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Ceto, vimutti, paññā, vimutti and *ubhato.bhāga, vimutti*

Freedom of mind, freedom by wisdom, and freedom both ways
An introduction by Piya Tan

1 Terms for freedom

1.1 TWO KINDS OF MENTAL FREEDOM. We have already noted that **the freedom of mind** (*ceto, vimutti*), in its highest sense, refers to the fruition of arhathood [2.4.4.2]. Here, we will examine other usages of this important term. We have also made a brief analysis of the distinction between the terms “the both-ways freedom” (*ubhato, bhāga vimutti*) and “freedom by wisdom” (*paññā, vimutti*) [2.2.2]. Here, we will examine the connections between “freedom of mind” (sometimes “freedom of mind”) (*ceto, vimutti*), “freedom through wisdom” (*paññā, vimutti*) and related terms.

1.2 DIFFERENCES. Although the two terms—*ceto, vimutti* and *paññā, vimutti*—relate to “freedom” (*vimutti*), they are not synonyms, and have important differences, especially regarding the kind of *freedom* that they refer to. While “freedom by wisdom” (*paññā, vimutti*) simply refers to the realization of nirvana or final freedom of any arhat, when paired with “freedom of the mind” (*ceto, vimutti*),¹ it means that the arhat has also mastered the form dhyanas.

1.3 When the arhat has mastered the 4 form dhyanas, the 4 formless dhyanas, and the cessation of perception and feeling—meaning that he has mastered the 8 liberations (*aṭṭha vimokkha*)²—then, he is said to be “freed both ways” or “dual-freed” (*ubhato.bhāga, vimutta*) [2.2.1]. This freedom is known as *ubhato.bhāga, vimutti*. An example of such an arhat is found in **the Asaṃsa Bhikkhu Sutta** (A 3.13).³

1.4 CONTENTS. The different kinds of mental or spiritual freedom (*vimutti*) mentioned in the Pali texts can be summarized as follows in this study:

(1) <i>ceto, vimutti</i>	temporary freedom	[2.2; 4.5]
(2) <i>akuppa ceto, vimutti</i>	final freedom	[2.3-2.4]
(3) <i>paññā, vimutti</i>	final freedom	[3, esp 3.1, 3.3; 4.5]
(4) <i>paññā, vimutti</i> and <i>ceto, vimutti</i>	final freedom	[3.1, 3.3]
(5) <i>ubhato.bhāga, vimutti</i>	final freedom	[3.3, esp 3.3.2]

2 Ceto, vimutti

2.1 USAGES

2.1.1 Two senses. *Ceto, vimutti* is generally used in two ways in the suttas,⁴ that is, meaning (1) temporary and pleasant (*sāmāyika ceto, vimutti*) [2.1.2.1], and (2) “unshakable” or permanent (*akuppa ceto,*

¹ The mfn *ceto, vimutta* is rare, but does occur, eg **Sākacchā S** (A 5.65/3:81,3), SD 58.5.

² See SD 49.5b (1).

³ A 3.13/1:108 (SD 51.12).

⁴ Although technically *sutta* is only one of the “9 limbs of the Teacher’s teaching” (*navarāga satthu, sāsana*), it can also refer to the whole ninefold set. Sometimes, the term *suttanta* is used for this purpose, although it is

vimutti) [2.2.3]. The **Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43)⁵ and the **Go,datta Sutta** (S 41.7)⁶ give the following 8 types of freedom of mind (*ceto,vimutti*):

(1) neutral freedom of mind	<i>adukkham-asukha ceto,vimutti</i>	M 43,26
(2) the freedom of mind that is lovingkindness	<i>mettā ceto,vimutti</i>	M 43,31(1)
(3) the freedom of mind that is compassion	<i>karuṇā ceto,vimutti</i>	M 43,31(2)
(4) the freedom of mind that is gladness	<i>muditā ceto,vimutti</i>	M 43,31(3)
(5) the freedom of mind that is equanimity	<i>upekkhā ceto,vimutti</i>	M 43,31(4)
(6) the freedom of mind that is nothingness	<i>ākiñcaññā ceto,vimutti</i>	M 43,32+35
(7) the empty freedom of mind	<i>suññata ceto,vimutti</i>	M 43,33+36
(8) the signless freedom of mind	<i>animitta ceto,vimutti</i>	M 43,27-29, 34, 37

The first—the neutral freedom of mind (*adukkham-asuka ceto,vimutti*) refers to the mental freedom enjoyed in the 4th dhyana, which is said to be beyond pleasure and pain. The other freedoms of mind are explained below.

2.1.2 Words with –samaya, -sāmaya, -sāmāya.

2.1.2.1 We have already mentioned the freedom that is “temporary and pleasant” (*sāmāyika ceto,-vimutti*) [2.1.1]. The adjective *asāmāyika* here comes from the prefix *na* (“no, not”) + *samaya* (“time, duration, occasion) + *ika* (suffix signifying an adjective).⁷ This is the kind of mental freedom we enjoy when we are focused in our meditation, especially in dhyana, but this lasts only from within a moment to some hours. In the more advanced meditators, such a dhyana state may last for days, but not beyond a week.⁸

2.1.2.2 The opposite of *sāmāyika* (also spelt *sāmayika*)—and the near-synonym *samayika*, “temporary” [2.1.2.3]—is *asāmāyika* (literally, “not temporary”), “permanent, unconditioned” (*asāmāyika*, “not temporary”). It appears as a qualifier (adjective) for “freedom” (*vimutti*) in the **Mahā Suññata Sutta** (M 122).⁹ The **Paṭisambhidā,magga** asks the question, “What is temporary liberation” (*sāmatika vimokkha*)? It answers it as “the 4 dhyanas and the 4 formless attainments” (*cattāri jhānāni catasso ca arūpa,samāpattiyo*) (Pm 2:40,22).

