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Nibbāna Paṭisaṃyutta Sutta 2

Dutiya Nibbāna Paṭisaṃyutta Sutta The Second Discourse Related to Nirvana | U 8.2

Theme: The “bent-free” (*anata*) nirvana formula

Translated by Piya Tan ©2016

1 Significance of the 4 Suttas

1.0 There are four discourses with the same title: Nibbāna Paṭisaṃyutta Sutta, “Discourse Related to Nirvana.” They describe nirvana with different themes as shown here:

		<u>Keyword</u>	
Nibbāna Paṭisaṃyutta Sutta 1	U 8.1/71/p80	the full nirvana pericope (full formula)	SD 50.1
Nibbāna Paṭisaṃyutta Sutta 2	U 8.2/72/p80 f	the “bent-free” (<i>anata</i>) nirvana formula	SD 50.2
Nibbāna Paṭisaṃyutta Sutta 3	U 8.3/73/p80 f	the “birth-free” (<i>ajāta</i>) nirvana formula	SD 50.3
Nibbāna Paṭisaṃyutta Sutta 4	U 8.4/74/p81	the “non-dependent” (<i>anissita</i>) nirvana formula	SD 50.4

1.1 NIBBĀNA PAṬISAṂYUTTA SUTTA 2

1.1.1 Anata

1.1.1.1 This U 8.2 verse is quite straightforward except for one enigmatic term in line a, that is, *anata*, “bent-free,” for which a few manuscripts give the variant reading (or *varia lectio* = vl) of *anattā*, “non-self.” This, however, is improbable, as it makes the passage sound too forced or technical. Sometimes, it is “corrected” to *amata* (“the death-free”), an epithet for nirvana, but its context is too broad.

The reading, *anata* (*na*, “not” + *nata*, “bent”), meaning “unbent, without a bent,”¹ on the other hand, is more probable and interesting, one which invites us to look deeper into our notion of nirvana, and helps us to clear our mind of preconceptions, misconceptions—our “bents”—regarding nirvana. Moreover, **the Udāna Commentary** has the lemma *anata* thus, at least confirming the preferred reading for Dhammapāla (the Udāna Commentary author) (UA 393).

1.1.1.2 “The bent-free” (*anata*) is here a term for nirvana, which “has no bents” (UA 393)—an allusion to a mind without any inclination to views and the absence of those with such an inclination. The term *anata* is resolved as *na* (“no, not”) + *nata* (“bent, incline”). The Commentary explains that the concept of “the bent” (*nata*) [1.1.1.1]—that is, the world of beings (humans and others)—is so called because of its bents, bending or inclination (*namanato*), mentally and bodily habits, instinctive reactions towards visible forms and so on. This refers to those in the sphere of sense-desires and so on, because they “slope” or tend in that way (*tannino*) (UA 393).

1.1.2 Translation principle

1.1.2.1 Translating *anata* as “a bent” (n) [1.1.3.1] or “bent (on)” (past participle) [1.1.3.2] is at best provisional and in idiomatic English. It is difficult to find an exact English translation for *anata*. This is an occasion when we need to select an English word whose sense is closest to *anata*, or whose sense can be stretched to include those of the Pali term. We need to familiarize ourselves with the Pali sense and use it to arrive at an English translation. We have thus breathed life into a dead word. Our language is thus enriched.

¹ “Bent” (n), “mental inclination or tendency; disposition; propensity, bias” (OED).

1.1.2.2 This is an application of the helpful **Humpty Dumpty rule**, which essentially says that a word is how we use it. This does not mean that we can cavalierly define a word in any way we like—except perhaps when we deliberately wish to highlight a statement with humour or hubris, or simply to mislead others. The point is that an author tends to use words in surprising ways that often delight and inspire us as great literature.

In translation, too, it is only proper and compassionate for us to carefully define our terms so that our readers have a clearer and better understanding of our intentions behind our words and expressions.² Our translation, in other words, should reflect the truth or reality that the word points to, or we should at least reflect the intended meaning of the word that we are translating.

