NIBBANA

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Introduction

Nibbāna, the ultimate deliverance from all delusion, has many aspects, and is often misunderstood, sometimes as annihilation, some- times as supreme happiness, rarely as the cessation of ignorance through insight, and still more rarely as the ending of all striving, a solution of a problem by means of a dissolution thereof. It is not through logic that insight dawns in the awakening of understanding, but through the realisation that all problems and conflicts have arisen from a misunderstanding of the source of all action, the 'self'. Is Nibbāna the solution to all problems? It is rather the dissolution of all conflict. A refusal to see can never lead to understanding. Only in actually experiencing the cessation of wilful thought can a negation be understood without a search for an answer to a problem which will always be in the interest of 'self'. It is this insight, taking the place of logic, contemplation instead of concentration, which sets the mind free from striving towards a goal. It is in the actual that the real can be experienced, not through escape, not through projection, not through accumulation of virtue, not through concentration in seclusion, not in stages of growth and evolution, but in realising the void of that delusion, which has created the 'self' to endure, to become secure, to resist in order to exist. It is the realisation of the void of an ideal, of the futility of trying to attain an image of the real.

It is only the truth which can set free.

Nibbāna

Nibbāna[1] is thought of as the highest attainment; the ultimate goal, bliss supreme, perfect understanding, the end of all sorrow, non-created, everlasting, the unrelated absolute, deliverance from all evil tendencies, cessation of all becoming and rebirth, freedom from ignorance, supreme insight.

One might continue this litany of praise and still remain as far as ever from its experience. Nibbāna remains incomprehensible. If the finite mind with its limitations of thought could comprehend Nibbāna, Nibbāna too would be limited and finite, relative and conditioned, it would not be Nibbāna.

Nibbāna cannot be described because our words which are symbols of our thoughts are limited by our relative experiences, by our feelings of the senses, by the perceptions of our desires, by the ideas of our hopes and fears, by the thoughts of self in achievement, in attainment, in conception, none of which is realisation. Realisation can be considered as a concept, though that, of course, is very far from realisation. As a conceptualisation it would be converted from an idea into an ideal. Still, it deserves consideration, if that would lead even negatively to better understanding.

[1] The Pāli term Nibbana is used here throughout, in preference to the more commonly used Sanskrit Nirvaṇa, because of its special connotation given to it by the Buddha in his discourses, as they are handed down to us in the Pāli language.

Aspects

There is first of all the ethical aspect, for Nibbāna implies the destruction of evil propensities (*āsavā*), the removal of moral hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*), the freeing from all fetters (*saṁyojana*). In view of these removals, Nibbāna is called deliverance (*vimutti*). Where Nibbāna cannot be aimed at as a positive goal—for, "not by striving can world's end be reached"[2]—striving becomes possible in the overcoming of the hindrances and obstacles.

Then there is the aspect which is more mental than moral, because it is the culmination of an evolution in the process of comprehension. It is the gradual development through the four stages of sainthood, from learner to adept (*asekha*), from stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*) to arahant. And as this process is not one of acquisition of learning or virtue, but is leading rather to no more becoming, it may be labelled a process of cessation (*nirodha*), with Nibbāna as the ending of becoming (*bhava nirodha*).

And finally, there is the philosophical and metaphysical aspect, which lends the concept a kind of positive character, even though most of its synonyms are negative. As such, Nibbāna is viewed as the deathless (*amata*), the unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*), the summum bonum (*parama sukha*). It is the one absolute in which there is no relativity and hence no distinction or division of 'self' and 'non-self', no opposition and no conflict. As such, it is not made, not caused, not created, not conditioned (*asaṅkhata*).

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[2] *Gamanena na pattabbo lokasanto kudācanaṁ*: Ang. N. IV.