2.1.2.3 There are also the forms *samaya*, “temporary,” and *asamaya*, “permanent,” as qualifiers of mental freedom (*vimutti*) and spiritual liberation (*vimokkha*). The terms, “temporary liberation” (*samaya,-*

sometimes used only in the titles of longer discourses, esp those of the Dīgha Nikāya. In the term *dhamma,vinaya*, *dhamma* refers to the suttas, but can sometimes incl the Abhidhamma. See eg **Dhamma,vihāri S** (A 5.74,2/3:88), SD 44.5; also SD 30.10 (4); SD 26.11 (3.2.1.3).

⁵ M 43,26-37 (SD 30.2).

⁶ S 30.2 (SD 60.4).

⁷ *Sāmāyikaṃ vimuttiṃ* occurs at S 1:120,14 [2.2.3.1]; A 3:349,14; Sn 54b *sāmayikaṃ ~ṃ*.

⁸ See eg how the Buddha spends the 7 weeks after his awakening, changing his posture and meditation every 7 days: see **Dhamma & Abhidhamma**, SD 26.1 (5). These 7-day breaks are prob are used for attending to the toilet, and drinking water, perhaps even taking some food in the case of most meditators. The Buddha, it is said, here fasts throughout the 7 weeks.

⁹ M 122,4/3:110 (SD 11.4).

vimokkha), “temporary freedom” (*samaya, vimutti*), “permanent liberation” (*asamaya, vimokkha*) and “permanent freedom” (*asamaya, vimutti*), are found in **the Mahā Sārōpama Sutta** (M 29).¹⁰

The term “permanently freed” (*asamaya, vimutta*) is found in **the (Ekādasaka) Nandiya Sutta** (A 11.17), which lists the 11 spiritual practices for a lay person. Near the Sutta’s end, the arhat is described as one who is “permanently freed” (*asamaya, vimutta*). This means that he “does not see in himself anything else that still needs to be done, or anything to add to what already has been done”¹¹ This last important statement describing the arhat is also found in **the Soṇa (Koḷivīsa) Sutta** (A 6.55).¹²

These words with the form *samaya* are, however, less common than those mentioned above.

2.2 TEMPORARY *CETO, VIMUTTI*

2.2.1 When “freedom of the mind” (*ceto, vimutti*)¹³ is used by itself, it never signifies arhathood (unless qualified with “unshakable,” *akuppa*, etc) [2.3-2.4]. Used by itself, *ceto, vimutti* simply denotes a temporary mental freedom, especially that of the 4 dhyanas or the 4 divine abodes [2.2.4].

2.2.2 The suttas often speak *ceto, vimutti* as being “temporary but pleasant” (*sāmāyika kanta*), such as in **the Mahā Suññata Sutta** (M 122) and **the Miga, sālā Sutta** (A 6.44).

The Mahā Suññata Sutta (M 122) says that a solitary life of meditation can bring about mental freedom that pleasant but temporary (*sāmāyikaṃ vā kantaṃ ceto, vimuttiṃ*).¹⁴

The Miga, sālā Sutta (A 6.44) uses the term *sāmāyika vimutti*, “temporary liberation,” omitting *kanta*. Here, the Buddha says that even an immoral person (*dussīla*) may better himself if he *only* understands the nature of the freedom of mind (*ceto, vimutti*) and the freedom by wisdom (*paññā, vimutti*), and with the help of Dharma study and instruction, he is able to experience at least temporary liberation, and continues in this way, he would have a happy rebirth where he can progress in the Dharma.¹⁵

2.2.3 The impermanent and conditioned nature of *ceto, vimutti* is further illustrated in **the Godhika Sutta** (S 4.23) and **the Aṭṭhaka, nāgara Sutta** (M 52).

2.2.3.1 The Godhika Sutta (S 4.23) recounts how the monk Godhika is unable to sustain and stabilize the mental freedom that he experiences six times. When he attains it in his seventh attempt, he commits suicide, and so immediately awakens as an arhat.¹⁶ The third Pārājika rule disallows killing a human being, and also suicide, or causing or encouraging it. The breach of this rule entails defeat (automatic expulsion from the sangha).¹⁷ It is probable that Godhika’s suicide occurs before this rule was instituted.¹⁸

¹⁰ M 29: *samaya, vimokkha* (M 29/1:196,29), *samaya, vimutti* (M 29/1:196,30), *samaya, vimokkha* (M 29/1:197,-27), and *asmaya, vimutti* (M 29/1:197,28).

¹¹ A 11.14/5:336,26 (SD 99.2).

¹² A 6.55,4.2/3:376 (SD 20.12). This clearly shows that arhats do not need to become Buddhas, as falsely claimed by some later Mahāyāna teachers and writers. See **Mahā Assa, pura S** (M 39,21.3), SD 10.13 highest goal; also **Mahā, nidāna S** (M 15.36.3/2:71,26), SD 5.17; SD 30.8 (6.4.4). On dealing with Buddha’s death, see SD 27.6b (4.1.1) dealing with Buddha’s death.

¹³ The mfn *ceto, vimutta* (eg *ceto, vimutto*) is rare, but does occur, eg **Sākacchā S** (A 5.65/3:81,3), SD 58.5. The adj *paññā, vimutto* occurs in all the 4 Nikāyas (eg D 2.70; M 1:439; S 3.65; A 1:74, 5:23).

¹⁴ M 122,4/3:110 f (SD 11.14); Nc:Be270; MA 4:158.

¹⁵ A 6.44,5.4/3:349 (SD 3.2(6)); Nc:Be270; MA 4:158.

¹⁶ S 4.23/1:120 f (SD 61.16).

¹⁷ Pār 3 (V 1:71-86).

¹⁸ See Oxford Dict of Buddhism: suicide.