1.1.3 The “bent-free” (*anata*) nirvana formula

1.1.3.1 The Sutta’s only verse—that is, the **“bent-free” (*anata*) nirvana formula**—reads as follows:

<i>Duddasaṃ anataṃ³ nāma</i>	The bent-free is hard to see;
<i>na hi saccaṃ sudassanaṃ</i>	for, not easily seen is the truth.
<i>paṭividdhā taṇhā jānato</i>	Penetrated is craving by one who knows;
<i>passato n’atthi kiñcanaṃ’ti.</i>	for the seer, there is no thing [it is without anything]. [§4]

1.1.3.2 This verse essentially says that when we are “bent” (*nata*) on being caught up in the pleasures of the senses, we will be lost in the forest of defilements. It is hard to see our way in the gloom and crowdedness of such a forest. So, we go deeper into this forest, facing more dangers and discomfort. This is a metaphor for being caught up in the world.

The one who knows (*janato*) and sees (*passato*) refers to an arhat, or perhaps someone who is able to fend off the advances of sense-desires and clear his mind of sense-pleasures, such as through meditation. This, however, has to be done regularly, and whenever necessary. The arhat, on the other hand, is fully free from them—he is already out of the forest, and knows and sees most clearly and joyfully.⁴

1.1.3.3 The 4th and last line (line d) is a tricky one. The phrase *n’atthi kiñcanaṃ* literally means “there is nothing,” but this has nihilistic undertones and is clearly not the intended sense here. Nirvana is never “nothing.” On the other hand, *akiñcana*, “nothing,” or better, “no thing,” is an important and familiar term.⁵ The arhat—the true brahmin—is said to be who “has nothing” (Dh 421) or “owning nothing” (S 566c).⁶

In this verse, *n’atthi kiñcanaṃ* describes nirvana. We can render it colloquially as “there is nothing there.” Or, better, “there is *no* thing there.” Whatever we conceive of as “thing”—the usual Pali word for this is *dhamma*—whether physical or mental—is not found in nirvana, and has nothing to do with nirvana. The point here is that there is “nothing” fixed or essential we can in anyway relate to nirvana. Nirvana, it must be noted, is beyond both “nothing” and “no thing.” Hence, I have rendered *n’atthi kiñcanaṃ* as “there is no thing” and “it is without anything.”

1.1.4 Discontent and delight

1.1.4.1 There is a related verse in the **Aratī Sutta** (S 8.2) wherein we find the word *anata*, thus:

<i>Aratiṅ ca ratiṅ ca pahāya</i>	Having abandoned discontent and delight,
<i>sabbaso gehasitaṅ ca vitakkaṃ</i>	and all household-related thoughts,

² On the Humpty Dumpty rule, see SD 17.4 (2.3).

³ So Be Ce Se. Ee *anattaṃ*. Comy (Ce:BJT) *anantaṃ*. On difficulties attending this word, see CPD sv.

⁴ On nirvana as “bent-free,” further see SD 50.4 (1.1.1.4).

⁵ SD 12.4 (6.3).

⁶ Spoken by Mahā Brahmā of the arhat monk Brahma,deva in **Brahma,deva S** (S 6.3) + SD 12.4 (6.3) *Akiñcana*.

vanatharṃ na kareyya kuhiñci
*nibbanatho **anato** ca hi bhikkhu*

let one not have any lust towards anything.
The lust-free and **bent-free**—he is indeed a monk.
(S 8.2/1:186,26*), SD 92.6

1.1.4.2 The Commentary on the Aratī Sutta explains “discontent” (*aratī*) as the discontent in the teaching (SA 1:269), that is, the 3 trainings in moral virtue, mental cultivation and wisdom. Its opposite, “delight” (*ratī*), refers to the cords of sensual pleasures, that is, the attachment to sense-pleasures [1.1.5.1], which is synonymous with “household-related thoughts” (*gehasitarṃ ca vitakkarṃ*). [1.1.5.2]

The last two lines centre on *vanatha*, which means “woods,” that is, an allusion to the metaphorical forest of defilements. There is a pun here referring to our being lost in the forest of defilements on account of sensual pleasures. The word *kuhiñci* refers to any object of sense-pleasure. [1.1.5.3]