Thus, Nibbāna is understood as deliverance from evil, cessation of becoming and unconditioned in causation. As goal it is negative, as an end it has no means, as achievement it is freedom. But, there is never a 'self', or a soul, which achieves or attains or begets. Inconceivable, yet it is to be experienced, not through striving and practice, but in understanding, experiencing and living in truth. Once the truth is seen, no more hallucination can occur, because the sources which produced this misconception, namely craving and self-seeking, have dried up.

It is with great diffidence, a modesty arising from self-distrust, that the subject is being approached apart from those textual references. Yet, it cannot be left untouched, as no book on Buddhism would be complete, even in a most rudimentary form, unless the final emancipation and realisation of Nibbāna were at least hinted at, as the solution of all life's problems, sorrows and conflicts.

A Solution?

Is Nibbāna the solution of our conflict? Is it the goal of our quest for peace? Is it the haven of attainment, where the mind can come to rest? In other words, is Nibbāna at the end of our striving? Is Nibbāna the answer to our prayer, the rest of our quest, the salvation of our soul? If Nibbāna were all that, it would be possible to strive for such sublime perfection, for such supreme satisfaction, for such ultimate attainment. But that would make Nibbāna a goal for our striving, dependent on our effort, limited to our relative concepts. Nibbāna is not an end of a goal achieved; for that would be the achievement of a finite 'self', and make of Nibbāna a limitation, a property, a condition, an effect, subject to effort and cessation.
Nibbāna is not an end, but an ending.

The avowed aim of the Buddha's teaching, to use his own words, is the ending of sorrow: "One thing only do I teach, woe and how its end to reach"[3]. It is the ending of woe, that is, of suffering which is conflict in the mind, which is the end of the Buddha's teaching. And thus we may make free by equating the ending of conflict with Nibbāna. For that, too, we have the Buddha's word that Nibbāna is the ending of becoming[4]; for, in becoming which is dependent on craving and clinging (*upādāna paccayā bhavo*) is found also the source of birth, sorrow, decay and death.

[3] *Dukkhañc' eva paññapemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṁ*: Majjh. Nik.
[4] *Bhava-nirodho Nibbānaṁ*: S. II-117.

The aim of the Buddha's teaching being the ending of conflict, and conflict being caused by craving, it is therefore the ending of craving which can provide the solution of sorrow as conflict. And that is called Nibbāna, the ending of craving ,(*nirvāṇa*). "Whereas becoming originates in craving, it is in Nibbāna that it ends"[5].

The end of becoming (*bhava-nirodha*) is just to be what one is. Can one strive to become what one is? All striving to become is an escape from what is. All striving for attainment is only another step towards securing that self-concept whose ideal is the delusion of attainment. To see the muddle-headedness of the entire process is the cessation of that process. And the cessation of that process is the end of becoming (*bhava-nirodha*).

To be what one is! What great courage is required and what pure insight! Does one ever dare to see what one is? One has become what one wants to be. It is this desire for becoming and this clinging to the object of one's desire, which formed the origin of becoming (*taṇhā-upādāna-paccaya bhavo*); and it is, therefore, in the cessation of this clinging that there can be a cessation of becoming, of the will-to-become, of volitional activity, of rebirth, of conflict, of death. And that is the end of Saṁsāra.

So, the immediate need is the ending of desire, and in that, all effort flounders. Staggering in one's attempt to get on, one plunges deeper in the mud of ignorance, of confusion. Seeing the need to end desire, one makes desirelessness the ideal object of one's striving. But, that too is desire; it is the will to become desireless, to become free, to become enlightened, to attain Nibbāna. As long as this point is not seen and understood, there will be continued striving even if the goal is idealised as no-more-striving. It is exactly in the confusion of this contradiction that there is discouragement and postponement. Saṁsāra as the process of evolution and involution is beginningless; then, how can that be brought to an end? If this process of becoming in rebirth cannot be seen as having an ultimate beginning as creation, how can one ever hope for its ending in this life-span? Thus, the ideal is fading off, and attainment is put away for some other time, when perhaps conditions will be more favourable.

[5] *Taṇhā samudayo bhave, nirodho nāma Nibbānaṁ*: Abh. Sang, 509.