2.2.3.2 The Aṭṭhaka, nāgara Sutta (M 52) explains that even *ceto, vimutti* is “(mentally) constructed [mind-made], intentionally formed...impermanent, subject to ending” Be that as it is, when we direct the calm, clear mind and constantly reflect on this fact, when properly done, we may gain arhathood, or non-returning if there is still some restlessness.¹⁹

2.2.4 The simplest most sutta common usage of “freedom of mind,” then, is in qualifying the experiences of dhyana and of **the divine abodes**. We see this typical passage on lovingkindness (which applies mutatis mutandis to the other three abodes, too) in **the Te, vijja Sutta** (D 13):

76 With a heart of **lovingkindness**,

he dwells suffusing one quarter, the second, the third, the fourth.

Thus above, below, in between, everywhere and to everyone as well as to himself,

he dwells suffusing the whole world with lovingkindness

that is vast, exalted, boundless, without hate, without ill will.

77 Just as a mighty conch-blower, Vāsetṭha,

might with little difficulty make a proclamation to the four quarters, so by this cultivation,²⁰

Vāsetṭha, by this **freedom of the mind through lovingkindness**,

any karma done in a limited way²¹ neither remains nor persists there.

(D 13,76-77/1:151 f), SD 1.8; cf A 1:38,23 f

2.3 AKUPPA CETO, VIMUTTI

2.3.1 The term *ceto, vimutti* is sometimes used in a special way qualified by various terms such as *kuppa*, “unshakable,” qualifies *ceto, vimutti*. Here, its special meaning has to be noted. Near the end of **the Dhamma, cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), the Buddha recounts how his awakening is an “unshakable freedom of mind” (*akuppā me ceto, vimutti*).²² This phrase famously occurs in the Buddha’s declaration of his own awakening, called “the Buddha’s basic awakening pericope”: which runs thus:

Unshakable is my freedom of mind. This is my last birth. There is now no more rebirth!

Akuppā me ceto, vimutti, ayam antimā jāti. N’atth’idāni punabbhāvo’ti.

This famous line occurs in the same context in the Buddha’s life, as recorded in **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26), **the (Dhātu) Pubbe Sambodhi Sutta** (S 14.31), **the Acariṃ Sutta** (S 14.32), **the Pubb’eva**

¹⁹ M 52,8-11/1:351 f (SD 41.2). On non-returning and restlessness, see SD 32.7 (2.1.4).

²⁰ “By this cultivation,” *bhāvitāya*. Alt tr “by this meditation.”

²¹ “Karma done in a limited way” or “limited karma,” *pamāṇa, kataṃ kammaṃ*. As in **Saṅkha, dhama S** (S 42.8/-4:322) & **Brahma, vihāra S** (A 10.208/5:299), SD 2.10. Comys on *Brahma, vihāra S* says that “limited karma” refers to sense-sphere karma (*kāmāvacara, kamma*)” (AA 5:77), and “unlimited karma” (*appamāṇa, kataṃ kammaṃ*) refers to form-sphere karma. It is called “unlimited” because it is done by transcending the limit, for it is developed by way of specified, unspecified and directional pervasion (DA 2:406; MA 3:450; cf J 2:62). SA on *Saṅkha S* explains that “When (simple) lovingkindness is said, this can be interpreted either as access concentration or dhyana, but when it is qualified as ‘freedom of mind’ (*ceto, vimutti*) it definitely means dhyana or meditation dhyana (*jhāna*).” (SA 3:105). The point is that if a person masters the “freedom of mind by lovingkindness” at the level of dhyana, the karmic potential of this dhyana attainment will take precedence over sense-sphere karma and will generate rebirth into the form realm. See **Brahmavihāra**, SD 38.5 (8.2) & Vism 309-311/9.49-58. (S:B 1149 n346; A:B 315 n73).

²² S 56.11,14,2/5:423 @ SD 1.1 = V 1.11,30.

Sambodha Sutta (A 3.100a), and the **Gayā,sīsa Sutta** (A 8.64).²³ The Buddha is here referring to his own awakening, that is, arhathood. The same term is used to refer to a monk's arhathood in **the (Lābha,-sakkāra,siloka) Bhikkhu Sutta** (S 17.30).²⁴

2.3.2 Similarly, in **the Mahā Sārōpama Sutta** (M 29), the Buddha speaks of the holy life, that is, monastic training (and the Buddhist life in general) as having “the unshakable freedom of mind” as its goal.²⁵ Its commentary glosses *akuppa ceto,vimutti* here as “the freedom of the fruit of arhathood” (*arahatta,phala vimutti*, MA 2:232).

The Das'uttara Sutta (D 34) lists “the unshakable freedom of mind” in its collections of “ones” under the caption, “Which one thing is to be realized?” (*katamo eko dhammo sacchikatabbo*). It is, of course, referring to the attaining of nirvana, as confirmed by its Commentary as “the freedom of the fruit of arhathood” (just as in the Majjhima Commentary above).²⁶ [2.4]

2.4 USAGES OF AKUPPA CETO,VIMUTTI

2.4.1 One of the most important usage of the term “unshakable freedom of mind” (*akuppa ceto,vimutti*) is found in the closing half of **the Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43), that is, the teaching on **the 4 kinds of mental freedom** (*akuppa ceto,vimutti*). The first begins with the cultivation of the divine abodes (*brahma,-vihāra*), and so is as the “immeasurable freedom of mind” (*appamānā ceto,vimutti*). The second is the freedom of mind through nothingness (*ākiñcaññā ceto,vimutti*), which is attained through full concentration in “the sphere of nothingness” (*ākiñcaññ'āyatana*), the third of the formless attainments.

The third is the freedom of mind through emptiness (*suññatā ceto,vimutti*), which is attained by reflecting on existence to be empty (*suñña*) of self (*attā*), or what is owned by the self (*attaniya*). The fourth is the signless freedom of mind (*animittā ceto,vimutti*), which is attained by “the non-attention to all signs” (that is, disregarding all mental objects) and “the attention to the signless element” (that is, nirvana).

