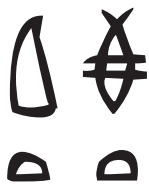


NIBBĀṆA

BY

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NIBBANA

“There exists, O Brothers, a Realm wherein is neither Earth nor Water, neither Flame nor Air; nor the vast Aether nor the Infinity of Thoughts, nor Utter Void nor the co-existence of Cognition and Non-cognition is There:—not this World nor Another, neither Sun nor Moon. That, Brothers, I declare unto you as neither a Becoming nor yet a Passing-away:—not Life nor Death nor Birth; Unlocalised, Unchanging and Uncaused:—That is the End of Sorrow!”

—The Book of Solemn Utterances.

THERE is perhaps no single point connected with our Buddhist Faith which has been so much discussed, or with regard to which so many misapprehensions exist, as that of the subject of the text from the Udāna which appears above. Whole volumes of learned dissertations have been written on the matter, and the conclusions arrived at have been naturally as diverse as the point of view and mental training of the authors of these various works. The question is itself as old as the Buddhist Religion:—“Nibbāṇa, Nibbāṇa, friend Sāriputta—thus they say—but what, friend, is this Nibbāṇa?”¹ That question was asked by the Brāhman ascetic on the banks of the Ganges twenty-five centuries ago; it was echoed by Milinda at Sāgala in the second century before Christ, and re-echoed by every thinker and writer on Buddhism since that time. Whether in Tokio or modern Babylon, from the frozen plains of mysterious Thibet to the scent-laden palm-groves of Ceylon, the answer to this question has been sought by every earnest enquirer and devotee of our Religion; its elucidation has been the life-work of the great scholars whose unselfish labours have revealed for the Western World the Treasure of the Most Excellent Law; and the realisation of the answer to the question is the hope and aim of five hundred million of our co-religionists this day.

And the reason is not far to seek. For this Nibbāṇa is the goal of our Religion, it is the keystone of the whole vast marvellous structure of ethic and philosophy that we know as Buddhism; the thought of its undying calm is the solace of our lives, and its attainment the hope of all our hearts. Buddhism indeed rests upon the assurance of this Nibbāṇa, and the

correctness of our appreciation of the greatest of the world-religions is in great measure to be estimated by the extent to which we have gained a clear mental concept as to the meaning of this word. For, unless we ourselves can formulate at least some clear idea in our own minds as to the aim of our Religion, we should merit the reproach cast at the unpractical young man in the Tevijja Sutta 2,—‘But then, good friend, you are making a staircase to mount up into something, taking it for a mansion, which, all the while, you comprehend nor, neither have seen;’ whilst, on the other hand, the first question that naturally rises end and aim of this system of philosophy, to what goal can those practices set forth in Buddhist works conduct? It is on this account that I have ventured to select this most difficult of all Buddhist subjects as the thesis of this essay for the first number of our Journal, for, once the goal and aim of Buddhism is understood, the rest of Religion, practice and philosophy alike, falls into its natural place as but the means to be employed to reach that goal. Herein I am of course aware of the manifold difficulties of the subject, and must crave the indulgence of my readers for my necessarily inadequate presentation of an ideal which has inspired the lives of unnumbered millions of men. But it has seemed essential to me that some such presentation should be made from the beginning, and this, I trust, will be accepted in excuse of my presumption, if I have ‘hastened in where angels fear to tread.’

There is one matter which appears deserving of a little consideration before proceeding further, namely the word Nibbāṇa itself. It has become the custom, when dealing with this subject, to use the Sanskritised form Nirvāṇa;—a practice against which, I think, we Buddhists should protest; alike because the Buddha taught us of Nibbāṇa, and prohibited the translation of His Teaching into Sanskrit; and because, when we say “Nirvāṇa” we convey to many minds the meaning of the Nirvāṇa of the Hindus—the absorption into Brahma, which is our Fourth Arūpa-Vimokha,—and a very different thing to Nibbāṇa. So it seems to me that it would be better—since we have no word in English which will as all convey the idea implied, and are therefore perforce compelled to employ a foreign word—to employ our own Pāli equivalent from the language in which our Master taught, rather than have recourse to an ambiguous word in a language which He purposely avoided using. And, whilst on the subject of verbal differences, there is one error, very common in the earlier