1.1.4.3 Nibbanatha (*ni*, “out” + *vanatha*, “the wood(s)”) literally, “without forest, woodless” (KhpA 151,26; J 3:358), idiomatically, “out of the woods,” meaning, “without craving” (*nikkāmo nibbano*, Sn 1131; *nibbanā*, plural, Dh 283); free from the “forest of defilements” (*nikkilesa, vano*) (SA 1:260). Here, “forest” is a metaphor for craving or sensual desire. **Nibbana** (*ni*, “out (of)” + *vana*, “forest”) is often taken as a variant reading for *nibbāna*.⁷ [1.1.5.3]

1.1.4.4 The next word—here, *anato*—has variant readings. In the Burmese (Be), Sinhalese (Ce) and European (Ee = PTS 1998), it reads *arato*, “the non-delighting or the one without lust.” In the Siamese (Se) and Ee (1884), it reads *anato*, “bent-free,” which is the preferred reading. [1.1.1]

The Saṃyutta Commentary (both Be and Ce) have *arato* in the lemma and glosses it as “free of delight arising from lust” (*taṇhā, rati, rahito*).⁸ However, both *anata* and *nati* would also fit the lemma and gloss respectively—*nati* (“inclination”) is a synonym for *taṇhā* (“craving”).

The reading at **Tha 1214** is *avanatha*, which has the same sense as *nibbanatha*. [1.1.5]

1.1.5 Vaṅgīsa Thera, gāthā

1.1.5.1 Tha 1214 of the Vaṅgīsa Thera, gāthā is practically identical to **the S 8.2 verse** [1.1.4.1], except for the last line (which follows the Ce and Se reading):

<i>Aratim ratim ca pahāya</i>	Having abandoned discontent and delight,
<i>sabbaso gehasitañ ca vitakkarṃ</i>	and all household-related thoughts,
<i>vanatharṃ na kareyya kuhiñci</i>	let one not have any lust towards anything.
<i>nibbanatho⁹ anato sa hi bhikkhu¹⁰</i>	The one out of the wood, bent-free—he is a monk. (Tha 1214)

1.1.5.2 “Discontent and delight” (*aratim ratim ca*) refers to how we are caught in our distracting play with sensual pleasures. We are never satisfied with any of them—none of them can really satisfy us. If we are satisfied, we would not want them any more. But, not getting them, we are discontented. Having acquired them, we become bored and dejected. This manner of thinking, then, is the cause of our discontent.

1.1.5.3 “Household-related thoughts” (*gehasitañ ca vitakkarṃ*) refers to our being mentally crowded with discontent and delight, with having this and that—friends, career, house, partner, family, wealth, fame, and so on. This is the way of the world.

However, if we neither measure them nor compare ourselves against others in these terms, then we can simply enjoy making them or getting them (or not). Our joy arises from seeing their goodness and ac-

⁷ For Buddhaghosa’s defs of the term *nibbāna*, see Vism 293. See PED & DP: *nibbāna* & *nibbana*.

⁸ Cf SA 1:269,27, where the lemma reads *araṇa*, “passion-free.” On *araṇa*, which, in **Araṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 139.2) means “conflict-free,” see SD 7.8.

⁹ So Ee Se; Be Ce *nibbanathā*.

¹⁰ Be Ee *avanatho sa bhikkhu*; Ce Se *anato sa hi bhikkhu*.

knowledging it—above all, seeing the impermanence of it all—accepting people and things as they are, and keeping a calm cool mind when it’s all over.

1.1.5.4 Although the Commentary on Tha 1214 explains *vanatha* as craving (*taṇhā*), the explanation of the same word at **Tha 338** highlights ignorance (*vanatho ... avijjādiko vanatho*, ThaA 2:142). The Commentaries on **Tha 526 and 1214** explain *nibbanatho* as “free from craving” (*nittañho*, ThaA 3:189), and the Commentary at **Tha 1214** explains *avanatha* (variant for *anato*) as arising on account of “the absence of delight” (*nandiyā abhāvato avanatho*, ThaA 3:190).¹¹

1.1.6 Cetanā Sutta 3

1.1.6.1 The Cetanā Sutta 3 (S 12.40) contains a verse that sheds some light on the conceptions of nirvana examined thus far. Notice that many of the words here are familiar, as lines cde recur in **the Nibbāna Paṭisaṃyutta Sutta 1** (U 8.1,5), for which see the explanations of key words there (SD 50.1).