2.4.2 These 4 freedoms are identical in meaning and purpose (the attaining of arhathood), differing only in name. They differ only by *the way* that we are liberated from the unwholesome roots (lust, hate, delusion), as follows:

Being freed from the unwholesome roots
as a measuring tendency (*pamāṇa,karaṇa*)²⁷
as something or “things” (*kiñcana*)²⁸
(as any of the three here)²⁹
as signs (*nimitta*)³⁰

it is called
the immeasurable freedom of mind
the freedom of mind through nothingness
the freedom of mind through emptiness
the signless freedom of mind (M 43), SD 30.2

²³ Respectively, M 26,18.7/1:167,28 @ SD 1.11; S 14.31/2:171 @ SD 29.17; S 14.32/2:172 @ SD 29.18; A 3:100a-1:259,11 @ SD 19.11; A 8.64/4:305,4 @ SD 86.7. For a philological comment, see Norman, “Aspects of Early Buddhism,” Leiden, 1990:25 n2.

²⁴ S 17.30/2:239,6 (SD 100.4).

²⁵ M 29/1:197,32 (SD 55.8).

²⁶ D 34,1.2(10); DA 3:1057; also at MA 2:174, 232, 5:59 (lemma: *vimutti*); SA 1:171; only as *vimutti* at MA 5:59, SA 2:53; NmA 2:333; Pm 1:128; cf AA 3:174; SnA 1:336.

²⁷ That is, through conceit (*māna*): see **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a.

²⁸ That is, the craving that reifies: see **Atammayatā**, SD 19.13.

²⁹ Although “emptiness” (*suñña* or Comy, *suññatā*) is not mentioned here, it is implied by the triad, since emptiness underlies the activity of the other three kinds of freedoms. It has been listed according to its mention in the Sutta.

³⁰ That is, as an external object: see **Nimitta & anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14.

All the 4 freedoms have a common name: “the unshakable freedom of mind” (*akuppa ceto,vimutti*).³¹ They all refer to the same thing: the bliss of nirvana.³²

3 Paññā,vimutta and ubhato.bhāga,vimutta

3.1 PAÑÑĀ,VIMUTTA. The suttas often speak of 2 kinds of **arhats** or spiritually freed beings: the “**wisdom-freed**” (*paññā,vimutta*)³³ and the **one freed both ways** or “dual-freed” (*ubhato.bhāga,vimutta*). Both are freed through wisdom—which is always the best tool for cutting off the ignorance that holds back and feeds the defilements.

Both have the same kind of liberating wisdom, that is, the understanding of the 4 noble truths. For both, too, the defilements are fully uprooted and destroyed birth. It is important to note here that they *neither* go on to become Buddhas *nor* need to, as they have attained the same awakening as the Buddha himself.³⁴

The “wisdom-freed” arhat cultivates only the form-dhyanas, and using the calm and clarity that the dhyana provides, he directs his attention to see true reality with right view. He does not go on to cultivate the 4 formless attainments.³⁵

3.2 UBHATO.BHĀGA,VIMUTTA. The Commentaries explain the term **ubhato.bhāga,vimutta** as meaning (1) freed *through* two “parts,” and (2) freed *from* two “parts” (*ubhato,bhāga*). Through attaining the formless spheres, he is freed from the body (*kāya*), and through attaining the path of arhathood (*agga,magga*, “the foremost path”) he is freed from the mind (*nāma*).³⁶ While the former is also called “freedom of mind” (*ceto,vimutti*), the latter is also called “freedom by wisdom” (*paññā,vimutti*).

In other words, he is freed in both body and mind.³⁷ The one “freed both ways” is an arhat who attains the 8 liberations (*aṭṭha,vimokkha*),³⁸ which include the 4 formless attainments and freedom by wisdom, that is, the destruction of all defilements. His mind is fully freed by the attaining of the fruit of arhathood. Hence, he is freed “both ways,” in both body and mind.³⁹

³¹ M 43/1:298 (SD 30.2); S 4:297. For details, see (2.3-2.4).

³² For more details on **ceto,vimutti**, see SD 30.2 (3).

³³ This adj form (esp as *paññā,vimutto*) is common [2.2.1 n].

³⁴ On arhats not needing to become Buddhas, see **Mahā Assa,pura S** (M 39,21.3), SD 10.13 (arhathood as the highest goal); **Mahā,nidāna S** (M 15,36.3/2:71,26), SD 5.17; also SD 30.8 (6.4.4), On dealing with the Buddha’s death, see SD 27.6b (4.1.1).

³⁵ On the form dhyanas, see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (5). On the formless attainments, see SD 24.11 (5).

³⁶ DA 2:524, 3:889; SA 1:278; AA 2:147 (the 7 types of saints), 4:2, 207; PugA 191.

³⁷ In **Upasīva Māṇava Pucchā** (Sn 5.7), the Buddha is said to be “Thus the sage is free in both body and mind” (*evaṃ muni nāma,kayā vimutto*, Sn 1074).

³⁸ Briefly, **the 8 liberations** are those of: (1) one with physical form sees physical forms (*rūpī rūpāni passati*); (2) one who does not see physical form internally, but sees physical forms externally (*ajjhataṃ arūpa,saññī bahiddhā rūpāni passati*); (3) one freed after contemplating the idea of the beautiful (*subhan’ t’eva adhimutto hoti*); (4) the sphere of infinite space; (5) the sphere of infinite consciousness; (6) the sphere of nothingness; (7) the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; and (8) the cessation of perception and feeling (Pm 2:38-40). Comy on **Mahā Sakul’udāyi S** (M 77,22/2:13) says that these liberations are the mind’s full (but temporary) release from the opposing states and its full (but temporary) release by delighting in the object (*ārammaṇa*) (MA 3:255, cf 255-259). For details, see SD 49.5b (1); also SD 5.17 (10).

