

1

Nibbidā

Disillusionment and revulsion

Theme: The arhat's awareness of and response to true reality

An introductory essay by Piya Tan ©2005, 2007

1 Insight of the masters

1.1 During meditation, when the mind is utterly still and the bright sign (*nimitta*) has arisen,¹ 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],² 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 *kammaṭṭhāna* [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,³ 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-ānanda 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 (5). 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 (5), **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 shibboleth⁴ 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*.

⁴ **Shibboleth** (IPA: 'ʃɪbəlɛθ) (Hebrew שבולת, "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).”⁵ 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-awakening, to nirvana.

*etaṃ ekanta,nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattanti.*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 √**VID**², “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,lakkhaṇa*). For other connections, see PED: *nibbidā*.

⁷ **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,28/1:189), SD 11.14; **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63,8/1:431), SD 5.8; **(Bojjhaṅga) Nibbidā S** (S 46.20/5:82), **(Magga) Paṭipanna S** (S 47.32/5:179), SD 47.21; **(Iddhi,pāda) Nibbidā S** (S 51.4/5:255), (S 55.12/5:361); **(Pañcaka) Nibbidā S** (A 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.

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,⁸ and attains the supramundane path (*magga*).

“It [the mind] is freed” (*vimuttam*) 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** (*virāga*) 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 (*paccavekkhaṇa, ñāṇa*)—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)⁹ 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

⁸ **Mental fetters** (*saṃyojanā*). 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 <u>revulsion</u> ,	<i>nibbidāya</i>
to dispassion [letting go],	<i>virāgāya</i>
to cessation (of suffering),	<i>nirodhāya</i>
to inner peace,	<i>upasamāya</i>
to direct knowledge,	<i>abhiññāya</i>
to awakening,	<i>sambodhāya</i>
to nirvana. ¹¹	<i>nibbānāya saṁvattati</i> (A 7.83/4:143), SD 102.4 [3.2]

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

Feeling revulsed, lust fades away. ¹²	<i>nibbindaṁ virajjati</i>
Through the fading away of lust, he is freed. ¹³	<i>virāgā vimuccati</i>
When he is freed, there comes the knowledge: ‘It (the mind) is freed.’ ¹⁴	<i>vimuttasmiṁ vimuttaṁ</i>
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 early 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 *aṭṭa* (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: paccavekkhaṇa-ñāṇa.

¹¹ *Etam hi upāli attha, saṁhitaṁ etaṁ dhamma, saṁhitaṁ etaṁ ādi, brahma, cariyakaṁ etaṁ nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṁvattati.*

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 maggena vimuccati*, MA 2:115,20).

¹⁴ This line refers to a statement of “review” (*idha paccavekkhaṇa lathitā*, 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 Rāhulôvāda Sutta (M 61) glosses **aññiyitabbam** as *aṭṭena pīlitena bhavitabbam*, “one should be distressed, (feel) harassed” (MA 3:129). The Majjhima Commentary on the Vitakka,saṅṭhāna Sutta (M 20) explains **aññiyeyya** as “(he) would be troubled” (*aṭṭo dukkhitto 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 muccissāmā ti aññiyanti*, 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 √**gup**, “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 NIBBIDĀ AND ATAMMAYATĀ. There is another interesting aspect of *nibbidā*: it is closely connected with **atammayatā** (non-identification). The Majjhima Commentary on the Alagaddūpama Sutta (M 22), in glossing *nibbidā* (“revulsion, disenchantment”) as “the insight leading to the emerging (of the path)” (*vuṭṭhāna,gaminī,vipassanā*), says that amongst its synonym is “the exhaustion of *tammayatā*” (*tam,mayatā,pariyādānan’ti*)” (MA 2:114). Hence, understandably, *nibbidā* and *atam,mayatā* mean the same thing. Indeed, we can easily see that the explanation of *atam,mayatā* perfectly describes *nibbidā*, too.¹⁹

Above all, knowing the correct meaning of *nibbidā* 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 Nibbidā 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) “Bhikshus, 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.”²⁰

[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 near²¹—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, sāvako* Seeing thus, bhikshus, an instructed noble disciple
rūpasmim nibbindati is revulsed at form;

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 *nicca* [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 **Vibhaṅga** 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 Vibhaṅga 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 (*saḷ-āyatana*), instead of the 5 aggregate—with a wordplay on *indriya*—see **Indriya Sampanna S** (S 35.153), SD 10.4(4.6).

vedanāya nibbindati
saññāya nibbindati
saṅkhāresu nibbindati
viññāṇasmim nibbindati.

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

29 *Nibbindam virajjati,*
virāga vimuccati,

Revulsed, he is dispassionate [lust fades away].
 Through dispassion [the fading away of lust],
 (his mind) is freed.

vimuttasmim vimuttam iti
ñāṇam hoti
khīṇā jāti,
vusitam brahma, cariyam,
katam karaṇīyam
nāparam itthattāyā ti pajānāti.