Perhaps, one may feel that we shall need another Buddha who will talk less of conflict and more of love. For, it is not possible to put the clock back and solve in a day what has been building up for many centuries and many lives. And thus one continues playing with building blocks, increasing one's desire for continuance, still vaguely hoping that all will be well in the end.

One keeps the end in view, and thus that ideal image becomes the moving force for activity. Without that ideal there would be no urge and no action. The activity we see therefore as the result of such urge, is not action at all, but wilful reaction. It is that will and volition to attain (*cetanā*) which constitutes the activity (*kamma*) which leads to reaction (*vipāka*) which is rebirth. That is becoming (*bhava*) and not ceasing (*nirodha*).

Refusal to See

But there is a refusal to see the end as an ideal, as long as there is a refusal to see what there is now. Must one build up a Saṁsāra of virtue to overcome a Saṁsāra of evil? Can hate be overcome by love when the source of hate is left untouched, when there is opposition because the 'self' isolates itself in virtue? As long as there is the concept of a 'self' to be liberated, there will be the effort towards that ideal, which is a concept of the 'self' to become free. It is not freedom as the goal, but the continuance of the 'self' in the ideal of freedom. And that is happening all the time, and every time when the pious wish is uttered: May you attain Nibbāna! The 'self' is building up its interests and holding its shares in that enterprise with the ultimate hope and expectation of attainment: May I attain!

It is with that end in view (not in this life perhaps, but in some other time, in some other place) that perfection is sought in giving and renouncing, in patience and in love, in virtue and in wisdom. But can wisdom be acquired? One may grow in knowledge and forbearance, but there is still the growth of 'self'. The very question 'How?' is the basic standard of all progress. It is the search for the means, the method for acquisition in the most subtle layers of the mind. It is that very search which must cease.

Of course, it is absurd to ask: How to cease? For that will still be the search for the attainment of cessation.

It is so easy to lose track of the path in the jungle of one's achievements. Absolute freedom is the image of the goal set by the mind. And then, thought begins to experiment! First, in renunciation, cutting oneself off from all impediments of the world. Then, in seclusion, cutting oneself off from all the impediments of the environment in which one lives. Then still further, in concentration, disciplining the mind to fix itself only on selected topics, cutting off mental distractions from within.

And then come the results. In reducing one's wants life has become simplified; and there is neither worry nor agitation even about the necessities of life, in the procuring of food and shelter. In limiting one's contacts and relationship, there is less friction and no waste of time, otherwise spent in frivolous or polite conversation. In fixing one's thoughts there is concentration which may lead to one- pointedness, the object of one's striving. In that one-pointedness there is restriction or distraction.

Now the mind seems free and loses itself in the infinity of space, in universal love and compassion, in boundless consciousness, even in the perception that nothing is, no 'thing'! And there the search for absolute freedom seems to have come to an end, as thought is freed from need and greed. In that state of liberation the mind is so completely cut off from all experience, that even perception becomes imperceptible.

The Thought of Nibbāna

But there is thought; there is the remembrance of states of absorption in ecstasy; there is the urge to dwell within that seclusion. And that means that there is still the 'I' who wants to become, who wants to remain, who wants to experience. Even in the remembrance of achievement, there is the thought which says 'I am'.

That is the moment when concentration-exercise can be seen as exercise, as an endeavour to reach a state of mind-control. But, mind-control is self-control and has still the thought of 'self'. With that object as a goal, there is no freedom. The more complete one's concentration, the greater also is the withdrawal of that 'self' in formless spheres of mental absorption, which will provide the purest delight i.e. static joy and bliss and equanimity. When the mind feels ready and purified and standing on the brink of enlightenment and realisation, it is only the realisation of one's own achievement, the pride which says 'I am' (*asmi-māna*), even when the fetter of individuality (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) was seen, understood and broken long ago.