³⁹ See **Jhānābhiñña S** (S 16.9,29 n), SD 50.7; also A Wynne 2002.

3.3 DIFFERENCE

3.3.1 The only difference between the “wisdom-freed” and the “one freed both ways” is in their progress in the calm (*samatha*) aspect of mental cultivation, that is, the extent to which they have mastered the meditative states of deep concentration (*samādhi*). This is clear from **the Kīṭāgiri Sutta** (M 70), where the dual-freed arhat is described as one who dwells “having touched touched with the body” (*kāyena phassitvā* or *phusitvā*) the formless states of freedom⁴⁰

This peculiar phrase means that he has personally won those formless attainments, which in turn frees him from his body, meaning he is no more under the sway of his physical senses. The Sutta states it in this way:

Here, bhikshus, a certain person, dwells, having touched with the body,⁴¹ those freedoms,⁴² peaceful and formless,⁴³ that transcend form,⁴⁴ and his mental influxes⁴⁵ are utterly destroyed through his seeing with wisdom. (M 70,15), SD 11.1

3.3.2 In short, both the dual-freed arhat and the wisdom-freed arhat have destroyed all their defilements (just like the Buddha), but the wisdom-freed does not attain the 8 liberations, that is, he is unable to attain the formless attainments (but attains only the form dhyanas), which is sufficient to provide the calm and clarity with which he is able to see true reality with liberating wisdom.

4 Dhyana and arhathood

4.1 PROFICIENCY IN SAMADHI. All arhats are perfectly freed in the same way from ignorance and suffering, but are distinguished into two types, on the basis of their proficiency in concentration (*samādhi*). Those who have destroyed the defilements but lack the mastery over the 8 liberations [2.2.1] are called “freed by wisdom” or “wisdom-freed” (*paññā, vimutta*).

If he is able to attain any of all of the form dhyanas, but no higher, he is said to be “mentally freed” (*ceto, vimutta*). However, if he is able to attain all the formless attainments (that is, the 8 liberations), then is said to be “freed both ways” (*ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*).⁴⁶

4.2 DEFINITION. This difference between the two types of liberation is evident from this definition of the wisdom-freed arhat, given in **the Kīṭā, giri Sutta** (M 70), thus:

⁴⁰ The mention of “the body” (*kāya*) he is intentional: through the formless attainments, the arhat is freed from his body, ie, he is not subject to his 5 physical senses. His mind is freed through self-realized wisdom.

⁴¹ *Kāyena phassitvā viharati. Phassitvā* has vll: *phusitvā* (Be Se), *phussitvā*. MA defines *phassitvā* thus: Having touched, mastered, attained it with the mental body *nāma, kāyena phassitvā pāpuṇitvā adhigantvā ti vuttam hoti* (MA 1:162), ie, experienced in one’s own person (body and mind), an idiomatic expression for personal experience. Cf A 2:87.

⁴² Here the “liberations” (*vimokkhā*, vl *vimokkhā*) refer to the “8 liberations” (*aṭṭha vimokkhā*). On *aṭṭha vimokkhā*, see **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15,35/2:70 f), **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,3.1(11)/3:262) + SD 5.17 (10).

⁴³ “Formless,” ie, devoid of material shape in terms of sense-object and of their result (MA 1:162).

⁴⁴ That is, having passed beyond the form dhyanas (*rūpa jhānā*) (MA 1:162).

⁴⁵ “Mental influxes,” *āsava*: see (5).

⁴⁶ Note here that these 3 word—*paññā, vimutta, ceto, vimutta, and ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*—all with the *-a* ending are adjectives (which are very common). Their respective nouns are, viz, *paññā, vimutti, ceto, vimutti, and ubhato, bhāga, vimutti*, all with the *-i* ending.

Here, bhikshus, a certain person dwells
not having touched with the body those freedoms that are peaceful and formless,
 that transcend form,
but his mental influxes are utterly destroyed through his seeing with wisdom.
 (M 70,16), SD 11.1

The wisdom-freed, then, does *not* attain any of the formless attainments, and also note that there is *no* mention of the form dhyanas—all arhats and non-returners need to at least attain the form dhyanas. This is so for two important reasons. Firstly, only the dhyanas provide us with a joy than can transcend those of the body, so that we can fully overcome sense-based lust and desire. Secondly, only the dhyana can calm and clear the mind well enough to see into through reality to attain non-returning or arhat-hood.⁴⁷

4.3 MASTERY OF SAMADHI. The Mahā Nidāna Sutta (D 15) gives us more important details about the arhat “freed both ways,” thus

1 Ānanda, when a monk attains these 8 liberations
 2 in a forward order, or in a reverse order, or in both forward and reverse order,
 3 when he attains them and emerges from them,
 4 wherever he wishes, in whatever way he wishes, for as long as he wishes,
 5 And, by realizing for himself through direct knowledge, right here and now,
 6 with the destruction of the mental influxes,
 7 attains and dwells in the influx-free freedom of mind, freedom by wisdom—
 8 then he is called a monk who is **freed both ways**.⁴⁸ (D 15,36), SD 5.17

Line 1: Only the one who masters the 8 liberations will be freed both ways [2.2.1].

Line 2: He has to be fully familiar with all the 8 liberations, that is, he has to know master “inside out,” so to speak. Here, it is clear that the 8 liberations work as a set for the arhat-to be.

Line 3: He has to fully master these liberations, both in attaining and in emerging.

Line 4: He should be able to these liberations in every other way. Lines 2-4 are a set referring to the full mastery (*vasa*) of the mind during meditation, as taught in discourses such as **the Vasa Suttas** (A 7.38ab), which refer to the 7 meditative skills, that is, those in samadhi, in attaining samadhi, in remaining in it, in emerging from it, in keeping fit for it, in the resort for it, and in the resolution for samadhi.⁴⁹ The last skill is that of directing the mind into the 1st dhyana and the higher ones (AA 3:355).

