

32

(Navaka) Ubhato.bhāga,vimutta Sutta

The (Nines) Discourse on the Both-way-freed | A 9.45

Theme: The arhat liberated in body and mind

Translated by Piya Tan ©2017

1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 Sutta summary

The **(Navaka) Ubhato.bhāga,vimutta Sutta** (A 9.45) is a discourse dealing with arhathood, found in the Pañcāla Vagga (A 9) of the Aṅguttara, which deals with the dhyanas and nirvana.¹ It lists the 9 progressive stages of cessation (*anupubba nirodha*), that is, the 4 form dhyanas (*rūpa jhāna*), the 4 formless attainments (*arūpa samāpatti*) and the attainment of cessation (*nirodha samāpatti*). They are also similarly listed in the **Anupubba Nirodha Sutta** (A 9.31).²

1.2 Sutta theme

1.2.1 In each of the first 8 stages [§§3-10], the dhyana experience is said to be “the both-way-freed in a provisional manner (*pariyāyena*),” that is, in a relative way of speaking. This means that at each level we experience a kind of temporary “nirvana,” that is, as the extinction or disappearance of certain dhyana-factors,³ and the cooling or suspension of certain defilements, that is, the 5 mental hindrances⁴ and the 4 influxes.⁵ None of these stages is nirvana itself, but they give us a progressively better idea of what nirvana is like, relatively speaking. This is the closest experience of nirvana we can have *here and now*, in this life itself, before we actually attain arhathood.

1.2.2 Only the 9th and last stage—that of **the cessation of perception and feeling** [§11]—refers to the non-returner’s and the arhat’s experience of nirvana here and now. Hence, the nirvana-experience is said to be described “in a non-provisional way” (*nippariyāyena*), that is, in the ultimate or Dharma way of speaking. In simple terms, “provisional” means the stages of progress leading to nirvana *here and now*, our concept of which is “non-provisional,” in the full and real sense of the term⁶

2 The both-way-freed

2.1 DEFINITIONS OF UBHATO.BHĀGA,VIMUTTA

2.1.1 The both-way-freed is defined in the **Kīṭā,giri Sutta** (M 70) as follows:

¹ For the full list, see SD 50.25 (2.1).

² A 9.31/4:409 (SD 33.6(3.2.3)): see SD 33.6 (3.2.2).

³ On dhyana-factors (*jhān’āṅga*), see **Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.1), SD 24.11 (4.3); SD 8.4 (6).

⁴ The 5 mental hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*)—sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt—prevent us from attaining dhyana. See **Nīvaraṇā**, SD 32.1

⁵ The 4 influxes (*āsava*) are those of sensual desire, of existence, of views and of ignorance: see **Ogha Pañha S** (S 38.11) SD 30.3 (1). An older set has only 3 influxes, ie, omitting the influx of views, which underlies all three: see SD 30.1 (1.3.2).

⁶ Further on *pariyāyena* and *nippariyāyena*, see SD 50.25 (1.4).

⁷Here, bhikkhus, a certain person, having touched the liberations⁸ with the body,⁹ dwells in those liberations that are peaceful and formless,¹⁰ transcending forms,¹¹ and his mental influxes are utterly destroyed through his having seen them with **wisdom**. (M 70,15), SD 11.1

2.1.2 The Puggala Paññatti defines the both-way-freed as follows:

He touches with the body [personally experiences] and dwells in the 8 liberations,¹² and the mental influxes are destroyed by his seeing with wisdom. (Pug 1.39/14 = 9.1,3/73)

2.1.3 The Ubhato.bhāga,vimutta Sutta¹³ (A 9.45) defines the “both-way-freed” even though he has only attained the 1st dhyana:

[He] attains and dwells the **1st dhyana** ... He dwells, having touched that base with his body as it is attained, and he knows that with wisdom.