All exercise, all endeavour, all effort, is a desire to fulfil the urge to become the ideal. It was that urge to become an arahant which made Ānanda fail to see that his very effort to attain was the stumbling block on the road to deliverance. The moment he gave up trying to become, he also ceased to react to his desire. And that cessation made him free.

It is the thought of 'self' which must cease; and that cannot be done by suppression. The more effort in full concentration, the deeper also grows the root of attainment that is of 'self'. Thought can only cease in understanding. What is thought? It is the relationship with the past, for thought is dependent on memory, thought is the reaction to the experience of yesterday, and thought wants to project that image into the future, in order to exist, to continue, to renew the past, to keep the 'self' alive. Thought is a reference to the past, and is never in the present. In the present there is selection, comparison, storage, keeping the old for use in the future. All that is reaction; and the knowledge thereof is the 'I'.

How can this knowledge cease? Obviously not through the acquisition of more knowledge which can only increase the property of the mind. The endeavour to increase one's knowledge has obviously only one aim, which is the ideal of attainment. It is the 'I' that wants to know, to obtain knowledge: it is that 'I' which wants to attain deliverance through knowledge. Thus, it is the 'I' that wants to become free from the 'I'. It is the idea of a liberated 'I'.

When knowledge cannot oblige, but rather becomes a hindrance to understanding, what other method can achieve the goal? Inspired and revealed religions have seen this impossible question; and not finding an answer they have found it necessary to introduce an external factor: grace. Not by man's own effort can there be salvation, but only through the grace of God. That ideal solution, "deus ex machina", so often used by the ancient Greek dramatists is however a product brought forth by a fertile imagination in an otherwise sterile mind.

The concept of God and his grace are still concepts based on a desire for an escape. But a further concept does not and cannot provide even further knowledge, still less a solution of the problem. The problem of this conflict cannot be solved by an escape through thought and will. The problem is in the volition of thought, and can only be reached by the cessation of willing, in the ending of thought.

What is there beyond knowledge? What is there to make thought cease? When it is seen that thought is a reaction to knowledge of the past, memory loses its value, as it is not of the present. To see the problem in the present there must be no reliance on the past. But without the past there is no thought in the present. Then, what is? When thought is the reflection of an experience, which is past as soon as there is a thought about it, then in the present there is only the actual experiencing which has no thought about it. In the present there is experiencing, while the thought is about an experience which is no more. When there is no thought about, there is no thinker either. In experiencing there is no self who can separate himself as subject, as observer, as actor, separate himself from the object which is the experience, the observed, the act. There is only action without reaction.

Can this be experienced? Why! It is all here to see, to experience, to realise; but not to know, to analyse, to describe, to retain. Experiencing is not knowledge; for, whereas in knowing there is a knower who stores his knowledge, in experiencing there is no thought about an experience and hence no experiencer who knows. A thought about an experience can arise, when the actual experiencing is made into an object of reflection by a subject, the experiencer, the thinker, the 'I'. But in experiencing there is no knowledge thereof, no analysis, no memory, no name-giving, and so there is no 'I'. Thought is the last stand of the 'I' in reaction, in conflict, in striving for results, in trying to attain, to become; the 'I' is the essence of individual existence, the essence of conflict.

Experiencing

Experiencing is not concentration on a choice object, but it is contemplation on what is. And what is? What is there in experiencing? The beauty of the mountains is. Not in the mountains or in the light-effects thereon, but in the mind's reaction thereto. The hurt caused by an angry word is not in the word, nor in the angry person but in the reaction thereto within the mind. The beauty may have faded in the evening, the angry words will have passed away with the winds, but the reaction is here and now in me. I am that reaction, even though there is no action, and hence no actor. The past experience has gone, the future result has not come yet. But what is, is the reaction which is neither action nor actor. And that is now being experienced as reaction. In seeing, the void of this reaction, there is the understanding of its non-entity, the non-entity of beauty and of anger, and of 'self'. Such is the awareness in contemplation.

In that awareness there is no effort and anxiety to attain, for there is no goal. It is all here in this moment.

