāvanā S, M 152.11n & Table 4 in SD 17.13.
3.5 Ways of Looking at the World. From this table, we can see that the good worldly, that is, an ordinary follower (monastic or lay) who has some faith or wisdom in Dharma practice, should regard all sense-experiences as being impermanent; that is, he should constantly practise the perception of impermanence (anicca, sañña).\(^{43}\) The learner on the path, that is, all the saints, short of the full-fledged arhat, should or would be “troubled, ashamed, disgusted” at all sense-experiences [2.2]. In the case of the arhat (including the Buddha), however, as “masters of the five perceptions,” would:

1. direct his lovingkindness towards disagreeable objects, or regard them as physical elements;
2. direct the thought of foulness towards agreeable objects, or regard them as impermanent;
3. pervade both with lovingkindness, or regard both as physical elements;
4. direct the thought of foulness towards both, or regard both as physical elements; or
5. be neither glad nor sad, but abide in equanimity regarding both mindfully and clearly comprehending.

In short, the arhat does not really feel “troubled, ashamed, disgusted.”

However, in the Kevaḍḍha Sutta (D 11), the Buddha himself uses these same words in disapproving of psychic exhibitions before the unordained: “I am troubled, shamed, revulsed (regarding them)” (āṭṭiyāti harāyati jigucchāti).\(^{44}\) Evidently, the Buddha is emphasizing his disapproval in the strongest terms. It is not that the Buddha is “troubled” by these sentiments, but it is his way of communicating his wisdom on our level. There are at least three ways of understanding the import of the stock phrase, aṭṭiyati harāyati jigucchāti [2.2]:

1. the Buddha is expressing his perception of sense-experiences in a language best understood by the unawakened, but his attitude is that of true equanimity; or
2. that the reciters are simply expressing his disapproval in conventional terms, or
3. it is natural that such sentiments would naturally arise reflecting the occasion, but the saint, knowing them to be impermanent, is unaffected by them, unlike a worldly.

In any case, the arhat is always in control of his feelings.\(^{45}\)

3.6 Nibbidā and the 3 Characteristics

3.6.1 The Vitakka,saṇṭhāna Sutta (M 20) gives a good idea of the meaning of the stock phrase “troubled, ashamed, disgusted” (aṭṭiyāti harāyati jigucchāti):

Bhikshus, just as a young man or woman, well-dressed and fond of ornaments, would feel troubled, ashamed, disgusted\(^{46}\) by a carcass of a snake, a dog, or a human hung around his or her neck, even so should the monk get rid of the bad unwholesome thoughts by examining the dangers of those thoughts, thus: “These thoughts are unwholesome, they are blameworthy, they bring suffering.” \(^{47}\)

Evidently, from this passage, we can deduce that feeling “troubled [sickened]” (aṭṭiyāti) is a practitioner’s or saint’s response to the unwholesomeness of the thought; “ashamed” (harāyati), to its blameworthiness; and “disgusted (with)” (jigucchāti), to its resulting in suffering. [2.2]

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\(^{43}\) See eg (Anicca) Cakkhu S (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

\(^{44}\) See Kevaḍḍha S (D 11,5 +7/1:213), SD 1.7.

\(^{45}\) See SD 1.7 (3). On “The arhats are in full control of their feelings,” see SD 17.3(7).

\(^{46}\) Aṭṭiyāti harāyati jigucchāti (2.2).
We can however go further in our reflections on the stock phrase *aṭṭiyati harāyati jigucchati*, (“he is troubled, ashamed, disgusted (with)”) and nibbidā, that is, seeing their connection in terms of the three characteristics. The Buddha often says that he is “troubled, ashamed, disgusted” with worldly things. On a simple level, as unawakened beings, we can benefit in a profound spiritual way by examining reality in this manner.

3.6.2 From Table 3.4 (above), we can see that the good worldling (*kalyāṇa puthujjana*) and the learner on the path (*sekha pāṭipada*) should cultivate, and see how the arhat “cultivates,” the sense-faculties when sense-experiences occur. The good worldling, that is, an ordinary follower (monastic or lay) who has some faith or wisdom in Dharma practice, should reflect all sense-experiences as being *impermanent*; that is, they should constantly practise the perception of impermanence (*anicca, saññā*). The learner on the path, that is, all the saints, short of the full-fledged arhat, should or would be “troubled, ashamed, disgusted” at all sense-experiences. The worldling however can still experience these responses in the practice of the perception of impermanence.

3.6.3 The world is *impermanent*, and so are its pleasures. In fact, we run after pleasures because we are constantly pursued by feelings we dislike. Jilted by the momentariness of pleasure, we are *troubled* (*aṭṭiyati*), being unable to really find what we seek, that is, lasting pleasure. When we understand this pervading nature of the painfulness of momentary pleasure, we are also *troubled* knowing that others too would suffer similar pain, chasing after pleasures that can never last.

That which is impermanent is necessarily *unsatisfactory*, giving satisfaction at best only momentarily, which, even then, we only enjoy if we are mindful of the moment. And being mindful of the moment, we notice that pleasurable feeling is always attended by its darker side: *painful feeling*. They go together. The wisdom of this pervading unsatisfactoriness, and our erstwhile chasing after it or our attachment to it, becomes a laughing matter of cosmic proportions: it is an irony, since what we took to be delightful is not satisfying after all. Understandably, the wise feel *ashamed* (*harāyati*) about all this.

3.6.4 We clearly have no control over what is impermanent and unsatisfactory. They have no *abiding entity* that we could put a finger on: things are not what they appear to be, and we have been superimposing our own biases, views and hopes on all our sense-experiences.

When we try to give up both pleasure and pain, we find ourselves suffocating in the ensuing boredom of neutral feeling. When we finally realize that we have been pulled and pushed about by our craving and ignorance, we finally decide to have nothing to do with them any more: we are simply *disgusted* (*jigucchati*) at feeling. We are beginning to see the true reality of non-self, that there is no abiding entity, no essence whatever in the world.

Whatever exists must change; whatever changes is unsatisfactory; whatever changes and is unsatisfactory is without an unchanging self.

4 *Nibbidā* and the 7 awakening-factors

In this section, we will go on to examine a few Sutta passages that show how *nibbidā* arises in spiritual training.