When it is freed, he knows: “It is freed.”
 There is the knowledge,
 “Birth is destroyed,
 the holy life has been lived,
 what should be done is done,
 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*),²⁴ 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 awakening 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 likely to be an early text is that it centres around the

²⁴ “Liberation,” *vimokkha*. On the usual application of this term here, in **(Sabb’upādāna) Pariññā S** (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 probably 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 cessation (of suffering), 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 *nibbānāya samvattati.* (A 7.83/4:143), SD 102.4 [2.2.2]

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

(D 9,28/1:188 f), SD 7.14

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, saṃhitam etam dhamma, saṃhitam etam ādi, brahma, cariyakam etam nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya samvattati.*

³¹ The Pali text uses *taṃ*, “that” or idiomatically “it,” ie the 10 indeterminable points. For a detailed analysis of these 10 points, see **Māluṅkyaputta S** (M 63), SD 5.8 (2).

³² *Kasmā bhante bhagavatā avyākatan ti. | Na h’etaṃ Poṭṭhapāda attha, saṃhitam na dhamma, saṃhitam na ādi, brahma, cariyakam na nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya samvattati.*

to awakening,
to nirvana.³³ *sambodhāya*
nibbānāya samvattati (D 9,30/1:189), SD 7.14

3.2.3 Commentarial explanation. The Majjhima Commentary to the **Alaggadūpama Sutta** (M 22) explains *nibbindati* and *nibbidā* quite comprehensively thus:

Nibbindati (v) means “he is discontented” (*ukkaṅṅhatī*), and here by ***nibbidā*** (n) “the insight leading to emergence (of the path)” (*vuṭṭhāna, gāmini, vipassanā*) is meant. However, the insight leading to path-emergence has many names.

- (1) In some places, it is called “the peak of consciousness” (*saññ’agga*) [D 9.17+19/1:184 f].
- (2) In some places, it is “the knowledge of the fixity of reality [true nature of things] (*dhamma-ṭ, ṭhiti, ñāṇa*).”
- (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] (*pārisuddhi, padhāniy’āṅga*).
- (4) In some places, it is “the insight that is the knowledge and vision of the path-progress” (*paṭipadā, ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhi, padhāniy’āṅga*).
- (5) In some places, it is “the exhaustion of thatness” [letting go of identification] (*tam, mayatā pariyādāna*).³⁴
- (6) In some places, it has three terms [names] (*tīhi nāmehi*).
- (7) In some places, it has two terms (*dvīhi nāmehi*).

(1) Here, in the **Poṭṭhapāda Sutta**, it refers to just this: “It is consciousness, Poṭṭhapāda, 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-ṭ, ṭhiti, ñāṇa*).

(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” (*pārisuddhi, padhāniy’āṅga*).

(4) In the **Ratha, vinīta (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 is lived under the Blessed One?” thus it is said in reference to “the insight that is the knowledge and vision of the path-progress” (*paṭipadā, ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhi, padhāniy’āṅga*).

(5) In the **Salāyatana Vibhaṅga (Sutta)** [M 137.20/3:220], “Bhikkhus, 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, mayatā pariyādāna*).³⁵

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

³³ *Etam hi poṭṭhapāda attha, samhitam etam dhamma, samhitam etam ādi, brahma, cariyakam etam nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya samvattati.*

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

³⁵ See *Atammayatā*, 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)³⁶

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).³⁷ 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]” (*virajjati*) 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 (*paccavekkhaṇa, ñāṇa*) 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.”³⁸

³⁶ *Nibbindatī ti ukkaṅṅhati. Ettha ca nibbidā ti vuṭṭhāna, gāminī, vipassanā adhippetā. Vuṭṭhāna, gāminī, vipassanāya hi bahūni nāmāni. Esā hi katthaci saññ’aggan ti vuttā. Katthaci dhamma-ṭṭhiti, ñāṇan ti. Katthaci pārisuddhi, padhāniy’āṅgan ti. Katthaci paṭipadā, ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhī ti Katthaci tam, mayatā, pariyādānan ti. Katthaci tīhi nāmehi. Katthaci dvīhi ti.*

Tattha Poṭṭhapāda, sutte tāva “saññā kho, poṭṭhapāda, paṭhamam uppajjati, pacchā ñāṇan” ti [D 9.17, 19] evam saññ’aggan ti vuttā.

Susima, sutte “pubbe kho, susima, dhamma-ṭṭhiti, ñāṇam pacchā nibbāne ñāṇan” ti [S 12.70/2:124] evam dhamma-ṭṭhiti, ñāṇan ti vuttā.

Dasuttara, sutte “paṭipadā, ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhipadhāniy’āṅgan” ti [D 34.2.2(1)/3:288] evam pārisuddhi, padhāniy’āṅgan ti vuttā.

Rathavinīte “kin nu kho, āvuso, paṭipadā, ñāṇadassana, visuddh’attham bhagavati brahma, cariyam vussatī” ti [M 24.9/1:147] evam paṭipadāñāṇadassanavisuddhī ti vuttā.