Not having to attain, there is the release from thought. Not having to work out one's own salvation, one is saved already from that 'self'. It is not the fire of lust and desire of the 'ego' which has been extinguished, but the 'ego' itself has evaporated, is seen as having never existed but in the opposition within conflict in ignorance. That extinction is called *nirvāṇa* when the conflict (*dukkha*) of resistance against impermanence (*anicca*) is seen and understood as void, because there is no self (*anatta*) to resist. It is only in ignorance that there is conflict which is caused by an ideal 'self' unable to maintain its own delusion. It is in emptying the mind that lies real freedom.

Nibbāna is not a state of being of an entity, but a moment of experiencing. In that moment there is no memory and no desire, no past and no future. And thus that moment cannot be remembered, cannot be called back, cannot be retained. Then how could it be described?

It is the moment when thought ceases, thought as conditioned by the past, by memory and tradition, thought as conditioned by the future by anticipation and desire. In that moment there is no thought, no thinking which is reflection, but just the experiencing of being unconditioned, of being free, of not being. In that moment there is no recognition, no recording, no comparing. Thought has ceased; thoughts which claim 'I

am', thoughts which find security in the past, thoughts which seek continuity in the future, the thought which says 'I am now',

In experiencing the egolessness, the non-entity in the impermanent flow of life, there is no resistance and no striving for unification; and thus there is no conflict. It is the 'I' which is the conflict; and in experiencing the non-identity in the absence of that 'I' there is no conflict either. In experiencing the silence which is the cessation of thought-formations, there is nothing, no 'thing', no 'I', which in opposition can produce the conflict of becoming.

Such experiencing is from moment to moment without the involvement of time, without the transmission of succession, without the logic of sequence. And so there is nothing to prepare the mind for, nothing upon which to focus the thought, nothing to concentrate upon or to renounce. It is seeing in actuality without hope or fear, without expectation of result, without establishment of security. That seeing is the one single moment of experiencing without an 'I' as the experiencer, without thought of the experience. And that is now.

How does this compare with the well-known statements about Nibbāna being happiness supreme (*parama sukha*), permanent (*nicca*), uncreated (*akata*), uncomposed (*asaṅkhata*), deathless (*am- ata*)?

First of all it must be pointed out that these are not positive statements at all. Deathless (*amata*) means no more death, because there is no more birth once a new life has been conditioned, even if the state of deliverance of an arahant is achieved during that life- time, there will follow the natural dissolution of death at the end of that life-time But with no rebirth to follow, there will be no more death either. The Buddha himself passed away at the age of 80, al- though the state of the deathless was attained by him 45 years earlier. Nibbāna is said to be uncomposed (*asaṅkhata*), because there is no possible formation or conditioning which can bring about that total freedom of deliverance. Nibbāna is also called the uncreated (*akata*), because there is no creator who can produce that which is not a product. In that sense, Nibbāna is not subject to change or cessation, and hence it is called permanent (*nicca*); for there can be no return to ignorance and delusion, once the fact of delusion has been seen through and understood as a fallacy. Once the individuality of personality and substantiality has been discovered to be the projection of wishful thinking for continuance, the event of enlightenment cannot be darkened by new delusions. Thus there is permanency in the freedom

from delusion. And that makes for happiness supreme (*parama sukha*), as everything else, the impermanent, the conditioned, the composite, is but death itself.

The Buddha's teaching is not a doctrine of annihilation. Life cannot be annihilated or destroyed; it is only some aspects of living that change as the current of a river. Life is not something separate which can be isolated and broken off. Life is the constant arising, the constant creation, the constant emerging, which cannot take place if life were a point in history, in the beginning before which there was only the 'word'.

It is not the 'word' that made the world, but it is thought that makes the world out of its own idea. The word is conceived by thought; and in the word there is the term, the label, the name by which the thought can continue, by which the idea can become the ideal, by which a dead past conceives the object of its own still-born image. Thus, that object, that ideal, that creation, is as dead as the memory of the past which wants to live in the future. But that is not life; it is death which is preserved, which is worshipped and made into a 'self' as the image of a self-created God. Such is the delusion of Saṁsāra, of identity, of permanence, of 'self'.