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47 See eg (*Anicca* Cakkhu S (S 25.1), SD 16.7.)
4.1 The Upanisā Sutta. The Upanisā Sutta (S 12.23) is a remarkable but rarely quoted discourse in the Nidāna Samyutta of the Saṁyutta Nikāya. It gives an insight into how suffering leads to faith, and so on through nibbidā to freedom, that is, the freedom cycle or supramundane dependent arising:

faith (saddhā) is the immediate cause of joy; joy is the immediate cause of zest; zest is the immediate cause of tranquility; tranquility is the immediate cause of happiness; happiness is the immediate cause of concentration; concentration is the immediate cause of knowledge and vision of things as they really are; knowledge and vision of things as they really are is the immediate cause of revulsion; revulsion is the immediate cause of dispassion (letting go of lust); dispassion is the immediate cause of freedom; freedom is the immediate cause of the destruction (of the influxes).

The lesson of the Upanisā Sutta is a powerful one: suffering is a great teacher, if we are willing to learn. The lesson of suffering is clear: nothing of this world is totally satisfactory. The reason for this unsatisfactoriness is that all things of the world are impermanent. This understanding arouses faith in spiritual development, because we are not to be blamed for our failures, nor are others to be blamed: it is the nature of reality, that there is nothing in this world that is worth clinging to. Through wise faith, the mind becomes more positive and wholesome, becoming progressively more happy, so that it becomes more calm and concentrated. The calm and concentrated mind is able to see true reality, that is, “the knowledge and vision of reality is the condition for revulsion.” When you know and see the world as it really is, you are no more cheated nor troubled by it: the joy arising from this is characteristic of spiritual freedom. In short, this is how the wheel of dependent arising is reversed, turning into the dependent ending of suffering, leading to freedom.

4.2 The 9 Greatly Helpful States

4.2.1 The Das’uttara Sutta (D 34), in its section on nines, presents nibbidā in a slightly different context: as the seventh of “the 9 states of great help (towards awakening)” (nava dhammā bahu, kāra), that is, the nine conditions rooted in wise attention (yoniso, manasikāra, mūlakā dhammā), namely,

(1) through wise attention, joy arises
(2) when we are joyful, zest arises
(3) when we are zestful, our body is calmed
(4) when the body is calmed, we know happiness

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49 “Immediate cause” or “proximate cause,” upanisā. See Upanisā S (S 12.23/2:29-32) & SD 6.12 (1).
50 “Zest.” pīti, also as “joy,” ie “joyful interest and energy.”
51 See eg (Moggallāna) Pacalā S (A 7.58), SD 4.11.
52 Yathā, bhūta, añña, dassanûpanisā nibbidā.
(5) the happy mind becomes concentrated 

(6) when the mind is concentrated, we know and see things as they really are 

(7) knowing and seeing things as they really are, we are revulsed 

(8) being revulsed, (our) lust fades away 

(9) through the fading away of lust, (the mind) is freed

Clearly, these “9 states of great help,” although differently worded and arranged, are very similar to the 7 awakening-factors (satta bojjhaṅga), namely:

The awakening-factor of mindfulness \( \text{sati} \)

The awakening-factor of mental investigation \( \text{dhamma,vicaya} \)

The awakening-factor of effort \( \text{viriya} \)

The awakening-factor of zest \( \text{pīti} \)

The awakening-factor of tranquillity \( \text{passaddhi} \)

The awakening-factor of mental stillness \( \text{samādhi} \)

The awakening-factor of equanimity \( \text{upekkhā} \)

The 9-state system closes with (8) fading away of lust (virāga) and (9) freedom (vimutti). Both these states are implicit in the awakening-factor of equanimity (upekkhā), the on-looking mind of true wisdom. Before the moment of awakening, this equanimity is still tinged with some level of aversion or disgust, but the awakened mind itself is the mirror-like wisdom of true emptiness, reflecting only what is before it but untouched by it, illusion-free and delusion-free.

The 9 greatly helpful states & the 7 awakening-factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The 9 greatly helpful states</th>
<th>The 7 awakening-factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Wise attention ( \text{yoniso manasikāra} )</td>
<td>(1) Mindfulness ( \text{sati} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Joy ( \text{pāmujja} )</td>
<td>(2) Mental investigation ( \text{dhamma,vicaya} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Zest ( \text{pīti} )</td>
<td>(3) Effort ( \text{viriya} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Bodily calm ( \text{passaddha,kāya} )</td>
<td>(4) Zest ( \text{pīti} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Happiness ( \text{sukha,citta} )</td>
<td>(5) Tranquillity ( \text{passaddhi} )</td>
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<tr>
<td>(5) Mental stillness ( \text{samādhi} )</td>
<td>(6) Mental stillness ( \text{samādhi} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Insight into reality ( \text{vipassanā} )</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(7) Revulsion ( \text{nibbidā} )</td>
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<tr>
<td>(8) Dispassion ( \text{virāga} )</td>
<td>(7) Equanimity ( \text{upekkhā} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) Freedom ( \text{vimutti} )</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2.3: The 9 greatly helpful states & the 7 awakening-factors

The awakening-factors approach begins with mindfulness (sati), or what we today call “meditation.” “Mindfulness,” however, is more specific than “meditation,” a modern translation of bhāvanā.

See Āhāra S (S 46.51), SD 7.15 & Anīvaraṇa S (S 46.38b), SD 3.2(5).

Also elsewhere called vimokkha (eg Sabb’upādāna Pariṇāṇa S, S 35.60/4:33 f, & Sabb’upādāna Pariyādāna S 1, S 35.61/4:34) or vossagga (eg Saṅgīti S, D 33.1.11(10)/3:226).

On “emptiness” here, see eg Cūḷa Suññata S (M 121), SD 11.3 & Mahā Suññata S (M 122), SD 11.4.
4.2.5 [See Table 4.2.3] The “9-state” method starts with (1) wise attention (yoniso manasikāra), which is a type of mindfulness practice, best summarized as the application of the three characteristics (ti,lakkhāna), especially the first, the characteristic of impermanence, to the meditation object or the meditation sign. On that level, the awakening-factor approach applies mental investigation (dhamma, vicaya), the examination of mental states, or the practice of satipatthana, that is, properly focussing our attention on the body, on feelings, on the mind, or on dharmas as taught in the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas (D 22; M 10).