Salāyatana, vibhaṅge “atam, mayatam, bhikkhave, nissāya atam, mayatam āgamma yāyam upekkhā nānattam nānattasitā, tam abhinivajjetvā yāyam upekkhā ekattā ekattasitā, tam nissāya tam āgamma evametissā pahānam hoti, evametissā samatikkamo hotī” ti [M 137.20/3:220] evam tam, mayatā, pariyādānan ti vuttā.

Paṭisambhidā, magge “yā ca muñcitu, kamyatā, yā ca paṭisañkhānupassanā, yā ca sañkhār’upekkhā, ime dhammā ekatthā vyañjanam eva nānan” ti [Pm 5.84/2:64] evam tīhi nāmehi vuttā.

Paṭṭhāne “anulomam gotra, bhussa anantara, paccayena paccayo, anulomam vodānassa anantara, paccayena paccayo” ti [Paṭ 1.417/1:92, 159] evam dvīhi nāmehi vuttā. Imasmim pana Alagadda, sutte [M 22.29/1:139] nibbindatī ti nibbidā, nāmena āgatā.

Nibbidā virajjati ti ettha virāgo ti maggo virāgā vimuccatī ti ettha virāgena maggena vimuccatī ti phalam kathitam. Vimuttasmim vimuttam iti ñāṇam hotī ti idha paccavekkhānā kathitā. See SD 17.1 (3.1.2).

³⁷ *Nibbidā, sahagatā saññā, manasikārā samudācaranti virāgūpasamhitā nibbedha, bhāginī paññā.*

³⁸ *Nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya samvattati: D 9,30,2/1:189 (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-m-ānanda 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*)**?³⁹

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 (*nirodha,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 **In-driya,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]⁴¹ 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.

55.12/5:361 (SD 3.3(8)); **A 5.69/3:83** (SD 20.1(6.1.7)), **7.79/4:143** (SD 20.1(6.1.8)), **10.107/5:216** (SD 79.7). In other connections: V 1:15 (*nibbidāya cittaṃ saṅghāsi*): **D 9,23/3:130**; **S 12.23/2:30**, **22.39/3:40**, **22.146/3:179**, **23.1/3:189**, **35.105/4:86**, **35.155/4:141**; **A 2.6/1:51**, **3.36/1:64**, **5.24/3:19**, **5.168/3:200**, **6.30/3:325 f**, **7.65/4:99**, **8.81/4:336**, **10.1/5:2 f**, **11.1/5:311 f**; J 1/1:97, **507/4:471, 473**; Sn 340; Pm 1:195, 2:43 f; Vbh 330; Nett 27, 29; Vism 650. Cf *abhinibbidā* (Nett 61, 98), where CPD says this is a wr of *abhinibbidā*.

³⁹ Sometimes rendered as “the perception of dispassion.”

⁴⁰ *Sekho ... pāṭipado* (sometimes wr as *paṭipadā*: see SD 21.14 (2), where *sekha* means “learner” and *pāṭipada* is an adj meaning “of the way,” ie, one who has entered the noble eightfold path, and bound for **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:ÑB 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):

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

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 worldling, 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,saññā*).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)” (*aṭṭiyāmi harāyāmi jigucchāmi*).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 jigucchati*** [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 worldling.

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,saṅṭhāna Sutta (M 20) gives a good idea of the meaning of the stock phrase “troubled, ashamed, disgusted” (***aṭṭiyati harāyati jigucchati***):

Bhikshus, just as a young man or woman, well-dressed and fond of ornaments, would feel troubled, ashamed, disgusted⁴⁶ 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.” (M 20,4/1:119 f), SD 1.6

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

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 *Aṭṭiyati harāyati jigucchati* (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*).⁴⁷ 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.

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 Saṃyutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya.⁴⁸ 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 (<i>saddhā</i>)	is the immediate cause ⁴⁹ of joy;	<i>pamojja</i>
joy	is the immediate cause of zest;	<i>pīti</i> ⁵⁰
zest	is the immediate cause <i>tranquillity</i> ;	<i>passaddhi</i>
tranquillity	is the immediate cause of happiness;	<i>sukha</i>
happiness	is the immediate cause of concentration;	<i>samādhi</i>
concentration	is the immediate cause of knowledge and vision of things as they really are;	<i>yathā,bhūta,ñāṇa.dassana</i>
knowledge and vision of things as they really are	is the immediate cause of revulsion;	<i>nibbidā</i>
revulsion	is the immediate cause of dispassion [letting go of lust];	<i>virāga</i>
dispassion	is the immediate cause of freedom;	<i>vimutti</i>
freedom	is the immediate cause of the knowledge of the destruction (of the influxes).	<i>āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa</i> (S 12.23,26/2:31 f), SD 6.12

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.⁵¹

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.”⁵² 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, <u>joy</u> arises	<i>yoniso,manasikaroto pāmojjaṃ jāyati;</i>
(2) when we are joyful, <u>zest</u> arises	<i>pamuditassa pīti jāyati;</i>
(3) when we are zestful, our body is <u>calmed</u>	<i>pītimanassa kāyo passambhati;</i>
(4) when the body is calmed, we know <u>happiness</u>	<i>passaddha,kāyo sukhaṃ vedeti;</i>

⁴⁸ See **Upanisā S** (S 12.23), SD 6.12 & Bodhi, “Transcendental Dependent Arising,” 1980:14 f & Gethin 1998:157-159.