A delusion cannot be suppressed, for the simple reason that it is a delusion, which means that it is non-existent. And hence, it cannot be overcome or put aside. It just does not exist. What is experienced is a self-created image, an idea which is an ideal, because it holds the promise of continuance, of security, of the future. To see that this idea of 'self' is only a projection of a desire to continue, is to see also that it has no existence in the present apart from being an image, a concept, a thought. When that is seen, the idea of 'self' is seen as a delusion, as a non-entity, and hence as non- existent. In that understanding there is no need for suppressing, no need for effort to overcome, no need for concentration. It is just the understanding and the realisation that there is no entity to be identified with action.

Understanding

This understanding can come through the understanding of action, which is always in the present. Seeing an action being performed with a purpose in the future, is seeing that such is not an action at all, but rather a reaction to a desire to obtain the future. When there is understanding of the immediate need of action, then there is no projection in the future, no desire for continuance, no thought of 'self'; and hence no isolation, no desire, no conflict.

Thus, understanding of the real lies in the understanding of the actual. And realisation of the permanent lies in the realisation of the impermanent. But, as long as the real, the permanent, Nibbāna, is an object for striving, for grasping (emotionally or intellectually), there can be neither understanding nor realisation. But understanding that in the impermanent there is neither subject nor object, understanding that action is neither actor nor result, is also the understanding of the delusion of isolation, of opposition, of 'self'. The understanding of this delusion sees a delusion as actual, sees the actual as non-ideal, sees the non-ideal as void of conflict and void of 'self'. Thus in the understanding of the actual there is the cessation of the ideal, of the delusion, of the concept of continuance of a non-entity. In that cessation of the ideal lies the reality of the actual, the truth of what is. It is the cessation of becoming in the realisation that truth is.

When there is understanding with insight, it does not mean that there are no more emotions, no more feelings, no more perceptions. But they will have ceased to be interruptions. There may be pain, but no more sorrow; there may be knowledge, but no misunderstanding; there may be loss, but no more grief; there may be action, but no more reaction; there may be wounds, but no more scars; there may be energy, but no more effort; there may be seeing, but no more hankering; there may be sensations, but no more attachment; there may be perceptions, but no more formations; there may be ideas, but no more ideals; there may be awareness, but no more projections; there may he need, but no more greed; there may be experiencing, but no more gathering; there may he love, but no more hate; there may be peace, but no more 'self'; there may be life, but no more death and no more birth.

For, when the ‘self’ is gone with insight, then the struggle is over, the burden is lifted, the fetters are broken, the path is there without obstacles and hindrances, and there is freedom. The path is there and there is freedom to walk, but the path does not lead to a goal; for, the path which is freedom is the goal. And there is no walker, no purpose, no subject, no object, but just the freedom to walk, the freedom to live, the freedom to be free, now!

In watching that freedom there is an awareness of what has been missed out all along: there is a joy in leaving out all what has been felt as pleasure; there is the awareness that all is good and right, while leaving aside all satisfaction; there is an even-mindedness which is no longer a balancing between ‘should’ and ‘should not’, but which understands only this single moment of experiencing what is, without distortion, without fixation, without aspiration, without reference to past or future, without knowledge of ‘self’.

Negation

Is Nibbāna then only negation, annihilation? Negation has the role of breaking down concepts, of ridding the mind of discrimination, of penetrating all preconceived ideas. Truth is not the object of its search, but truth will stand revealed once all concepts are destroyed. Negation, therefore, is not a kind of dialectic aiming at an exposition of truth. Negation has no aim apart from negating the false. That is bound to produce a crisis; but it is a crisis in which action must follow. Whether such action follows faith, dogma and authority, or accepts the discoveries of reason and intellect, it is still only a reaction which is the positive search for an answer, a solution, a goal. And whether that goal is called truth, or god, or self, it is all the same, for it is at projection of thought which wants to attain, to achieve, to become.