In the “9 state” method, wise attention (resulting in not being oppressed by any nimitta) leads to (2) joy (pāmujja or pāmojja), that is, a wholesome delight that lasts conditioned by our meditation. This joy (in the nine states) and this effort (in the awakening-factors) lead to (3) zest (pīti), a joyful interest in our enterprise, that is, our meditation here. This zest, much more profound than the initial joy, too, is conditioned by our meditation and is impermanent. However, unlike worldly zest (or better, rapture), the impact of pīti is so profound that even its memory has a wholesome calming effect long after the experience is gone.

In the awakening-factors, mental investigation is followed by effort (viriya): noting as they really are the various states that arise, we is not troubled by negative thoughts and distractions, and so our energies are progressively focussed. This is the energy of joyful interest (pīti) that sustains our mindfulness and meditation. In other words, this joy is already present before such effort could arise.

From here on, the rest of stages in both methods are remarkably identical except for their number and wording. Zest, in the nine states, leads us to enjoy a somewhat body-based joy, called (4) bodily calm (passaddha,kaya), which in turn is the basis for a subtler mind-centred happiness (sukha,citta). The awakening-factor system calls the former stage tranquillity (passaddhi): in fact, the words are effectively synonymous, and includes mental happiness. In both systems, this is the basis for (5) mental stillness (or concentration) (samādhi) (explicit in the 9 states, and implicit in the 7 awakening-factors), which allows us (6) to see things as they really are (yatthā,bhūta,ñāna,dassana), that is, insight into reality (vipassanā).

With our coloured glasses and blinkers removed we are at first (7) utterly revulsed (nibbinda) at true reality, so that we simply decide not to have anything to do with it: we are simply disenchansted by the world; we see beyond all the illusions and falsehood and no more wants to be cheated by it. The best historical example of this is, of course, that of the Bodhisattva Siddhattha’s revulsion with the world as dramatized in the story of the four sights or “divine messengers” (deva,dūta).

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56 A “meditation object” (nimitta), also called ārammana in the Commentaries, refers to a chosen specific mode of meditation, eg the breath, as taught, eg, in Ānāpāna,sati S (M 118), SD 7.13. A “meditation sign” (nimitta) refers usu to an intruding thought or distraction that is unwholesome (rooted in greed, hate, or delusion), as described, eg, in Vitakkas,saṁvega S (M 20), SD 1.6. On bhāvanā, see SD 15.1.

57 See Satipaṭṭhāna Ss, SD 13.3.1d & (Nimitta) Jāta,rūpa S (A 1.100/1:253-258), SD 19.11 Intro.


59 D 22/2:290-315; M 10/1:55-63 (SD 13). The Kāya,gata,sati S (M 119), SD 12.21.

60 Pāmojja: D 1:72, 196; S 3:134, 4:78, 351; 5:156, 398; A 3:21, 5:1 f, 311 f, 339, 349 Sn 256. Pāmojja (Skt prāmodya): D 2:214. 3:288; M 1:37, 98; S 1:203, 2:30,5:157; Dh 376, 381; Pm 1:177; Dhs 9, 86.

61 Cf yathā,bhūta,ñāna,dassana in Analayo, From Craving to Liberation, 2009:124-140.

62 The Bodhisattva’s experience here is usu described as samvega [4]. See esp Deva,dūta S (M 130), SD 2.23.
The 9-state system goes on to list (8) dispassion or fading away of lust (virāga) and finally (9) freedom (vimutti). Both these states are implicit in the awakening-factor of equanimity (upekkhā), that is, the on-looking mind of true wisdom. Before the moment of awakening itself, this equanimity is still tinged with some level of aversion or disgust, but in the awakened mind, this is the mirror-like wisdom of true emptiness, reflecting only what is before it but untouched by it, illusion-free and delusion-free, ever-ready to respond in compassion where needed.

4.2.6 Both the 9 states and the 7 awakening-factors progressively bring us to awakening. Apparently, while the 9 states initially focus on “joy” (pāmojja), the goal is clearly that of “wisdom” (paññā) or “insight” (vipassanā), that is, “seeing things as they really are.” The 7 awakening-factors, on the other hand, constitute the “calmness” (samatha) approach. It is interesting to note that in both cases, “zest” (pīti), that is, dhyāna or mental absorption (jhāna), is present.

This is understandable as the early teachings do not differentiate meditation as samatha and vipassanā, both being varying aspects of the same mental cultivation process. While discourses like the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta (S 25.1) would exemplify the “nine-state” approach to awakening, the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas (D 22; M 10) famously describe the “awakening-factor” approach to spiritual freedom.

4.2.7 How the awakening-factors function is presented in the viveka, nissita (“dependent on solitude”) formula, where “solitude” (viveka) is placed between upekkhā and virāga, as in this very common pericope that ends the Ānāpāna, sati Sutta (M 118):

[88] 41 And how, monks, are the 7 awakening-factors cultivated and often developed to bring true knowledge and freedom to perfection?

42 Here, monks,

(1) a monk cultivates the awakening-factor of mindfulness that is founded on solitude,

---

63 Also elsewhere called vimokkha (eg Sabb’upādāna Pariṇāṇa Sutta, S 35.60/4:33 f, & Sabb’upādāna Pariyādāna Sutta 1, S 35.61/4:34) or vossagga (eg Saṅgīti S, D 33.1.11(10)/3:226).

64 It is important to note that the “equanimity” here is neither worldly nonchalance (gehasita upekkhā, M 137/-3:217-220; S 36.23/4:232; Vbh 382; MA 3:731; SA 3:84), nor “indifferent feeling” (adukkham-asukhā vedanā, D 34/3:275; M 59/1:399; S 12.32/2:53, 12.51/2:83, 22.79/3:86, 87, 4:114 f, 207, 223 f; A 3.61/1:173, 8.11/4:442; It 52/46, 53/47), but is “centredness” (tatra, majjhhattā, Nm 1:144; Pm A 1:190; Vism 14.153/466 f), a quality of all pure consciousness and a moral quality of the formations-group (saṅkhāra-k, khandha).

65 On “emptiness” here, see eg Cūḷa Suññata Sutta (M 121), SD 11.3 & Mahā Suññata Sutta (M 122), SD 11.4.

66 S 25.1/3:225 (SD 16.7).

67 D 22/2:290-315; M 10/1:55-63 @ SD 13.

68 See Viveka, nissita, SD 20.4.

69 On the awakening-factors (bojjhāga), see SD 10.15 & the viveka, nissita formula, see SD 20.4. See also Gethin 2001:162-168.