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,ñāṇa,dassanūpanisā nibbidā*.

(5) the happy mind becomes <u>concentrated</u>	<i>sukhino cittaṃ samādhīyati;</i>
(6) when the mind is concentrated, we know and <u>see things as they really are</u>	<i>samāhite citte yathā,bhūtaṃ jānāti passati;</i>
(7) knowing and seeing things as they really are, we are <u>revulsed</u>	<i>yathā,bhūtaṃ jānaṃ passaṃ nibbindati;</i>
(8) being revulsed, (our) <u>lust fades away</u>	<i>nibbindaṃ virajjati;</i>
(9) through the fading away of lust, (the mind) is <u>freed</u>	<i>virāgā vimuccati. (D 34,2.2(1)/3:288)</i>

4.2.2 Clearly, these “9 states of great help,” although differently worded and arranged, are very similar to **the 7 awakening-factors** (*satta bojjhaṅga*), namely:⁵³

The awakening-factor of <u>mindfulness</u>	<i>sati</i>
The awakening-factor of <u>mental investigation</u>	<i>dhamma,vicaya</i>
The awakening-factor of <u>effort</u>	<i>virīya</i>
The awakening-factor of <u>zest</u>	<i>pīti</i>
The awakening-factor of <u>tranquillity</u>	<i>passaddhi</i>
The awakening-factor of <u>concentration</u>	<i>samādhi</i>
The awakening-factor of <u>equanimity</u>	<i>upekkhā</i>

4.2.3 The 9-state system closes with (8) fading away of lust (*virāga*) and (9) freedom (*vimutti*).⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ These two sets overlap in these ways:

The 9 greatly helpful states

[] Wise attention	<i>yoniso manasikāra</i>
(1) Joy	<i>pāmuja</i>
(2) Zest	<i>pīti</i>
3) Bodily calm	<i>passaddha,kāya</i>
(4) Happiness	<i>sukha,citta</i>
(5) Mental stillness	<i>samādhi</i>
(6) Insight into reality	<i>[vipassanā]</i>
(7) Revulsion	<i>nibbidā</i>
(8) Dispassion	<i>virāga</i>
(9) Freedom	<i>vimutti</i>

The 7 awakening-factors

(1) Mindfulness	<i>sati</i>
(2) Mental investigation	<i>dhamma,vicaya</i>
(3) Effort	<i>virīya</i>
(4) Zest	<i>pīti</i>
(5) Tranquillity	<i>passaddhi</i>
(6) Mental stillness	<i>samādhi</i>
(7) Equanimity	<i>upekkhā</i>

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

4.2.4 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*

⁵³ See *Āhāra S* (S 46.51), SD 7.15 & *Anīvaraṇa S* (S 46.38b), SD 3.2(5).

⁵⁴ Also elsewhere called *vimokkha* (eg *Sabb’upādāna Pariññā 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).

⁵⁵ On “emptiness” here, see eg *Cūḷa Suññata S* (M 121), SD 11.3 & *Mahā Suññata S* (M 122), SD 11.4.

(“mental cultivation”), which refers to a broad array of conditions and practices that conduce to the rise and stability of mindfulness, a sustained and proper attention to a meditation object or a meditation sign.⁵⁶ Here “meditation object” and “meditation sign” are translations or different usages of the same term, *nimitta*.⁵⁷

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,lakkhaṇa*), especially the first, the characteristic of impermanence, to the meditation object or the meditation sign.⁵⁸ 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).⁵⁹

In the “9 state” method, wise attention (resulting in not being oppressed by any *nimitta*) leads to **(2) joy** (*pāmuja* or *pāmojja*),⁶⁰ 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 (*virīya*): 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** (*yathā,bhūta,ñāṇa,dassana*), that is, insight into reality (*vipassanā*).⁶¹

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 disenchanted 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*).⁶²

⁵⁶ A “meditation object” (*nimitta*), also called *ārammaṇa* 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 **Vitakka,saṅṭhāna 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.

⁵⁸ See esp **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7, & the “contemplation of mind-objects” in **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118,21/3:83), SD 7.13).

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

⁶⁰ *Pāmuja*: 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 *prā-modya*): 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,ñāṇa,dassana* in Analayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, 2009:124-140.