works on Buddhism, and not infrequently met with to-day, which cannot be too strongly protested against. This is the idea—first start, I believe, by Burnouf, and in those early days of Buddhist scholarship quite nature—that there are three sorts of Nibbāṇa:—Nibbāṇa proper, Parinibbāṇa, and Mahāparinibbāṇa. This—as has been well pointed out by Childers and Rhys Davids 4,—is an entire misconception. Sometimes in the texts, the particle ‘nibbuto,’ and sometimes ‘parinibbuto’ is used of the attainment of Anupādisesa Nibbāṇa by an Arahāt, i. e., of his death—the terms are interchangeable; whilst in Mahāparinibbāṇa—used only of the Buddha’s attainment of Anupādisesa Nibbāṇa—the prefix Mahā—great—is merely a term of special respect, and no more implies a new sort or a higher stage of Nibbāṇa than the analogous English expression, ‘the Great Decease’ means the person of whom it is said is dead in any different sense to one of whom the words ‘the decease’ alone are used. There are indeed two different adjectives used in the Tipiṭaka to qualify Nibbāṇa:—Sa-upādisesa, having a remainder, substratum or basis—used of the attainment of Nibbāṇa in this life by the Arahāt or Buddha, where, although the Nibbāṇa has been attained, there yet remains the body and other Khandas as a nexus; and the Anupādisesa, without a basis—used of the attainment of Nibbāṇa in this life by the Arahāt or Buddha, where, although the Nibbāṇa has been attained, there yet remains the body and other Khandas as a nexus; and Anupādisesa, without a basis, used of the Nibbāṇa Itself—of the state of the Arahāt or Buddha after death of his body. These words do not imply that there are two sorts of Nibbāṇa; but refer rather to the state of the Arahāt or Buddha before and after death respectively. The Principle of Nibbāṇa is One,—Infinite, Changeless, Real:—It is the End of All—how should there be aught beyond It? But of him who is yet embodied, after its attainment, the word Sa-upādisesa Nibbāṇa—Nibbāṇa ‘without a basis.’

Childers, indeed, concluded 5 that there were two different things implied in these two qualification:—that there were two sorts of Nibbāṇa:—of which the first was the state of Arahāt-ship, and the second absolute annihilation; and he endeavoured to show that certain of the words used as synonyms for Nibbāṇa implied the one, and yet others the other Nibbāṇa. This theory, however, has now been shewn to have been due to a misapprehension; and the researches of later scholars have truly shewn that all of the synonymns of Nibbāṇa are equally applicable to either aspect, whilst many texts—which Childers must have been unacquainted with or

have overlooked—expressly deny that Anupādisesa Nibbāṇa is annihilation. 6

Here, then, one thing is clear—if we are to gain any idea, approximating correctness at least, of the meaning of this word Nibbāṇa, we must at the start place ourselves in the mental attitude of the Buddhist; for so long as we attempt the analysis of the idea from any other standpoint, so long shall we find ourselves involved in ever deeper and deeper confusion; so long must all our attempts necessarily end in failure. Such attempts may be likened to an endeavour to comprehend modern Copernican astronomy by the help of the comprehend modern Copernican astronomy by the help of the Ptolemaic system, wherein the earth is conceived as the centre of the universe,—sun and moon, planets and stars circling around it in their various orbits, existing for its benefit, and for the sake of man's comfort and convenience in particular. Between the Occidental theories of metaphysic and ontology up to within a recent period, and the Ptolemaic theory of a geocentric universe, there exists indeed a remarkable analogy. For as the Ptolemaists held the centre of the earth to be the central point of all the universe, and as all their conclusions about the motions of the heavenly bodies were falsified by the incorrectness of that belief; so did the earlier ontological systems of the West, from that of Descartes downwards, arrive at incorrect conclusions about the nature of Being, by reason of the fact that they centred the noëtic universe around an imaginary being dwelling in man, which they termed the Ego, or Immortal Soul. The analogy may in fact be carried further, for just as the adherents of the old geocentric system regarded the teachings of Copernicus as manifestly absurd because one perceives that the sun moves round the earth, so do the modern adherents of the Ego-centric philosophies base their repudiation of the Non-ego-centred systems of Buddhism and the later Western ontologies on the fact that one perceives that all phenomena of mind are centered in and revolve about one static changeless Self or Ego within,—one Recipient of all sensation, one Formulator of all volition, one Witness of all thought and action;—a Ghost or Soul regarded as distinct from and independent of the organs of the senses and the mind. And, further, as the Ptolemaists held the Copernican system, when first broached, to be subversive of all true religion and morality, as placing the centre of the universe without that world which they so highly esteemed, its scope beyond man's service, which they held so important; so do the

believers in the Immortal Soul this day still hold as pernicious, as opposed to all that makes for righteousness, any denial of this Indweller that they esteem of such paramount importance, concluding that if indeed there be no Ego, no Immortal Soul, then is there surely no hope within us, and thereby is the end to all right views and life.