70 This closing section (M 118.41-44/3:88) is a pericope = Ānanda S 1 (S 54.13-14/5:333) = Ānanda S 2 (S 54.14/-5:335).

71 Here “solitude” (viveka) (or seclusion) has special reference to the overcoming of the 5 mental hindrances (pañca nivaranañā). This whole phrase, beginning with “dependent on solitude”—viveka, nissitaṁ virāga, nissitaṁ nirodha, nissitaṁ vossagga, nissitaṁ vossagga, parināmim dhamma, vicaya, sambojjaṁ—already is called the viveka, nissita formula. See Gethin 2003:162-168. According to Paṭisambahidā, magga, there are 5 kinds of “solitude” (viveka), i.e. overcoming of the hindrances and the defilements: (1) solitude through suppression (vikkhambhāna viveka); (2) solitude through the substitution of opposite or displacement by opposites (tad-āṅga viveka); (3) solitude through cutting off (samuccheda viveka); (4) solitude through tranquillization (patipassaddhi viveka); and (5) solitude through escape (nissaraṇa viveka) (Pm 1:27, 2:219-224; Vism 13.12/410, 22.110/693; DhSA 12, 164). See also Satipaṭṭhāna Ss, SD 13.1 (4.2.3).
dependent on fading away (of lust),\textsuperscript{72} dependent on cessation (of suffering),\textsuperscript{73} ripening in letting go (of defilements).\textsuperscript{74}

(2) He cultivates the awakening-factor of dharma-investigation...
(3) He cultivates the awakening-factor of effort...
(4) He cultivates the awakening-factor of joy...
(5) He cultivates the awakening-factor of tranquillity...
(6) He cultivates the awakening-factor of concentration...
(7) He cultivates the awakening-factor of equanimity that is dependent on solitude, dependent on fading away (of lust), dependent on cessation (of suffering), ripening in letting go (of defilements).\textsuperscript{75}

(M 118,41-41/3:88), SD 7.13

Considering the juxtaposition of solitude (viveka) and equanimity (upekkhā) in the viveka, nissita formula, and the close connection between the nine states and the awakening-factors, it is obvious that viveka is here a synonym of the fading away of lust (virāga), arising from nibbidā. In fact, some areas of nibbidā and of viveka overlap, especially when viveka is taken to mean “solitude,” that is, detachment from the world.

\textbf{4.2.8} This same teaching, differently worded, is found in the (Bojjhaṅga) Nibbidā Sutta (S 46.20), where the Buddha says,

\textbf{SD 20.1(4.2.8)}

\textbf{(Bojjhaṅga) Nibbidā Sutta}

The (Awakening-factor) Discourse on Revulsion | S 46.20
\textbf{S 5.2.2.10}, Saṁyutta Nikāya 5, Mahā Vagga 2, Bojjhaṅga Saṁyutta 2, Gilāna Vagga 10
Theme: The awakening-factors conduce to the awakening process

1 Bhikshus, these seven awakening-factors, when cultivated, often developed, lead to utter revulsion, to dispassion, to ending, to peace (stilling), to direct knowledge, to self-awareness, to nirvana.

2 What are the seven?
   (1) the awakening-factor that is mindfulness, \textit{sati sambojjhaṅga}
   (2) the awakening-factor that is dharma-discrimination, \textit{dhamma, vicaya sambojjhaṅga}
   (3) the awakening-factor that is effort, \textit{viriya sambojjhaṅga}
   (4) the awakening-factor that is zest, \textit{piti sambojjhaṅga}
   (5) the awakening-factor that is tranquillity, \textit{passaddhi sambojjhaṅga}
   (6) the awakening-factor that is concentration, \textit{samādhi sambojjhaṅga}
   (7) the awakening-factor that is equanimity. \textit{upekkhā sambojjhaṅga}

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Virāga}, also tr as “dispassion.”
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Nirodha}, ie, “cessation of suffering.”
\textsuperscript{74} MA says that there are 2 kinds of letting go or relinquishment (of suffering) (vossagga): “giving up” (pariccāga), ie the abandonment of defilements, and “entering into” (pakkhandana), ie culminating in nirvana. Gethin notes that this phrase is not unique to the 7 bojjhaṅgā, but is also found in connection with the factors of the noble eightfold path, the indriyā and balā (2001:162 f). This formula shows that each bojjhaṅga is to be developed successively “as dependent on solitude, fading away of lust [dispassion], and cessation” (Gethin 2001:166).
3 These, bhikshus, are the seven awakening-factors, when cultivated, often developed, lead to utter revulsion, to dispassion, to ending, to peace [stilling], to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana.\(^76\)

— evaṁ —

4.2.9 We even have a “lost” Buddha-word recorded in the Netti-p,\(^\text{p}karaṇa, where the Buddha admonishes the monk Rādha, thus:

Rādha, look not longingly to past form, nor delight in future form; in the present form [in the form that now arises], practise the way to revulsion, fading away (of lust), ending (of suffering), giving up (of ignorance), and letting go (defilements)." \(^77\)

4.2.10 The Netti reminds us, by invoking the Yamak'ovāda Sutta (S 22.85),\(^78\) that although only form (rūpa) is mentioned here, the text implies all the other four aggregates (feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness) (Nett 173/30). The point is very clear: revulsion is intimately connected with the awakening to the true reality of the world.

5 Nibbidā, samvega and pasāda

5.1 If nibbidā refers to a negative side of spiritual realization, atammayatā (non-identification with things) reflects its positive aspect [2.3]. The difference between the two near-synonyms is a subtle one, and is really a matter of emphasis. While nibbidā emphasizes the seeing or knowing (vindati) of the negative aspects of reality, that makes us let go of that reality [2.1], atammayatā focusses on the letting-go of or non-identifying with such virtual realities so that we are truly freed. Both concepts are founded on the notion of letting-go.