When consciousness is unestablished and grows not,
b **there is no inclination** (*nati*).
c When there is no inclination,* there is neither coming nor going.
d When there is neither coming nor going,* there is neither dying nor arising.
e When there is neither dying nor arising,*
f there ends further birth, decay-and-death, sorrow,
 lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.
g —Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.¹² (S 12.40,7), SD 7.6(6c)

1.1.6.2 The key-word here is “**inclination**” (*nati*) [b], which is a synonym for craving (*taṇhā*) [1.1.4.3]. The Sutta’s Commentary confirms this. It is called “inclination” in the sense of inclining (*namanaññhena*) towards pleasant forms, etc (SA 2:72).¹³

1.1.6.3 In explaining “**there is coming and going**” (*sati āgati,gati*) [d], the Commentary says that there is “coming” (rebirth) and “going” of consciousness, where “going” refers to a new rebirth dependent on the final karmic thought-moments, or the sign of karma (*kamma,nimitta*), or the destiny sign (*gati,nimitta*) (SA 2:72). This is reference to the three objects of the last conscious process before death.¹⁴ On the ending of all this [g], see **Nibbāna Paṭisaṃyutta S 1** (U 8.1).¹⁵

1.1.6.4 Here, *cutūpapāta* has been translated as “**dying and arising**,” rather than “death and rebirth.” Both “death” and “rebirth” suggest fixed states, whereas these are both simply transitional moments, as a being moves on through samsara.¹⁶

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¹¹ For more comy analyses of words related to *vana*, see Tha:N 183 n338.

¹² On this passage, see Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:96 f.

¹³ Cf UA 393, 398.

¹⁴ See Abhs:BRS 5.35-37.

¹⁵ U 8.1/80,15 (SD 50.1) & UA 398.

¹⁶ For a more contextual application of the key terms here, see **Alabbhaniya Thaṇa S** (A 5.48,5/3:54), SD 42.1. On the extinction of this duality, see **Nibbāna Paṭisaṃyutta S 1** (U 8.1/80,15), SD 50.1.

The Second Discourse Related to Nirvana

U 8.2

Thus have I heard.

The Buddha teaches on nirvana

1 At one time, the Blessed One was residing in Anātha,piṇḍika's park monastery in Jeta's grove outside Sāvattihī.

2 Now, at that time, the Blessed One had been instructing, inspiring, rousing, and gladdening the monks with a Dharma talk connected with nirvana.¹⁷

The monks listened to the Dharma, receptive, attentive, concentrating their whole mind, giving ear.

The bent-free (*anata*) nirvana formula

3 Then, the Blessed One, knowing the significance of the occasion, uttered this udana:

4 *Duddasaṃ anataṃ¹⁸ nāma
na hi saccaṃ sudassanaṃ
paṭividdhā taṇhā jānato
passato n'atthi kiñcanaṃ'ti.*

The bent-free¹⁹ is hard to see;
for, not easily seen is the truth.
Craving is penetrated by one who knows;
for the seer, there is no thing [it is without anything].

[1.1.3.1]

— evaṃ —

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¹⁷ *Tena kho pana samayena Bhagavā bhikkhū nibbānapaṭisaṃyuttāya dhammiyā kathāya sandasseti samādape-
ti samuttejeti sampahaṃseti. On sandasseti ... sampahaṃseti—the 4 “stages of teaching” (desanā, vidhī) or the
Buddha's grace (buddha, līlā)—see Cand'upama S (S 16.3) SD 38.2 (4.2.3). For a detailed application, see Kesa,put-
tiya S (A 3.65,17) + SD 35.4a (§17).*

¹⁸ Comy *anataṃ*.

¹⁹ “The bent-free,” *anata*: see [1.1.4.4].