To that extent, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the both-way-freed** in a provisional manner. (A 9.45,3), SD 50.32

The underscored phrase is missing from **the Paññā,vimutta Sutta** (A 9.44), SD 50.31, definition of the “wisdom-freed.” Evidently, the “both-way-freed” is able to stay in the 1st dhyana as long as he wishes (normally not beyond seven days at a time),¹⁴ while the “wisdom-freed” has only a shorter experience of it.

2.2 DIFFERENT FROM ANĀSAVĀ CETO, VIMUTTI PAÑÑĀ, VIMUTTI

2.2.1 The Majjhima Commentary says that he is “freed both ways” because he is freed from the physical body (*rūpa,kāyato*) by the formless attainments, and from the mental body (*nāma,kāyato*)—that is, from the mind class of feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness)—through the path of arhathood.¹⁵

⁷ *Idha bhikkhave ekacco puggalo ye te santā vimokhā atikamma rūpe āruppā te kāyena phassivā viharati, paññāya c’assa disvā āsavā parikkhiṇā honti.*

⁸ “Liberations” (*vimokhā*, vl *vimokkhā*) refer to **the 8 liberations** (*aṭṭha vimokkhā*), which briefly are: (1) dhyana via internal (body-based) kasiṇa practice; (2) dhyana via external kasiṇa practice; (3) dhyana via colour kasiṇa or the divine abodes; (4) the sphere of infinite space; (5) the sphere of infinite consciousness; (6) the sphere of nothingness; (7) the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; and (8) the cessation of perception and feeling. For details, see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.3.33/2:111n), SD 9, **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15,35/2:70 f), SD 5.17, **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,3.1(11)/3:262), **Vimokhā S** (A 8.66/4:306), **Saṅkhār’upapatti S** (M 120,37/3:103), SD 3.4.37; also SD 5.17 (10).

⁹ *Kāyena phassivā viharati. Phassivā* has vll: *phusivā* (Be Se), *phussivā*. MA defines *phassivā* thus: Having touched, mastered, attained it with the mental body (*nāma,kāyena phassivā pāpuṇitvā adhigantvā ti vuttam hoti*) (MA 1:162), ie experienced directly in one’s own person (body and mind), an idiomatic expression for personal experience. Cf A 2:87.

¹⁰ “Formless,” ie, devoid of material shape in terms of sense-object and of their result (MA 1:162).

¹¹ That is, having passed beyond the form dhyanas (*rūpa jhānā*) (MA 1:162).

¹² See above n on “Liberations.”

¹³ A 9.45/4:453 (SD 50.32). Cf D 2:71; M 1:439; A 1:74, 4:453; Pug 14, 72, 73.

¹⁴ See, eg, how the newly awakened Buddha meditated for 7 successive weeks with a break after each week: **Dhamma and Abhidhamma**, SD 16.1(5).

¹⁵ DA 2:514, 3:889; MA 3:188; AA 4:207; SnA 2:594.

2.2.2 The dual freedom of the “both-way-freed” arhat, however, should not be confused with the “influx-free freedom of mind, freedom by wisdom” (*anāsavā ceto, vimutti paññā, vimutti*), which is shared by all **arhats**, whether they experience the formless attainments or not.¹⁶ A key difference here is that those arhats who are “both-way-freed,” on account of their mastery of the 4 dhyanas, have psychic powers, while the other arhats do not. Otherwise, there is no difference whatsoever in their awakening.

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The (Nines) Discourse on the Both-way-freed

A 9.45

- 1 (Originating in Kosambī).¹⁷
- 2 “Both-way-freed. Both-way-freed (*ubhato.bhāga, vimutta*),’ avuso,¹⁸ it is said. How, avuso, has the Blessed One spoken of **the both-way-freed**?”¹⁹

THE OPENING: THE 9 PROGRESSIVE ABODES²⁰

The 4 dhyanas

(1) THE 1ST DHYANA

3 Here, avuso, a monk,²¹

quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome mental states,
attains and dwells in the **1st dhyana**,
accompanied by initial application and sustained application,
and with zest and happiness born of solitude.²²

3.2 He dwells, having touched that base²³ with the body as it is attained,²⁴
and he knows that with wisdom.

¹⁶ See Bodhi 1984:49-51

¹⁷ Ce. On Kosambī, see SD 6.1 (1-2).