Line 5: With this mastery, he cultivates insight through them (PmA 1:233). With this, he gains direct knowledge (*abhiññā*), that is, seeing into true reality, and including other related knowledges and powers.

Line 6 is important and will be discussed in some detail separately [5].

Line 7 is important and will be discussed in some detail separately [4.5.1].

Line 8: We see the mention of the arhat “freed both ways” mentioned in **the Mahānidāna Sutta** (D 15) immediately after the passage on the 8 liberations, showing that he has mastered them.

⁴⁷ The paths of streamwinning and of once-returning do not need dhyana, but a good level of moral conduct, and some level of mindfulness, such as the perception of impermanence: see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

⁴⁸ On types of saints, see Intro (10).

⁴⁹ **Vasa S** (A 7.38ab), SD 41.16.

4.4 THE 2 KINDS OF FREEDOM

4.4.1 Line 7 has two important terms: “freedom of mind” (*ceto, vimutti*) and “freedom by wisdom” (*paññā, vimutti*). These 2 freedoms should not be confused with the 2 kinds of arhats we have been discussing: the one liberated both ways (*ubhato.bhāga, vimutta*) and the wisdom-freed [2.2.2]. **The 2 freedoms** here are (1) the freedom of mind, and (2) the freedom of wisdom. These two kinds of freedom describe arhats in general,⁵⁰ and even to arhats who do not attain the 8 liberation.⁵¹

4.4.2 We have already noted (2) the freedom by wisdom (*paññā, vimutti*) under the category of “the one liberated by wisdom” (*paññā, vimutta*) [2.2.2], the common term here. *Paññā, vimutti* is called “freedom through wisdom” because it arises from insight (*vipassanā*), the wisdom of seeing true reality, especially in terms of impermanence or of suffering, and on a deeper level, on non-self. “Freedom through wisdom” frees us from ignorance (*avijjā*). Freedom from ignorance refers to the spiritual penetration of the 4 noble truths.⁵²

“Freedom from wisdom” is often used with *ceto, vimutti*, which is mental concentration that frees us from lust or craving (*taṇhā*). Hence, it is called “freedom of mind,” because lust arises on account of the 6 senses (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind). This freedom usually arises from calm (*samatha*), which may be some level of samadhi, but especially so through the any of the 4 form dhyanas or all of them. Through calm, the mind is free from grasping the 5 physical senses and also from grasping itself.

4.5 PAÑÑĀ, VIMUTTI CETO, VIMUTTI

4.5.1 When the two terms—*paññā, vimutti* and *ceto, vimutti*—are paired together in a stock passage and qualified as being “**influx-free**” (*anāsava*), then, the passage refers to the destruction of the influxes by the supramundane path of arhathood. Here is the passage from **the Mahā Sakul’udāyi Sutta** (M 49.5a):

Furthermore, Udāyi, the path has been shown to my disciples, practising as such,
by realizing for himself through direct knowledge, right here and now,
with the destruction of the mental influxes,⁵³
attains and dwells in the influx-free freedom of mind, freedom by wisdom.⁵⁴

(M 77,59/2:22), SD 49.5a

⁵⁰ See eg **Ākaṅkheyya S** (M 6,19/1:35 f), SD 59.1; **Samaṇa-m-acala S 1** (A 4.87,3/2:87), SD 20.13.

⁵¹ See eg **Samaṇa-m-acala S 1** (A 4.87,4/2:87+ 6(5)/2:88), SD 20.13.

⁵² On the noble truths, see **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11), SD 1.1.

⁵³ “With the destruction of the mental influxes destroyed,” *khīṇ’āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit “inflow, outflow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as taints (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, bad (influences), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists 4 *āsava*: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16,2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict under *āsava*.

⁵⁴ “Freedom of mind and freedom through wisdom,” respectively, *ceto, vimutti* (or, freedom by concentration, ie through destruction of the mental hindrances) and *paññā, vimutti* (freedom through insight) (A 1:60). One who is *freed by wisdom* “may not have reached the 8 liberations or deliverances (*vimokkha = jhāna*) in his own body, but through seeing with wisdom, his mental influxes are destroyed” (M 70,16/1:478). All arhats are perfectly freed in the same way from ignorance and suffering, but are distinguished into two types on the basis of their proficiency in concentration. Those who can attain **the 8 liberations** (*aṭṭha, vimokkha*), which include the 4 formless attainments and the attainment of cessation, are called *freed both ways*, that is, freed from the physical body by means of the

4.5.2 The freedom of mind (*ceto, vimutti*), in the highest sense, refers to the fruition of arhathood, particularly the concentration associated with it. Here, then, it refers to the freeing of the mind from lust that occurs through the arhat’s prior cultivation of concentration, while **the freedom by wisdom** (*paññā, vimutti*) is the freeing of the mind from ignorance that occurs through the cultivation of wisdom—as stated in the **Vijjā Bhāgiya Sutta** (A 2.3.10).⁵⁵ In the Commentaries, “freedom of mind” is taken to refer to the concentration faculty in the arhat’s fruition attainment (*phala samāpatti*), and “freedom by wisdom” denotes his wisdom faculty.⁵⁶ [2.4.5]

5 The mental influxes (*āsava*)

5.1 The Pali term for “mental influxes,” *āsava* (literally, “inflow, outflow”), comes from *ā-savati*, “flows towards” (that is, either “into” or “out” towards us). It has been variously translated as “taints” (“deadly taints,” Rhys Davids), “corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, bad (influence),” or simply left untranslated.

5.2 They are so called because they “flow” into our minds through the 6 sense-bases (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind). We mentally “process” these experiences of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and minding, thinking them over (perceiving and conceiving),⁵⁷ measuring them (liking, disliking and being bored),⁵⁸ and attracting more thoughts (mental proliferation).⁵⁹ Such activities are rooted in the latent tendencies,⁶⁰ which are fed by the influxes, and so perpetually self-generate.