This cannot be argued away; for the argument can only provide a substitute: the super-Self, the absolute, in which the 'self' is absorbed i.e. static concentration, in retirement from the world, or in a modern totalitarian state. Thus, negation of all concepts will leave the mind blank, in the void of which there is no thought possible. And in the absence of the movement of thought, in that negation of all positive contribution to an ideal, there is the absolute negation of both being and becoming. It does not make sense, because it is not logical thought. It is not to be aimed at, because there is no knowledge of the path which is freedom. Without walker, the path cannot be known, cannot be shown, cannot be walked. And yet it is a path which does not move, which does not lead, which does not end.

It is a path of creative understanding; every moment a new creation, a new realisation, a new discovery, as a river which must flow and is always new even though its course is ancient as the ages—as a fire which must burn and is always alight in consuming and burning itself up. The river flows, not with a purpose, but because it is a river; the fire burns, not with a goal, but it would not be a fire if it did not burn.

Insight

Thus, the path of understanding is a path of insight from moment to moment, but not with an aim of comprehension. Insight must see what is, and what is not, and why it is thus. It is the nature of seeing, of understanding, of insight. It has no object of sight, it is sight, seeing what is, choiceless, without volition, without selection, without intention. Thus it is a path of negative understanding in seeing what is actual and ideal, and thereby understanding what is real. In that understanding actuality ceases to evoke reaction, the ideal ceases to provoke desire; and in the absence of reaction and projection, of memory and desire, there is neither past nor future, neither being nor becoming.

Are these mere words? Semantics? They certainly have no meaning beyond experiencing. They certainly hold out no hope for satisfaction, no security in stabilisation, no continuity in existence. And thus, they cannot form a basis for effort and striving. And yet, in this total negation there is a freedom from conceiving, which is a freedom from becoming, from rebirth, from the continuance of a miserable ‘self’-concept, of a misconceived isolation of an ‘ego’, of a distortion of thought in opposition, in chaos and in hate.

The Actual is the Real

In the actual, one can face oneself just as one is. And what does one see? A past identity with over-education, a tenseness because one is trying too hard, an attempt to escape from the circumstances of this life-time in which one is born. And what am I doing about it? And what am I thinking of doing about it? It is this doing things, acting and thinking which make the true 'I'. In thinking, there is reflection, there is a building up of more ideals, a strengthening of the 'I' in opposition and isolation which is conflict. To see that clearly, there must be great sincerity and open-mindedness; and that involves doubts about what I have been doing so far, doubts about the intention of my efforts, doubts about the truth of my striving, doubts about the image of my goal, doubts about the reality of my achievements, doubts about all my actions to see whether they are actions at all, or mere reactions to a desire to escape, to become, to attain, to be my ideal 'self'.

And when I see all that truly, there is understanding. And in that understanding there is the ending of striving, of desire to attain, of the will-to-become. In that understanding there is no further question of right or wrong, of self or no-self, no thought of achievement or attainment. There is just the ceasing of becoming, the ending of conflict, the 'no more' of all delusion. That understanding is wisdom, is insight which comes with contemplation (*vipassanā*).

Contemplation is not concentration. By concentrating on conflict one can only isolate it and thereby intensify it. To end conflict one must understand conflict, and that cannot be done by suppressing it forcibly.

Conflict, to end, must yield itself up; and a natural yielding is never done through violence. There may be submission as a result of violence, a result of conquest. But, that is not ending. Yielding spontaneously can come about only through understanding. Understanding what?

The nature of conflict is the process of clinging to what has no substantiality, no identity, no reality. It is only an ideal one clings to, the ideal of a 'self' becoming secure, a problem being solved. The ideal solution has no reality; and it is that fact which has to be uncovered. Then there will be no search for the ideal. And in the cessation of searching, there is the cessation of the ideal; and in the cessation of the ideal, there is the actual, which is the real truth.