⁶² The Bodhisattva’s experience here is usu described as *saṃvega* [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*).⁶³ Both these states are implicit in the awakening-factor of **equanimity** (*upekkhā*), that is, the on-looking mind of true wisdom.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵

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, dhyana 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)⁶⁶ would exemplify the “nine-state” approach to awakening, **the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas** (D 22; M 10)⁶⁷ 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,⁶⁸ where “solitude” (*viveka*) is placed between *upekkhā* and *virāga*, as in this very common pericope that ends **the Ānāpāna, sati Sutta** (M 118):⁶⁹

[88] 41 And how, monks, are the 7 awakening-factors cultivated and often developed to bring true knowledge and freedom to perfection?⁷⁰

42 Here, monks,

(1) a monk cultivates the awakening-factor of mindfulness that is founded on *solitude*,⁷¹

⁶³ Also elsewhere called *vimokkha* (eg **Sabb’upādāna Pariññā 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 59/1:396; 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, majjhataṭṭā*, Nm 1:144; PmA 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 S** (M 121), SD 11.3 & **Mahā Suññata S** (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** (*bojjhaṅga*), 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 nīvaraṇā*). This whole phrase, beginning with “dependent on solitude” —*viveka, nissitaṃ virāga, nissitaṃ nirodha, nissitaṃ vossagga, nissitaṃ vossagga, pariñāmiṃ dhamma, vicaya, sambojjhaṅgaṃ*—is called **the viveka, nissita formula**. See Gethin 2003:162-168. According to **Paṭisambhidā, magga**, there are 5 kinds of “solitude” (*viveka*), ie **overcoming of the hindrances and the defilements**: (1) solitude through suppression (*vikkhambhana viveka*); (2) solitude through the substitution of opposite or displacement by opposites (*tad-aṅga viveka*); (3) solitude through cutting off (*samuccheda viveka*); (4) solitude through tranquillization (*paṭipassaddhi 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),⁷² dependent on cessation (of suffering),⁷³ ripening in letting go (of defilements).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)*.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 *nibiddā*. In fact, some areas of *nibbidā* and of *viveka* overlap, especially when *viveka* is taken to mean “solitude,” that is, detachment from the world.

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

SD 20.1(4.2.8)

(Bojjhaṅga) Nibbidā Sutta

The (Awakening-factor) Discourse on Revulsion | S 46.20
S 5.2.2.10, Saṃyutta Nikāya 5, Mahā Vagga 2, Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta 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-awakening, to nirvana.

2 What are the seven?

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| (1) the awakening-factor that is mindfulness, | <i>sati sambojjhaṅga</i> |
| (2) the awakening-factor that is dharma-discernment, | <i>dhamma, vicaya sambojjhaṅga</i> |
| (3) the awakening-factor that is effort, | <i>viriya sambojjhaṅga</i> |
| (4) the awakening-factor that is zest, | <i>pīti sambojjhaṅga</i> |
| (5) the awakening-factor that is tranquillity, | <i>passadhi sambojjhaṅga</i> |
| (6) the awakening-factor that is concentration, | <i>samādhi sambojjhaṅga</i> |
| (7) the awakening-factor that is equanimity. | <i>upekkhā sambojjhaṅga</i> |

⁷² *Virāga*, also tr as “dispassion.”

⁷³ *Nirodha*, ie, “cessation of suffering.”

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).

⁷⁵ **D 33**,1.11(10); **M 2**/1:11, **77**/2:12, **118**/3:88, **146**/3:275, **147**/3:277; **S 3.18**/1:88, **43.12**/4:365 f, **45.2**/5:2, **45.3**/5:4, **45.9**/4:11, **45.49**/4:30, **45.55**/4:31, **45.63**/4:33, **45.77**/4:36, **45.92-96**/4:38-40, **45.139**/4:42, **45.148-158**/4:45-52, **45.181-180**/4:54-62, **46.1**/4:63 f, **46.5**/4:72, **46.6-7**/4:75 f, **46.11-14**/4:78 f, /4:**46.21**/4:83, **46.26-29**/4:86-88, **46.48**/4:101, **46.54**/4:119 f, **46.56-47**/4:128-131, **46.76-77**/4:133 f, **46.130**/4:137, **48.71-82**/4:239, **48.124**/4:241, **50.1**/4:249, **50.54**/4:251, **54.1**/4:312 f, **54.13**/4:333; **A 4.14**/2:16, **6.58**/3:390; **Pm** 219 f, 223.

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

— evaṃ —

4.2.9 We even have a “lost” Buddha-word recorded in the **Netti-p, pkaṇa**, 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).” (Untraced)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, sarṇvega 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.

<i>Matta, sukha, pariccagā</i>	One should give up a lesser happiness
<i>passe ce vipulaṃ sukhaṃ</i>	if one sees a greater happiness.
<i>caje mattā sukhaṃ dhīro</i>	Let the wise let go of the lesser happiness,
<i>sampassaṃ vipulaṃ sukhaṃ</i>	for the sake of a greater happiness. (Dh 290)

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 For details, see (**Bojjhaṅga**) **Sīla S** (S 46.3), SD 10.1.