From the dependent ending formula found in the Upanisā Sutta (S 12.23) [4.1], it is helpful to note that suffering and states of joy both arise before nibbidā (and ayammayatā). The realization that our suffering is not worth it, we turn to higher things, and in due course, through inner calm and clarity, realize a higher happiness and pleasure.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Mattā, sukha, pariccagā} & \quad \text{One should give up a lesser happiness} \\
\text{passe ce vipulaṁ sukhaṁ} & \quad \text{if one sees a greater happiness.} \\
\text{caje mattā sukhaṁ dhiro} & \quad \text{Let the wise let go of the lesser happiness,} \\
\text{sampassaṁ vipulaṁ sukhaṁ} & \quad \text{for the sake of a greater happiness.} \quad (\text{Dh 290})
\end{align*}
\]

That higher happiness and pleasure come from the taste of dhyana, or even from the zest or joyful energy that comes with the peace of mindfulness practice balanced with lovingkindness.\(^79\)

As such, both nibbidā and atammayatā are supremely empowering spiritual forces within ourselves that arise from the knowledge and vision of true reality [2.3]. In the early stages of our mindfulness

\[^{76}\text{For details, see (Bojjhaṅga) Sīla S (S 46.3), SD 10.1.}\]

\[^{77}\text{Atīte Rādha, rūpe anapekkho hohi, anāgataṁ rūpaṁ mā abhinandi paccuppannassa rūpassa nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya cāgāya patinissaggaṁ patīpojja. (qu in Nett 173/30). The last 2 parenthetical amplifications are my own.}\]

\[^{78}\text{S 22.85/3:113 (SD 26.14). More specifically, Nett says, “Because all the 5 aggregates in oneself have a single [common] characteristic in the sense of being the victim of a murderer.” (id)}\]

\[^{79}\text{On how not knowing such higher pleasures leads us to cyclic pains, see SD 19.13 (7.5): Substance independence.}\]
training, we are empowered by joy, or more specifically, a “bright joy” \((\textit{pasāda})\),\(^{80}\) which may arise through mere faith or through discriminating wisdom.\(^{81}\) This profound joy may arise, for example, from hearing a very inspiring teaching, meeting a truly spiritual person, or being in a very peaceful place, being surrounded by beautiful natural scenery, or looking up at a clear cloudless moonless night sky, a dome of twinkling stars.

5.2 \textit{Sāṁvega}

5.2.1 \textbf{Religious experience} can also arise when we are faced with “life-and-death” situations or near-death experiences, such as those experiences recounted in the story of Siddhattha’s 4 sights.\(^{82}\) Such a religious experience profoundly jolts us, at least momentarily, into facing true reality, so that we ask ourselves the fundamental questions of life: what is my real purpose in life, what is life about, what happens to me after death? And so on. Such thoughts are often powerful enough to move us to seek satisfying answers or at least to lead more selfless lives. This is what motivated Siddhattha to leave home and seek awakening. The religious experience is called \textit{sāṁvega}.

5.2.2 There are texts that try to capture the feeling of samvega. The \textit{Udaya Sutta} (S 7.12), for example, evokes the crushing humdrum of the repetitive cycle of life:

\begin{verbatim}
Again and again, they sow the seeds;  \hspace{1cm} Punappunām c'eva vapanti bijaṁ
Again and again, down comes the rain;\(^{83}\)  \hspace{1cm} punappunām vassati deva,rājā
Again and again, the farmers plough the fields;  \hspace{1cm} punappunām khetanā kasanti kassakā
Again and again, the land yields grain;  \hspace{1cm} punappunām aṅñāram upeti rāṭṭham
Again and again, the beggars beg;  \hspace{1cm} punappunām yācakā yācayanti
Again and again, the master givers give;  \hspace{1cm} punappunām dāna,patiدادanti
Again and again, when the master givers’ given,
Again and again, they find a place in heaven;
Again and again, the milkers milk the cows;
Again and again, the calf goes to its mother;
Again and again, one struggles and suffers;
Again and again, the foolish finds the womb;
Again and again, he is born and he dies;
Again and again, they take him to the cemetery.
But when one has found the path to no more rebirth,
One great in wisdom, is not born again and again!
\end{verbatim}

5.2.3 The Dhammapada preserves a verse that hints at samvega, especially in its first line:

\begin{center}
\textit{Jigacchā paramā rogā} \hspace{1cm} \textit{Hunger is the greatest of diseases;}
\textit{sāṅkhārā paramā dukhā} \hspace{1cm} \textit{conditioned states are the greatest ill:}
\textit{etam ñātvā yathā,bhūtaṁ} \hspace{1cm} \textit{having known this as true reality,}
\textit{nibbānam paramā sukhaṁ} \hspace{1cm} \textit{nirvana is the highest happiness.} \hspace{1cm} \textit{(Dh 203)}
\end{center}

\(^{80}\) On the importance of joy in meditation, see “A pleasure that is wholesome” @ SD 10.10 (3).

\(^{81}\) See eg \textit{(Anicca) Cakkhu S} (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

\(^{82}\) See \textit{Deva,dūta S} (M 130), SD 2.23 (2).

\(^{83}\) \textit{Puna-p,punām vassati deva,rājā}, lit “again and again the rain-gods rain down.”
We go through the daily ritual of eating so often that we rarely notice or care about how it affects our bodies, that too little or too much of it can cause ill-health, disease, even death. We almost never question why we should ever eat or eat so often. The urge to preserve life keeps us in the rut of eating: even in the midst of a great battle or a busy business life or even when doing nothing, we have to take time off to eat.

5.2.4 We may not see our constant need for food as a problem, until when we find that certain kinds of food do not satisfy us, or at certain times we are simply unable to eat even when we need to. A medieval Jewish sage was moved to say, “I am fed up with being hungry again and again, and I hunger after final satiety.” Nyanaponika, in his booklet on “The Four Nutriments of Life,” reflects:

This is the suffering inherent in the very function of eating, though mostly hidden by the habituation to this most elementary feature of routine life. The concrete suffering and pain involved in the search for food and its acquisition, is obvious enough to all and this misery was, is and will be life’s constant companion. There is the mute suffering in the animal world where “devouring each other is the law” (and man joining in it by even rearing animals for food); we also know of primitive man’s fight for pasture land (basically the same as modern man’s wars for “world markets”); we also know of the pangs of hunger among the poor, and of starving children the world over. And though the resources for feeding humanity have grown considerably in our days, man still has not controlled famine, even where it would be in his power to do so; and all progress in the field of food-production threatens to be dwarfed by the rapid growth of world population. This problem looms large on the horizon of present-day humanity and may well become desperate if the disparity between available food and increasing population reaches a critical point. Should that critical point be reached, we do not know what dire consequences may follow from that situation, unless a united mankind can solve the problem by concerted action and peaceful means. Hence, also for mankind’s future, what the Dhamma teachers of old said remains true: that the search for food (āhāra,pariyetṭhi) is an ever-present source of suffering (vattamāna dukkha) and as such it can stir man’s sense of urgency (saṁvega) when he considers, in the light of “nutriment,” man’s own nature, his incessant needs and his situation in the world. (1981:3)