5.3 The list of 3 influxes—those of sense-desire, desire for eternal existence, and ignorance—is probably an older one, and is found more frequently in the suttas.⁶¹ The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood.

The Abhidhamma lists 4 mental influxes, those of

(1) sense-desire,	<i>kām’āsava</i>
(2) (desire for eternal) existence,	<i>bhav’āsava</i>
(3) views, and	<i>diṭṭh’āsava</i> ⁶²
(4) ignorance.	<i>avijjāsava</i> ⁶³

formless dhyanas, and from all defilements by the path of arhathood [§3.33]. Saḷha, like the arhats Sāriputta and Moggallāna, is “freed both ways” (*ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*). The differences between the two types of freedom are given in **Mahā, nidāna S** (D 2:70 f), **Kiṭṭāgiri S** (M 1:477 f), and esp **Jhānābhiññā S** (S 16.9, 29), SD 50.7. For full list of the 8 liberations, see **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15, 35/2:70 f), SD 5.17.35. See also D 3:262, 228; **Vimokkha S**, A 8.66/4:306; also M 120, 37/3:103 (SD 3.4). See also **Aṭṭha Vimokkha**, SD 62.5 & Analayo 2009:141-148.

⁵⁵ A 2.3, 10/1:61 @ SD 3.2(4.2).

⁵⁶ MA 2:40; SA 3:299; UA 36.

⁵⁷ On perception (*saññā*), see **Saññā**, SD 17.4. On conception (*maññanā*), see **Mūla, pariyāya S** (M 1, 3) n, SD 11.9; **Ejā S 1** (S 35.90), SD 29.10 (3). See also SD 31.10 (2.6); SD 43.3 (4.2.3.5).

⁵⁸ On feeling, see **Vedanā**, SD 17.3.

⁵⁹ On thought proliferation (*papañca*), see **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 6.14 (2).

⁶⁰ On the latent tendencies, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3.

⁶¹ D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63.

⁶² This 3rd *āsava* was added later (eg D 2:81). The 3 influxes of sensual desire, existence and ignorance are prob the original set. See Johansson 1976:178; Premasiri 1990:58.

⁶³ D 16, 1.12/2:82, 16.2.4/2:91, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937.

These four are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*) because when we allow them, they dominate us, flooding our lives and drowning us in them. Otherwise, we are helplessly swept around by them.⁶⁴

6 Dhyana and arhathood

6.1 It is helpful to state here that **dhyana**, at least form dhyanas, are necessary for the attaining of arhathood. Firstly, we need to understand that the 8 liberations (which is a functional listing of the 8 dhyanas, along with cessation) work successively in that order *as a set*; otherwise, there is no need for such a set. In this sense, the dual-freed is said to have mastered them, that is, they have mastered both the form dhyanas and the formless attainments.

This is not to say that dhyana is necessary for awakening itself. While dhyana is necessary for the attaining of non-returning or arhathood,⁶⁵ it is not necessary for the attaining of streamwinning or once-returning.⁶⁶ As a rule, the path of renunciation, whether monastic or lay, properly has arhathood or non-returning as its goal. For effectively lay discipleship, it is sufficient to work towards streamwinning in this life itself, as the Buddha exhorts us in **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1).⁶⁷

6.2 There is a popular belief amongst some circles of traditional or ethnic Buddhists that dhyana is not necessary for arhathood. The practitioner, it is claimed, need only practise “insight” (*vipassanā*), a form of modernist meditation systematized in Burma in the mid-20th century.⁶⁸ This modernist approach is based on the notion of “dry-insight” (*sukkha, vipassaka*) practice, which includes meditation without needing to attain dhyana.

The point is that the term *sukkha, vipassaka* is not found in the Pali canon at all. It is only found in the Commentaries. Paired with this term is that of “the pure insight vehicle goer” (*suddha, vipassāna, yānika*). Again this term is an innovation introduced by Buddhaghosa in his *Visuddhi, magga*.⁶⁹ This is not to say that Vipassana as a meditation method has not merit at all. It may certainly help certain people, but not others.⁷⁰ If the method helps to be mentally calm, focused, and above all, happy (“open-minded”), then we have a good reason to keep on the practice. Otherwise, it is helpful to find a suitable method and a good teacher so that we progress in our mental cultivation.

6.3 TYPES OF ARHATS

6.3.1 Sutta typology

6.3.1.1 The suttas mention various types of arhats, the best known of which are 4 types, that is, the “one with the 3 knowledges” (**te, vijja**), the “one with the 6 superknowledges” (**cha-ḷ-abhiññā**), the one “freed both ways” (*ubhato. bhāga, vimutta*) and the “wisdom-freed” (*paññā, vimutta*). **The Pavāraṇā Sutta** (S 8.7) mentions a group of 500 monks, of which there are 60 “three-knowledge” arhats, 60

⁶⁴ See SD 50.12 (2.5.2).

⁶⁵ Dhyana (*jhāna*) is esp necessary for proper practice of celibacy and the overcoming of lust. Such a practice should, of course, be accompanied by proper tutelage (*nissaya*), along with the cultivation of insight (*vipassanā*) and of lovingkindness (*mettā*).

⁶⁶ On dhyana being unnecessary for streamwinning, see SD 8.5 (2) & SD 23.6 (4).

⁶⁷ S 25.1 (SD 16.7).

⁶⁸ See **Samatha and Vipassana**, SD 41.1 (1).

⁶⁹ *Vism* 18.5/588.

⁷⁰ See **Samatha and Vipassana**, SD 41.1.