⁷⁷ *Atīte Rādha, rūpe anapekkho hohi, anāgataṃ rūpaṃ mā abhinandi paccuppanassa rūpassa nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya cāgāya paṭinissaggāya paṭipajja.* (qu in Nett 173/30). The last 2 parenthetical amplifications are my own.

⁷⁸ 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 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” (*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 *SAMVEGA*

5.2.1 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 *samvega*.

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

Again and again, they sow the seeds;	<i>Punappunam c’eva vapanti bijam</i>
Again and again, down comes the rain; ⁸³	<i>punappunam vassati deva,rājā</i>
Again and again, the farmers plough the fields;	<i>punappunam khettaṃ kasanti kassakā</i>
Again and again, the land yields grain;	<i>punappunam aññam upeti raṭṭham</i>
Again and again, the beggars beg;	<i>punappunam yācakā yācayanti</i>
Again and again, the master gives give;	<i>punappunam dāna,patī dadanti</i>
Again and again, when the master givers’ given,	<i>punappunam dāna,patī daditvā</i>
Again and again, they find a place in heaven;	<i>punappunam saggam upeti ṭhānam</i>
Again and again, the milkers milk the cows;	<i>punappunam khīranikā duhanti</i>
Again and again, the calf goes to its mother;	<i>punappunam vaccho upeti mātaram</i>
Again and again, one struggles and suffers;	<i>punappunam kilamati phandati ca</i>
Again and again, the foolish finds the womb;	<i>punappunam gabbham upeti mando</i>
Again and again, he is born and he dies;	<i>punappunam jāyati miyyati ca</i>
Again and again, they take him to the cemetery.	<i>punappunam sīvathikam haranti</i>
But when one has found the path to no more rebirth,	<i>maggāñ ca laddhā apunabbhavāya</i>
One great in wisdom, is not born again and again!	<i>na punappunam jāyati bhūri,pañño ti</i>

(S 7.12/1:173 f), SD 16.13

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

<i>Jigacchā paramā rogā</i>	Hunger is the greatest of diseases;
<i>saṅkhārā paramā dukhā</i>	conditioned states are the greatest ill:
<i>etam ñātvā yathā,bhūtaṃ</i>	having known this as true reality,
<i>nibbānam paramam sukham</i>	nirvana is the highest happiness. (Dh 203)

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

⁸¹ See eg (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

⁸² See **Deva,dūta S** (M 130), SD 2.23 (2).

⁸³ *Puna-p,punam 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."⁸⁴ Nyanaponika, in his booklet on "The Four Nutriment 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 (*saṃvega*) when he considers, in the light of "nutriment," man's own nature, his incessant needs and his situation in the world. (1981:3)⁸⁵

6 The pervasiveness of nibbidā

6.1 ALLUSIONS TO NIBBIDĀ. Practising Buddhists, 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 *saṃvega*, further see SD 9(7f); on *pasāda*, see further SD 9(7h).

6.1.1 The Vitakka,saṅghāna 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 (*ādīnava*) 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, disgusted⁸⁸ 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 *aṭṭiyāti* 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,maṃsa 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,bhūtaṃ*), as “food” for consciousness—is found in the Putta,maṃsa 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:

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 S** (M 19,3-5). Reflecting on the unwholesomeness 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 *Aṭṭiyāti 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-m-ānanda 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 (5). See also **Vibhaṅga S** (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.⁹¹ He is not drawn to it. Either *equanimity* or *loathsomeness* is established in him.⁹²

(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, disgusted⁹³ 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 Tālapuṭa 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

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

⁹² *Asubha, saññā, paricitenā bhikkhave bhikkhuno cetasā bahulaṃ viharato methuna, dhamma, samāpattiyā cittaṃ paṭilīyati paṭikuṭati paṭivattati na sampasāriyati, upekhā vā pāṭikkūlyatā vā saṅghāti*. Here “loathsomeness” (*pāṭikkūlyatā*) 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 jigucchati*: 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 conduces to mental concentration,
which allows us to see true reality,
which leads to revulsion, and
which results in the knowledge and vision of freedom.

sīla
avippaṭisāra
pamudita
pīti
passadha,kāya
sukha
samādhi
yathā,bhūta
nibbidā
vimutti,ñāṇa,dassana
(A 10.2/5:2-4), SD 41.6

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 5.2.2.9, Aṅguttara Nikāya 5, Pañcaka Nipāta 2, Dutiya Paṇṇāsaka 2, Saññā Vagga 9

Theme: Five practices conducive to the awakening process

1 Bhikshus, these 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.

What are the five?