6 The pervasiveness of nibbidā

6.1 ALLUSIONS TO NIBBIDĀ. Practising Buddhist, especially the forest monks and recluse nuns, generally agree that nibbidā refers to a very powerful spiritual experience. There are several points in the suttas which suggest that the meaning of nibbidā is something quite strong. Here are some examples:

84 Abraham ben Chisdai, in Ben-hamelekh we-hanasir (The Prince and the Ascetic). This is an old Hebrew version of the “Barlaam and Joasaph” story which unwittingly carried the main features of the Buddha’s life story through a major part of the medieval world. The Hebrew version has several distinct traces not only of the Buddha’s life story, but also of Buddhist ideas, like the one quoted above. Only a comparison of the numerous versions of the “Barlaam and Joasaph” story could decide on whether these ideas were part of the tradition and common to other versions, or whether they originated in the Hebrew author’s mind. This is from Nyanaponika 1981.

85 On saṁvega, further see SD 9(7f); on pasāda, see further SD 9(7h).
6.1.1 **The Vitakka, saṇṭhāna Sutta** (M 20) gives 5 methods on stilling the unquiet mind during meditation,\(^{86}\) the fourth of which is relevant here, that is, one which might be called “aversion therapy,” thus:

If, bhikshus, while the monk is paying attention to a different meditation sign, and there still arises in him bad unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate or delusion, then he should examine the dangers (ādinava) of those thoughts, thus: “These thoughts are unwholesome, they are blameworthy, they bring suffering.”\(^ {87}\)

Then the bad unwholesome thoughts are eliminated and disappear. By their elimination, the mind thus stands firm internally, settles down, becomes unified and concentrated.

**Parable of the well-dressed person.** Bhikshus, just as a man or a woman, young, well-dressed and fond of ornaments, would feel troubled, ashamed, disgusted\(^ {88}\) by a carcass of a snake, a dog, or a human hung around his or her neck, even so should the monk get rid of the bad unwholesome thoughts by examining the dangers of those thoughts, thus: “These thoughts are unwholesome, they are blameworthy, they bring suffering.”

Then the bad unwholesome thoughts are eliminated and disappear. By their elimination, the mind thus stands firm internally, settles down, becomes unified and concentrated.

(M 20.4/1:119 f), SD 1.6

As we have earlier noted [3.6], this passage gives a clear hint that *attiyāti* refers to a practitioner’s response to the unwholesomeness of a thought, *harāyati* to its blameworthiness, and *jigucchati* to its resulting in suffering [2.3]. Although there is no mention of nibbidā here, it is clearly implied.

6.1.2 **The Putta, maṁsa Sutta** (S 12.63). Another simile for the experience of nibbidā—that of when we understand the nature of sense-contact “as it really is” (*yathā, bhūtaṇi*), as “food” for consciousness—is found in the Putta, maṁsa Sutta, where sense-contacts (*phassa*) are said to be like a flayed cow painfully stung by bugs and insects no matter where it stands.\(^ {89}\) Although the Sutta does not mention nibbidā, it is implicitly describing such an experience.

6.1.3 **The (Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta** (A 7.46) describes 7 perceptions as mindfulness practices that can lead us to “the deathless” (nirvana). The first of these 7 perceptions is that of foulness (*asubha*-saññā),\(^ {90}\) regarding which the Buddha declares:

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\(^{86}\) Briefly, the 5 methods are: (1) attending to a different meditation object; (2) examining the dangers of the unwholesome thought; (3) simply disregarding the negative thought; (4) analysing the thought; and (5) sheer determination. See SD 1.6.

\(^{87}\) This method was used by the Bodhisattva as recorded in *Dvedhā, vitakka Sutta* (M 19.3-5). Reflecting on the unworthiness of the bad thoughts arouses a sense of shame (*hiri*); reflecting on their dangerous consequences arouses the fear of bad karma (*ottappa*) (A 1:51; It 36).

\(^{88}\) *Attiyāti harāyati jigucchati* [2.3].

\(^{89}\) S 12.63/2.99 @ SD 29.9.

\(^{90}\) *Asubha*, *saññā*, in the Suttas, refers to the 31 (or 32) parts of the body, ie *asubha*, *saññā* (perception of foulness): see *Giri-mañanda Sutta* (A 10.60,6/5:109), SD 19.16. On details of practice, see *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (D 22.5/2:293 = M 10.10), SD 13.2-3; *Kāya, gatā, sati Sutta* (M 119.7/3:90), SD 12.21 (5). See also *Vibhaṅga* (S 51.29/5:277 f), on the analysis of will or desire (*chanda*).
Bhikshus, when a monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of foulness, his mind shrinks away from sexual intercourse, turns away from it, rolls back from it. He is not drawn to it. Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him.

(A 7.46,4.1/4:46 f), SD 15.4

The practice of the perception of foulness establishes our minds in equanimity (upekkhā) or loathsomeness (pāṭikkūlyatā). This latter term is a synonym for nibbidā.

6.1.4 The Vuṭṭha Sutta (A 9.11) is interesting in that Sāriputta, in nine verses, describes his practice of body-based mindfulness, tempered with lovingkindness. In his last two verses, he says:

... bhante, just as woman or a man, young, youthful, well-dressed and fond of ornaments, would feel troubled, ashamed, disgusted by a carcass of a snake, a dog, or a human hung around his or her neck, even so, bhante, I feel troubled, ashamed, disgusted at this foul body of mine.

... bhante, just as a man were to carry around fat [oil] in a bowl, full of holes and cracks, oozing and dripping, even so, bhante, do I carry around this body, full of holes and cracks, oozing and dripping.

(A 9.11,8-9/4:377 f), SD 34.15

In the first four verses, Sāriputta declares that, just as whatever dirt or impurity that are thrown into any of the four physical elements, they are not troubled, ashamed, or disgusted, so too, practising the element-like meditations, he has immeasurable lovingkindness towards all. And in the last two verses, shown above, he reflects on the nature of his own physical body, implying that he has no craving either. Although there is no mention of nibbidā here, it is again clearly implied in these two verses.

6.1.5 Tālapuṭha Thera, gāthā (Tha 1091-1145). The main theme running through the verses of the elder Tālapuṭa, although unstated, is nibbidā. Take for example these two verses:

1093 Seeing by insight that this body is impermanent, 
A nest of destruction and disease, assailed by decay and death—
When shall I dwell alone in the woods, free of fear?
When indeed will it be?