“with the 6 superknowledge” and 60 “liberated both ways.” This shows that while these 3 kinds of arhats are rare, the most common are those “wisdom-liberated.”⁷¹

The number **500** here simply means a big number, probably a few hundred. The number “**1,250** [twelve and a half hundred] monks” (*aḍḍha, telasa bhikkhu, sata*) famously refers to those arhats who assembled at the 1st Māgha Pūjā assembly.⁷² Or, it may refer to a much large assembly than 500 monks, such as that mentioned by Jīvaka in **the Sāmañña, phala Sutta**.⁷³

We also see the phrase, “**many hundreds of monks**” (*aneka, sata bhikkhu*),⁷⁴ or “**surrounded by many hundred sangha disciples**” (*aneka, sata, parivāra sa. sāvaka, saṅgha*).⁷⁵ The number become astronomical in size in the accounts of the past buddhas whose life-spans are incredibly long. Take, for example, **Vipassī**, the 1st of the 7 buddhas in the lineage ending with Gotama, had 3 assemblies of arhats, numbering respectively, 80,000, 100,000 and 6,800,000!⁷⁶ Such huge numbers are not found in connection with the historical buddha, Gotama, who lived at a time when the average human lifespan was only 100 years.

6.3.1.2 While all 4 types of arhats are mentioned together in **the Pavāraṇā Sutta** (S 1:191), they are separately listed (amongst other kinds of saintly individuals) in **the Puggala Paññatti** (Pug 3, 14). These 4 arhats and their spiritual characteristics are given in **Table 6.3.3** below.

6.3.2 Vinaya typology

6.3.2.1 The most evolved being according to early Buddhism is the self-awakened arhat. **The Vinaya** gives a list, in an ascending order, of those worthy of the best alms, the last three are “the worthy” (*araha*), the “one with the 3 knowledges” (*te, vijja*) and the “one with the 6 superknowledges” (*cha-l-abhiññā*).⁷⁷ The term *araha* translates “arhat,” but here refers to arhats in general, while the other two are those with higher knowledges and psychic powers. [2.7.3]

6.3.2.2 Since the term *araha* [6.3.2.1] refers arhats in general, it should include the two mentioned earlier [3], that is, the arhats who are “freed both ways” (*ubhato. bhāga, vimutta*) and who are “wisdom-freed” (*paññā, vimutti*).

Thus, altogether they we have these following **4 kind of arhats** [6.3.3]

6.3.3 The arhats and their characteristics. Here is a summary table of the 4 kinds of arhats and their characteristics (their qualifications and attainments), and some sample references.⁷⁸

⁷¹ S 8.7/1:191 (SD 49.11).

⁷² SD 16.1 (6); SD 45.16 (1.4).

⁷³ Eg D 2,8/1:48 (SD 8.10).

⁷⁴ Eg D 26,25/3:76), SD 36.10.

⁷⁵ Eg A 7.69/4:136.

⁷⁶ See **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14,1.10) + SD 49.8b (1.0.4.5).

⁷⁷ Cv 6.6.2 (V2:161)

⁷⁸ For further details, see SD 1.8 (2.2.3); also Lily de Silva 1978:143 f.

<u>Type</u>	<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>References</u>
<i>cha-ḷ-abhiññā</i>	The arhat “with the 6-superknowledges” Mastered the 4 dhyanas or more as samatha. Has 6 superknowledges: psychic powers, the divine ear, mind-reading, retrocognition, the divine eye, knowledge of the destruction of the mental influxes. ⁸⁰	Cv 6.6.2 (V 2:161) Das’uttara Sutta (D 34,1.7(10)/3:281) ⁷⁹ Ākaṅkheyya Sutta (M 6,19/1:35 f) Apadāna (some 80 references)
<i>te,vijja</i>	The arhat “with the 3 knowledges” Mastered the 4 dhyanas or more as samatha. Has the 3 knowledges: retrocognition; the divine eye; and knowledge of the destruction of the mental influxes.	Te,vijja S (D 13,76-81/1:250-252) ⁸¹ Vāseṭṭha Sutta (M 98,59*/2:196 = Sn 656) (Apara,diṭṭhi) Aññatara Brahmā Sutta (S 6.5,18*/1:146) Ti,kaṇṇa Sutta (A 3.58/1:163) (Te,vijja) Jāṇussoṇi Sutta (A 3.59/1:166) (Tika) Te,vijja Sutta (It 99/98-100)
<i>ubhato.bhāga,- vimutta</i>	The arhat “freed both ways” Mastered the 8 liberations or the 9 progressive abodes. Has knowledge of the destruction of the mental influxes.	Ariya Pariyesana Sutta (M 26,42/1:174) Cūḷa Sārōpama Sutta (M 30,/1:204) ⁸² Cūḷa Go,siṅga Sutta (M 31,18/1:209) ⁸³ Nimitta Sutta (A 3.100b20/1:256)
<i>paññā,vimutta</i>	“The wisdom-freed” arhat Any or all of the 4 dhyanas as samatha. Has knowledge of the destruction of the mental influxes.	Nivāpa Sutta (M 25,20/1:160), Cha-b,bisodhana Sutta (M 112,20/3:36)

Table 6.3.3. The arhats and their characteristics

— evaṃ —

⁷⁹ The Sutta answers to “What are the 6 things to be realized?” (*katame cha dhammā sacchikātabbā*), giving the 6 superknowledges (the first 5 being psychic powers), the last of which is: “He dwells, here and now, by his super-knowledge and realization, in the attainment of the influx-free freedom of mind and freedom through wisdom,” (*āsavānaṃ khayā anāsavaṃ ceto,vimuttiṃ paññā,vimuttiṃ diṭṭh’eva dhamme sayāṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharati*).

⁸⁰ On these 6 superknowledges, see SD 27.5a (6).

⁸¹ In **Te,vijja S** (D 13), SD 1.8, the ref to “the unshakable freedom of mind” by way of the divine abodes [2.2.3-2.2.4] is obliquely alluded to in D 13,76-81.

⁸² The “unshakable freedom of mind” (*akuppa ceto.vimutti*) is mentioned here.

⁸³ “Cessation of perception and feeling” (*saññā,vedayita,nirodha*) is mentioned here.

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