2 Here, bhikshus,

- (1) one dwells contemplating on impurity in the body;
- (2) one perceives the foulness of food;
- (3) one perceives non-delight in all the world;

asubhānupassī kāye viharati
āhāre paṭikkūla,saññi
sabba,loke anabharata,saññi

- (4) one perceives impermanence in all formations; *sabba,sāṅkhāresu aniccānupassī*
 (5) the perception of death is well established for oneself.⁹⁴ *maraṇa,saññī assa ajjhataṃ supatṭhita*

3 These, bhikkhus, 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.*

— evaṃ —

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, Aṅguttara Nikāya 7, Sattaka Nipāta 2, Duttiya Paṇṇāsaka 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]

— evaṃ —

6.2 CONTEMPORARY REMARKS ON NIBBIDĀ

6.2.1 Comments by practitioners

6.2.1.1 Commenting on such passages as these, **Bhikkhu Santi**⁹⁵ 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), **Satisūpaṭṭhita S** (A 5:122/3:143). The first 4 practices are recorded in **Māra Tajjanīya 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, sukha* (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 Liem⁹⁶ 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)⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸ 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*).

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*, *pahaṭṭha* 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. *Nibbidā* 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.

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⁹⁹ See *Atam, mayatā*, SD 20.1.

Appendix: Suttas with *nibbidā* passages

Listed here are suttas, like **the Alaggadūpama 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.”

Dīgha,nakha Sutta	M 74,10/1:500	The 3 kinds of feelings
Alaggadūpama Sutta	M 22,26-29/1:138 f	The 5 aggregates
Cūḷa Rāhulovāda Sutta	M 147,9/3:279 f	The 5 aggregates
Cha,chakka Sutta	M 148,40/3:286 f	Revulsion towards the 6 senses
Assutavā Sutta 1	S 12.61/2:95	Revulsion towards body and mind; dependent arising
Assutavā Sutta 2	S 12.62/2:98	Revulsion towards body and mind; dependent arising
Susima Sutta	S 12.70/2:125	The 5 aggregates
Cakkhu Sutta	S 18.1/2:245	The impermanence of the 6 senses
Khandha Sutta	S 18.10/2:249	The impermanence of the 5 aggregates
Cakkhu Sutta	S 18.11/2:250	The 6 internal senses & 6 external objects
Anicca Sutta	S 22.12/3:21	The impermanence of the 5 aggregates
Anatta Sutta	S 22.14/3:28	The 5 aggregates are not self
Soṇa Sutta	S 22.49/3:50	The 5 aggregates
Anatta,lakkhaṇa Suta	S 22.59/3:68	The 5 aggregates
Āditta Sutta	S 22.61/3:71	The 5 aggregates are on fire
Arahanta Sutta 1	S 22.76/3:83	The 5 aggregates
Arahanta Sutta 2	S 22.77/3:84	The 5 aggregates
Khajjanīya Sutta	S 22.79/3:90	The 5 aggregates
Phena,piṇḍūpama Sutta	S 22.95/3:142	The 5 aggregates
Kukkuḷa Sutta	S 22.136/3:177	The 5 aggregates are “blazing” <i>kukkuḷa</i>)
Māra Sutta	S 23.11/3:195	The 5 aggregates are “death” (Māra)
Adukkhamadukkhī S	S 24.96/3:224	The 5 aggregates
Ajjhattānicca Sutta	S 4:2/35.1	The 6 internal senses
Bāhirānicca Sutta	S 35.4/4:3	The 6 external senses
Āditta Sutta	S 35.28/4:20	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings are “burning”
Addha,bhūta Sutta	S 35.29/4:21	The 6 senses are “oppressive”
Samugghāta Sappāya S	S 35.32/4:26	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings: conceivings
Anicca Sutta	S 35.43/4:28	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings are impermanent
Upassaṭṭha Sutta	S 35.44/4:29	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings are “afflicted”
Sabb’upādāna Pariyādāna Sutta 1	S 35.61/4:33	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings
Sabb’upādāna Pariyādāna Sutta 2	S 35.62/4:35	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings
Cha,phass’āyatana Sutta 3	S 35.73/4:45	The 18 senses (organs, objects, and contacts)
Gilāna Sutta 1	S 35.74/4:47	The 18 senses (organs, objects, and contacts)
Saṅkhitta Dhamma Sutta	S 35.86/4:54	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings
Bāhiya Sutta	S 35.89/4:64	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings
Upādāya Sutta	S 35.105/4:86	The 6 senses
Seyyo’ham-asmi Sutta	S 35.108/4:88	The 6 senses
Rāhulovāda Sutta	S 35.121/4:106	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings
Ajjhattānicca Sutta	S 35.140/4:129	The 6 senses are impermanent
Ajjhatta,dukkha Sutta	S 35.141/4:130	The 6 senses are suffering
Ajjhattānatta,hetu Sutta	S 35.142/4:132	The 6 senses are not self