1094 Having seized the sharp sword of wisdom made, 
Having cut the creeper of craving, creeping everywhere, 
Breeder of fear, bringer of pain—
When indeed will it be? 

(Tha 1093-1095), SD 20.9

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91 This is the result of the perception of foulness; for the actual practice, see eg Giri-mānanda S (A 10.60,6/-5:109), SD 15.15.

92 Asubha, saññā, paricitena bhikkhave bhikkhuno cetasā bahulam viharato methuna dhammo samāpattiya cittam paṭilīyati paṭikuṭati paṭivattati na sampasārīyati, upekṣā vā pāṭikkūlyatā vā saṅthāti. Here “loathsomeness” (paṭikkūlyatā) refers to a feeling close to or leading to “revulsion” (nibbidā), in terms of specific objects, such food. The pervading mood here is not a negative one, but a careful mind in the sense of a burnt child dreading the fire, or being once bitten twice shy. The stress on celibacy here suggests that the goal is arhathood. For an alternative, albeit lower goal, we should at least work towards streamwinning: see (Anicca) Cakkhu S (S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.7.

93 Aṭṭiyāti harāyati jīgucchati: see Nibbidā, SD 20.1(2.2).
These two verses reflect Tālapūta’s mind before he goes into retreat, yearning for the freedom from suffering. Having seen with insight the true nature of reality, he does not want to have anything more to do with the world: he is disgusted with it, filled with revulsion towards suffering. The sense of nibbidā pervades these verses.

6.1.6 The experience of nibbidā arises from seeing the true nature of reality. The Cetanā’karaṇīyā Sutta (A 10.2) shows how a practitioner, beginning with moral virtue, would naturally experience non-guilt-feeling, which leads to joy, which leads to zest, which leads to a tranquil body, which brings happiness, which conveys to mental concentration, which allows us to see true reality, which leads to revulsion, and which results in the knowledge and vision of freedom.

In short, a morally virtuous person, through his calm, clear and joyful mind, will attain such mental focus that his vision of true reality will naturally cause revulsion towards worldliness, so that he gains spiritual freedom.

6.1.7 The 5 practices conducive to the awakening process. The suttas often give teachings for monastics to practise to expedite their spiritual growth. Four well known practices are listed in the (Pañcaka) Nibbidā Sutta (A 5.69) as arousing revulsion in the practitioner, and properly cultivated, bring awakening itself. Although these are difficult practices the laity, a moderate effort in cultivating them would be especially helpful for those who are troubled by strong sensual lust. Such a practice, however, should always be done with the cultivation of lovingkindness, and under the supervision of an experienced meditation teacher.

SD 20.1(6.1.7) (Pañcaka) Nibbidā Sutta

The (Fives) Discourse on Revulsion | A 5.69/3:83
A 5.2.9, Aṅguttara Nikāya 5, Pañcaka Nipāta 2, Dutiya Paññāsaka 2, Saṁhā Vagga 9
Theme: Five practices conducive to the awakening process

1 Bhikshus, these 5 things, when cultivated, often developed, lead utterly to revulsion, to dispasion, to cessation (of suffering), to inner peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana.

What are the five?

2 Here, bhikshus,

(1) one dwells contemplating on impurity in the body; asubhānupassī kāye viharati
(2) one perceives the foulness of food; āhāre paṭikkulā, saññī
d(3) one perceives non-delight in all the world; sabba, loke anabhārata, saññī
(4) one perceives impermanence in all formations;  
(5) the perception of death is well established for oneself.  

These, bhikshus, are the 5 things, when cultivated, often developed, lead utterly to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation (of suffering), to inner peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana.

— evam —

6.1.8 The nibbidā formula as defining teachings. The centrality of the teachings found in the nibbidā formula are highlighted in the (Upāli) Satthu,sāsana Sutta (A 7.79) as the benchmark as the Buddha’s Dharma-Vinaya.

SD 20.1(6.1.8)  
(Upāli) Satthu,sāsana Sutta
The (Upāli) Discourse on the Teacher’s Teaching | A 7.79/4:143 [Be 7:83]  
A 7.2.3.9, Āṅguttara Nikāya 7, Sattaka Nipāta 2, Dutiya Paṇñāsaka 3, Vinaya Vagga 9  
Theme: The nibbidā formula teachings define the Dharma-Vinaya

1 Then, the venerable Upāli approached the Blessed One, saluted the Blessed One, and then sat down at one side. Sitting at one side, he said to the Blessed One:

1.2 “Bhante, it would be good if the Blessed One teach me the Dharma in brief, so that having heard the Dharma from the Blessed One, I may dwell alone, aloof, diligent, exertive and resolute.”

2 “Upāli, those things which you may know thus:

‘These things that do not lead utterly to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation (of suffering), to inner peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana,’ you should definitely recognize,

‘This is not the Dharma; this is not the Vinaya [the Discipline]; this is not the Teacher’s teaching.’

2.2 But, Upāli, those things which you may know thus:

‘These things that do lead utterly to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation (of suffering), to inner peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana,’ you should definitely recognize,

‘This is the Dharma; this is the Vinaya; this is the Teacher’s teaching.’” [144]

— evam —

6.2 CONTEMPORARY REMARKS ON NIBBIDĀ

6.2.1 Comments by practitioners

6.2.1.1 Commenting on such passages as these, Bhikkhu Santi notes:

Although I don’t think any of these passages, and there are more, actually use the word nibbidā they obviously refer to a very powerful experience of disgust, revulsion, even aversion, so I think even “disenchantment” is too soft here.

94 These 5 methods—with the disadvantages (of formations, ādīnava, saññā, DAṬ 3:335) are given in Saññā S 1 (A 5.61/3:79). See also (Pañcaka) Āsava-k,khaya S (A 5.70/3:83), SD 56.13a(6); Gilāna S (A 5.121/3:142 f), Satisūpaṭ-ṭhita S (A 5:122/3:143). The first 4 practices are recorded in Māra Tajjaniya S (M 50,18), as being taught by the past buddha Kakusandha (the 1st of the 5 buddhas to arise in our world cycle), SD 36.4.