Enlightenment in Stages

Is there enlightenment in stages? Just as knowledge (*ñāṇa*) is not understanding (*paññā*), just as seeing (*dassana*) is not insight (*vipassanā*), so the entering of the stream (*sotāpatti*) is not the experiencing of the fruit of emancipation (*arahatta-phala*). Even when there is a discarding of beliefs in God or soul (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), even when there are no doubts (*vicikicchā*) about interdependent relationship in actuality, even when there are no more beliefs in the efficacy of prayers and rituals (*sīlabbata-paramāsa*), there would be still enough scope for desire for the satisfaction of the senses (*kāmacchanda*) and antagonistic feelings (*vyāpada*), for the desire to become (*rūpa- rāga, arūpa-rāga*), for the agitation in the search for achievement (*uddhacca-kukucca*), all of which are steeped in the conceit which says 'I am' (*asmi-māna*) and in the delusion which is ignorance (*avijja*). Only in the final realisation that the 'I' is a delusion of identity, can there be no concentration of effort to eliminate that non-entity.

There may be the reaction of that delusion in which the 'self' asserted itself. Such reaction can be seen and understood; and in the clear and complete recognition of that fact (that is of the reaction as such), there can be freedom of insight that such reaction is a delusion. The reaction is there as a remnant (*sa-upadisesa*), but it can no more project and procreate. Thus, this insight is the liberation from, although not the annihilation of, the reaction. Then there is perfection which is not an attainment to which nothing more can be added, but rather a perfection from which nothing more can be eliminated as false.

The Truth sets Free

It is the truth which can set free. And when finally at the death of an arahant, when the results of past actions have been outlived, when even the reactions of clinging are broken up (*anupādisesa*), then truly Nibbāna may be called freedom (*mokkha*), the great re- lease (*vimutti*), deliverance. It is not the goal of action of one who is in bondage. For, that would be merely an ideal. But one who recognises the nature of bondage, that it is the pursuit of gratification of the 'self' Which causes one to escape from what is, an escape towards an ideal made by 'self' made by thought, made by desire—one who recognises that, such a one will cease the pursuit of pleasure and discover the pure and creative joy of freedom in every moment, in every experience, in which there is no striving, no 'self', no opposition, no conflict. Such freedom is not an achievement, but rather the discovery of being without acquisition, without property of body or of mind, the discovery of having "laid down the burden", the discovery of not being bound by concepts and ideals. It is not a freedom of the 'self', but rather the freedom from 'self', the realisation that there is no 'self' to be or to become free.

It is not the arrival at journey's end, but the ending of all journeys, of all travel, of all search, of all restlessness and agitation, of all striving to become, of all wanting to be or not to be.

And with this the last word has been said; for, where craving has ceased, the process of becoming which is grasping has ceased also.

Where there is no more becoming, there is no more rebirth and all its consequences of sorrow, decay and death. And thus Nibbāna is the only deliverance, the only freedom surpassing all understanding, above all emotion, beyond all striving, unconditioned, uncreated, indestructible through the overcoming of greed, hate and delusion, through insight and realisation in the deliverance from 'self '.

About the Author

Henri van Zeyst was born in Utrecht, the Netherlands, in 1905. Educated throughout in Catholic schools and colleges, he spent his final years of studies in philosophy and theology and the first year of his priestly ordination in an Italian monastery near Florence. At the age of 31 he was sent to London to be in charge of a new foundation of his Order, where he was also teaching Dogmatic Theology to the scholastics of Christus Rex Priory in North London. An intensive course of comparative religion brought him in contact with Buddhism. Within a year of his coming to Sri Lanka he was ordained a Buddhist monk there in 1938 under the name of Bhikkhu Dhammapāla. From 1956 to 1968 he worked at the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism at the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya of which he was in the final years of that period the Senior Assistant Editor and Administrative Officer. During the last stages of his life he was residing in a meditation centre at Nilambe, Kandy, giving instructions to those who came to him for guidance on meditation.

He died on 15 September, 1988.