¹⁸ Presumably, Ānanda is addressing the monk Udāyī—Kāl’udāyī, says Comy (AA 4:205)—in Ghosit’ārāma, outside Kosambī, far west of the “middle country” (*majjhima, desa*), ie, the central Gangetic plain. Since they address one another as *āvuso* (“Friend, brother”), this sutta—and the others of this **Pañcāla Vagga** [2.1]—record events while the Buddha is still living. The Buddha’s absence may be explained by the fact that he is away on solitary retreat for the rains of the 10th year of the ministry (BA 3): see SD 6.1 (2+6). **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16) records the Buddha, in his last days, as instructing that senior monks should address juniors by name or as *āvuso*, while junior monks should address seniors as *bhante* (“sir”) or *āyasmā* (“venerable”) (D 16, 6.2), SD 9.

¹⁹ On the “both-way-freed” (*ubhato.bhāga, vimutta*), see (2).

²⁰ See SD 50.25 (1.3.2.2).

²¹ “A monk” (*bhikkhu*) in such contexts always refers to a meditator (**Satipaṭṭhāna S**, M 10,3A n, SD 13.3), or to the practitioner (SD 4.9 (5.3); SD 13.1 (3.1.1)).

²² “Born of solitude,” *viveka, ja*; ie it is the result of abandoning the hindrances: on the 3 kinds of solitude, see **The body in Buddhism**, SD 29.6a (1.5). On the omission of “one-pointedness of mind” (*cittassa ek’aggatā*) and “concentration” (*samādhi*) here, see **The layman and dhyana**, SD 8.5.

²³ “That base” (*tad-āyatanam*), ie, the meditation state.

²⁴ *Yathā yathā ca tad-āyatanam tathā tathā nam kāyena phassivā viharati.*

3.3 To that extent, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the both-way-freed** in a provisional [relative] manner.²⁵

(2) THE 2ND DHYANA

4 And, furthermore, avuso, a monk,
with the stilling of initial application and sustained application,
by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind,
attains and dwells in **the 2nd dhyana**,
free from initial application and sustained application,²⁶
with zest and happiness born of concentration.²⁷

4.2 *He dwells, having touched that base with the body as it is attained,
and he knows that with wisdom.*

*To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the both-way-freed** in a provisional [relative] manner.*

(3) THE 3RD DHYANA

5 And furthermore, avuso, a monk,
with the fading away of zest, he dwells equanimous, mindful and clearly knowing,
and experiences happiness with the body.
He attains and dwells in **the 3rd dhyana**,
of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.’
He permeates and pervades, floods and fills this very body with the happiness
free from zest.

5.2 *He dwells, having touched that base with the body as it is attained,
and he knows that with wisdom.*

*To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the both-way-freed** in a provisional [relative] manner.*

(4) THE 4TH DHYANA

6 And furthermore, avuso, a monk,
with the abandoning of joy and pain—
and with the earlier disappearance of pleasure and displeasure—
attains and dwells in **the 4th dhyana**,
that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.

6.2 *He dwells, having touched that base with the body as it is attained,
and he knows that with wisdom.*

*To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the both-way-freed** in a provisional [relative] manner.*

²⁵ *Ettāvata’pi kho āvuso sandiṭṭhiko dhammo vutto bhagavatā pariyāyena.* “In a provisional manner,” *pariyāyena*, ie, in a restricted sense, “in a sense”: SD 50.25 (1.4.2-1.4.4); cf *nippariyāyena*: SD (1.4.5).

²⁶ On “initial application and sustained application” (*vitakka, vicāra*), see **Vitakka, vicāra**, SD 33.4; SD 8.4 (5.1.2).