95 Bhikkhu Santi, erstwhile of the Santi Forest Monastery, Bundanoon, NSW, Australia.
Etymologically I think “aversion” is quite good, since it literally means “turning away,” although “turning inwards” would be more accurate, and in the experience in some ways the negative side of “aversion, disgust or revulsion” is present, but it’s also usually associated with some kind of pīti, sukhā (joy and bliss), usually down-flowing pīti, and the results of course are not negative. However, I also wouldn’t use “aversion” in a translation because of the way it is likely to be misunderstood, but I might use it when explaining it in more detail.

(Santi, in email, Pali Yahoo Groups, 14 Jan 2006)

6.2.1.2 Santi goes on to give a very sobering observation and reminder:

... I think we have to be very careful of assuming as mostly scholars and relatively inexperienced meditators, and of course I’m including myself, that the “soft” or mild way in which we’ve experienced nibbidā is all there is to it. Again, I’ve heard from some of the great meditation masters in Thailand that they experienced what you might call nibbidā extremely strongly. I remember Luangphor Liem gave the simile of when someone goes fishing for eels, and they reach down into their net to pull out an eel, and as they pull it out they realise that they have got hold of a very poisonous snake, and without hesitation or any regret they throw it away as far as they can. He says that’s what it’s like when you see the true nature of all kinds of existence.

(Santi, in email, Pali Yahoo Groups, 14 Jan 2006)

6.2.1.3 Luangphor Liem alludes to Buddhaghosa’s parable of the fisher and the watersnake in the Visuddhi, magga, given here in full:

A man thinking of catching fish, it is said, took a fishing-net and cast it into the water. He put his hand into the mouth of the net under the water and seized a snake by the neck. He was glad, thinking, “I have caught a fish!” Thinking he had caught a big fish, he lifted it up to look at it. Seeing it has three marks, he recognized it to be a snake, and was terrified. He saw the danger, felt revulsion for what he had seized, and wished to be free from it. Seeking a way to free himself, he uncoiled it from his arm, starting from its tail. Then, raising his arm above his head, he swung it around a couple of times to weaken it. Then, he flung it away, crying, “Away with you, foul snake!” and quickly scrambled up to dry land. He stood looking back the way he had come, thinking, “Indeed, I’ve been freed from the jaws of a huge snake!”

(Vism 21.49/652)

6.2.2 The truth and beauty of nibbidā

6.2.2.1 To convey the twin notions of nibbidā being a state of wisdom-produced revulsion and yet not a hate-rooted affection, Dhammanando (a monk of the forest tradition) proposes that there is no better word than “displacency.” Unfortunately, by the 19th century, he notes, the meaning of this word had changed to “incivility,” and in the present degenerate age it has become entirely obsolete. Still, it might be worth reviving. Another possibility, he proposes, is “disrelish,” which has an advantage over “displacency,” in that it can also be used as a verb (unlike “displacency,” which has no verb form for translating nibbindati).

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96 Luangphor Liem Ṭhitadhammo (1941- ) is the current abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat, succeeding Ajahn Chah. This is where contemporary Western forest monks, such as Sumedho and Brahmavamso were trained.

97 Email dated 13 Jan 2006.

98 For a delightful 18th century example, see the opening paragraph of part II of Sir Thomas Browne’s “Christian Morals”: http://penelope.uchicago.edu/cmorals/cmorals2.html.
6.2.2.2 A translation is, in important ways, an informed or learned generation’s way of seeing an ancient text, including the Pali texts. The way we feel about words change with time and tide. Very often popular society gives birth to “love-words,” reflecting some popular notion or trend. The simple elegance of the Anglo-Saxon “gay” today refers to a sexual preference or lifestyle, and it does not help us to translate say sukha, sobhana, pahattha or ūdagga as “gay.” Gaily, this beautiful word still preserves its old warm sens in the lyrics of Stephen Foster’s classic anti-slavery folk song: “The sun shines bright in the old Kentucky home. | ’Tis summer, the darkies are gay.”

However, as time dims our vision of a difficult past, and the times use words that empower their circumstances, we need to work with new “provisional” translations if we are to reach out to them so that they will see the liberating Dhamma. What should be clearly seen here is not a history of suffering, but rather the story of awakening, of how a promising young man leaves his palaces of pleasure for a life of renunciation and true freedom. The suttas—in text or in translation—guide and remind us so that we are free just as the Buddha and the arhats are free.

6.2.2.3 Nibbida, in a word, encapsulates the Buddha’s most powerful realization of the true reality of existence that makes him turn away from the world for a truer freedom and higher happiness, one that is experienced in this world itself. The world is not what it seems to be, especially when we are close up to it. Only some “existential distancing” will give us a truer vision of the world.

During the insidious ravages of COVID-19 in 2020, the key preventive habit was that of “social distancing” to avoid the transmission of the deadly pathogen. Nibbida is the essence of such a distancing so that we are not infected by the sad ways of the world. In fact, when we see and understand that impermanence, suffering and non-self nature of the world, we would renounce all desire for it. We would have nothing to do with: we would never identify with the world. Hence, nibbidā is closely synonymous with atam, mayatā, “non-identification” having to do with worldliness, with whatever “that” is. 99

6.2.2.4 The point, then, is that even the best definition or term cannot give the taste of awakening to the unawakened. It is difficult to properly put into words what can only be directly experienced. Nibbidā, as a term, serves as a sort of peep-hole for the curious worldling: we may be able to peer through the hole, but what we make of our view depends on our ability to see beyond the eye. It helps to get the fuller accounts and explanations from those who have seen true reality, or from those who are moving in that direction: their experience is vitally helpful. For, nirvana is not a word: it is a personal experience.

_____

99 See Atam, mayatā, SD 20.1.

http://dharmafarer.org
Appendix: Suttas with nibbidā passages

Listed here are suttas, like the Alaggadûpama Sutta (M 22) [1], almost all of which apply the 3 characteristics to the teachings mentioned here leading up to this stock passage on nibbidā:

Seeing thus, bhikshus, an instructed noble disciple becomes revulsed at form, revulsed at feeling, revulsed at perception, revulsed at formations, revulsed at consciousness.

Being revulsed, lust fades away. Through the fading away of lust [that is, dispassion], (the mind) is freed. When it is freed, there comes the knowledge: “It is freed.”

He knows: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what is to be done, there is no more of this state of being.”

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100 PTS ed says this is identical to S 22.86/3:116-119 (without nibbidā passage); but CSCD:Be has the nibiddā passage here.
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