Bahirānicca Sutta	S 35.143/4:129	The 6 sense-objects are impermanent
Bahira,dukkha Sutta	S 35.144/4:130	The 6 sense-objects are suffering
Bahirānatta,hetu Sutta	S 35.145/4:132	The 6 sense-objects are not self
Nibbāna Sappāya Sutta	S 4:136/4:135 f	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings
Ajjhattātītanicca Sutta	S 35.186/4:151	The past 6 senses are impermanent
Ajjhattānāgatānicca Sutta	S 35.187/4:151	The future 6 senses are impermanent
Ajjhatta,paccuppanānicca Sutta	S 35.188/4:151	The present 6 senses are impermanent
Ajjhattātīta,dukkha Sutta	S 35.189/4:152	The past 6 senses are suffering
Ajjhattānāgata,dukkha Sutta	S 35.190/4:152	The future 6 senses are suffering
Ajjhatta,paccuppanna,dukkha Sutta	S 35.191/4:152	The present 6 senses are suffering
Ajjhattātītanatta Sutta	S 35.192/4:152	The past 6 senses are not self
Ajjhattānāgatānatta Sutta	S 35.193/4:152	The future 6 senses are not self
Ajjhatta,paccuppanānatta Sutta	S 35.194/4:152	The present 6 senses are not self
Bahirātītanicca Sutta	S 35.195/4:152	The past 6 sense-objects are impermanent
Bahirānāgatānicca Sutta	S 35.196/4:152	The future 6 sense-objects are impermanent
Bahira,paccuppanānicca Sutta	S 35.197/4:152	The present 6 sense-objects are impermanent
Bahirātīta,dukkha Sutta	S 35.198/4:152	The past 6 sense-objects are suffering
Bahirānāgata,dukkha Sutta	S 35.199/4:152	The future 6 sense-objects are suffering
Bahira,paccuppanna,dukkha Sutta	S 35.200/4:152	The present 6 sense-objects are suffering
Bahirātītanatta Sutta	S 35.201/4:152	The past 6 sense-objects are not self
Bahirānāgatānatta Sutta	S 35.202/4:152	The future 6 sense-objects are not self
Bahira,paccuppanānatta Sutta	S 35.203/4:152	The present 6 sense-objects are not self
Yad-anicca Ajjhattātīta Sutta	S 35.204/4:153	That which is impermanent are the past 6 senses
Yad-anicca Ajjhattānāgata Sutta	S 35.205/4:153	That which is impermanent are the future 6 senses
Yad-anicca Ajjhatta,paccuppanna S	S 35.206/4:153	That which is impermanent are the present 6 senses
Yan,dukkha Ajjhattātīta Sutta	S 35.207/4:154	That which is suffering are the past 6 senses
Yan,dukkha Ajjhattānāgata Sutta	S 35.208/4:154	That which is suffering are the future 6 senses
Yan,dukkha Ajjhatta,paccuppanna S	S 35.209/4:154	That which is suffering are the present 6 senses
Yad-anatta Ajjhattātīta Sutta	S 35.210/4:154	That which is not self are the past 6 senses
Yad-anatta Ajjhattānāgata Sutta	S 35.211/4:154	That which is not self are the future 6 senses
Yad-anatta Ajjhatta,paccuppanna S	S 35.212/4:154	That which is not self are the present 6 senses
Yad-anicca Bahirātīta Sutta	S 35.213/4:154	That which is impermanent are the past 6 sense-organs
Yad-anicca Bahirānāgata Sutta	S 35.214/4:154	That which is impermanent are the future 6 sense-organs
Yad-anicca Bahira,paccuppanna S	S 35.215/4:154	That which is impermanent are the present 6 sense-organs
Yan,dukkha Bahirātīta Sutta	S 35.216/4:155	That which is suffering are the past 6 sense-organs
Yan,dukkha Bahirānāgata Sutta	S 35.217/4:155	That which is suffering are the future 6 sense-organs
Yan,dukkha Bahira,paccuppanna S	S 35.218/4:155	That which is suffering are the present 6 sense-organs
Yad-anatta Bahirātīta Sutta	S 35.219/4:155	That which is not self are the past 6 sense-organs
Yad-anatta Bahirānāgata Sutta	S 35.220/4:155	That which is not self are the future 6 sense-organs
Yad-anatta Bahira,paccuppanna S	S 35.221/4:155	That which is not self are the future 6 sense-organs
Āyatana Ajjhattānicca Sutta	S 35.222/4:155	The 6 senses are impermanent
Āyatana Ajjhatta,dukkha Sutta	S 35.223/4:155	The 6 senses are suffering
Āyatana Ajjhattānatta Sutta	S 35.224/4:156	The 6 senses are not self
Āyatana Bahirānicca Sutta	S 35.225/4:156	The 6 sense-objects are impermanent
Āyatana Bahira,dukkha Sutta	S 35.226/4:156	The 6 sense-objects are suffering
Āyatana Bahirānatta Sutta	S 35.227/4:156	The 6 sense-objects are not self
Āditta,pariyāya Sutta	S 35.235/4:171	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings
Anurādha Sutta	S 44.2/4:383	The 5 aggregates. ¹⁰⁰

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

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