²⁷ The 2nd dhyana is known as “the noble silence” (*ariya, tuṇhī, bhāva*) because within it initial application and sustained application (thinking and discursion, *vitakka, vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech cannot occur. (S 2:273); cf S 4:293 where *vitakka* and *vicāra* are called verbal formation (*vacī, saikhāra*), the mental factors responsible for speech. In **Ariya, pariyesanā S** (M 1:161), the Buddha exhorts the monks when assembled to “either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence” (ie either talk Dharma or meditate). See **Dutiya Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.2/4:263 f), SD 24.12.

The 4 attainments

(5) THE SPHERE OF INFINITE SPACE

7 And furthermore, avuso, a monk,
having completely transcended perceptions of form,
 with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance,
 through non-attention to perceptions of diversity,
 contemplating, “Infinite space,” attains and dwells in **the sphere of infinite space.**²⁸
*7.2 He dwells, having touched that base with the body as it is attained,
 and he knows that with wisdom.*

*To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the both-way-freed** in a provisional [relative] manner.*

(6) THE SPHERE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

8 And furthermore, avuso, a monk,
having completely transcended the sphere of infinite space,
 contemplating, “Infinite consciousness,”
 attains and dwells in **the sphere of infinite consciousness.**²⁹
*8.2 He dwells, having touched that base with the body as it is attained,
 and he knows that with wisdom.*

*To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the both-way-freed** in a provisional [relative] manner.*

(7) THE SPHERE OF NOTHINGNESS

9 And furthermore, avuso, a monk,
having completely transcended the sphere of infinite consciousness,
 contemplating, “There is nothing,”
 attains and **[451] dwells in the sphere of nothingness.**³⁰
*9.2 He dwells, having touched that base with the body as it is attained,
 and he knows that with wisdom.*

*To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the both-way-freed** in a provisional [relative] manner.*

(8) THE SPHERE OF NEITHER-PERCEPTION-NOR-NON-PERCEPTION

10 And furthermore, avuso, a monk,
having completely transcended the sphere of nothingness,
 contemplating, “This is peaceful; this is sublime,”
 attains to **the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.**³¹

*10.2 He dwells, having touched that base with the body as it is attained,
 and he knows that with wisdom.*

²⁸ *Sabbaso rūpa,saññānaṃ samatikkamā paṭigha,saññānaṃ atthaṅgamā nānatta,saññānaṃ amanasikārā ananto ākāso ti ākāsaṇaṅcāyatanaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

²⁹ *Sabbaso ākāsaṇaṅc’āyatanaṃ samatikkama anantaṃ viññāṇaṃ ti viññāṇaṅcāyatanaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

³⁰ *Sabbaso viññāṇaṅc’āyatanaṃ samatikkamma n’atthi kiñcī ti ākiñcaññ’āyatanaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

³¹ *Sabbaso ākiñcaññāyatanaṃ samatikkama santam etaṃ paṇītam etan ti n’eva,saññā,nāsaññ’āyatanaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the both-way-freed in a provisional [relative] manner**.

The cessation of perception and feeling

11 (9) Furthermore, avuso, a monk, having completely transcended the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, attains and dwells in **the cessation of perception and feeling**,

11.2 and having seen that with wisdom, his mental influxes are fully destroyed.³²

11.3 He dwells, having touched that base³³ with the body as it is attained—and he knows that with wisdom.³⁴

To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of the both-way-freed in a non-provisional manner.³⁵

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³² In **Kāya,sakkhī S** (A 9.43,11.3), here follows the line, “He dwells, having touched that base with the body, as far as it is attained.” (SD 50.30).

³³ “That base” (*tad-āyatanam*), ie, the meditation state.

³⁴ *Yathā yathā ca tad-āyatanam tathā tathā nam kāyena phassitvā viharati—paññāya ca nam pajānāti*. The last clause—“and he knows it with wisdom”—is unique to this Sutta in the Chapter.

³⁵ “In a non-provisional manner,” *nippariyāyena*, ie, in the ultimate sense: see SD 50.25 (1.4.5).