Yet knowledge grows. To-day the Western mind no longer deems it fatal to Religion, in its deeper and truer sense, to understand this earth on which we live as but a spark of life lost in the bosom of infinity:—men's hearts have grown apace with their right understanding of the universe.

To me it seems that in like manner the abandonment of the old ego-centric fallacies would similarly enlarge, not alone our perception of the true nature of the noëtic universe, but also morality, humanity, and, above all, toleration. Be that as it may, if we are to gain any correct idea of the Buddhist Nibbāṇa, we must, following the Buddhist idea, understand that, just as the earth is not the centre of the universe, just as there is no stationary centre of the universe,—so there is no Ego or Soul, not any eternally-existent soul-personality in man; for without that clear conception at the outset it is impossible to gather any accurate idea of the Goal of Buddhism. And in this context I would point out that with this abandonment of the idea of a Soul or Ego, all such question as 'Who attains Nibbāṇa?' must necessarily be set aside. This denial of a 'Soul,'—of any immortal principle in man,—is one of the cardinal tenets of Buddhism; it is this doctrine which makes of Buddhism a Religion altogether apart from all other forms of religious belief. That being of a man, according to Buddhist psychology, consists of five very complex groups, each as it were a little universe in itself, which we may conveniently classify as Body, Sensations, Cognitions, Tendencies and Thoughts or Aspects of Consciousness. 7 Of these five, the Mind-group alone, instigating the lower groups, causes to rise what we call Kamma, or Action; or, as we might put it in modern phraseology, does 'work.' When certain forms of this mind-born work are done, the energy expended becomes latent, goes, as it were into an unmanifested form, and remains so latent until conditions arise in which it can manifest again as mind-born act. In other words, it produces that group which I have called 'Tendencies'—in Pāli Saṃkhārā—in exactly the same way as when we wind a watch up, the work done imposes stresses on the material of the spring, which will later manifest as work, when the

escapement allows the watch to run down. When a being dies, he leaves behind him very many of these ‘Tendencies,’ and they, in running down, so to speak, manifest as a being who is a new being from the Western, individualistic point of view, but the same Kamma or sequence of cause and effect. Now, when a being by his mind does evil, that produces forces which later give rise to bad mental states—to sorrow; and, similarly, doing good, he evolves forces which later produce on that line of evolution which we call his being, good mental states—happiness. This is the so-called ‘re-incarnation’, of which very garbled views have been spread in the West:—transmigration were a better term, for there is something which transmigrates,—i.e. passes over,—namely the Tendencies, collectively the Kamma; whilst there is nothing whatever, according to Buddhist ideas, which re-incarnates—a term which implies the existence of a Ghost or Soul in the being which (as the Hindu believes) passes over from body to body as a man changes his clothes. Buddhism denies the existence of anything to re-incarnate—so Buddhism does not teach re-incarnation—all that passes over from life to life according to our views is this involved energy of the Tendencies. 8 A good simile of the idea intended to be conveyed is that of the transmission of energy commonly used in text-books on physics. You place a number of billiard-balls in a line, each in contact with its neighbour, and strike the end one—the balls all along the line cannot appreciably move because each has another in front of it—but they transmit the energy, and the ball at the other end of the row flies off, after a certain small lapse of time.

Now there is one obvious conclusion to be arrived at concerning the operation of this Buddhist proposition that ‘Mental action and re-action are opposite and equal.’ If you start good saṁkhārās, then you will later enjoy good mental states—and visa versâ, if you start evil tendencies, states of woe will arise. But as each being’s Kammas are practically infinite in number, because of the ages during which they have been produced, we find ourselves involved in never-ending transition, now in states of happiness, now in states of woe. It is an endless circle of becoming;—now becoming a happy being, and, now again, an unhappy one:—and so it goes on, so long as we continue to produce these tendencies at all. And, further, as the tendencies of the greater number of being are to evil, there is much more suffering produced than happiness. Further, the Kamma is itself only one of eight causes of woe—natural forces, the season and some others can

also produce states of misery. 9 Thus, if a stone falls on my foot and crushes it, pain is caused me—not Kamma-born,, but born of the natural laws governing the fall of the stone and the nature of my foot and sensory apparatus. So that in this continued cycle of birth and re-birth, the preponderance of painful states over happy and pleasant ones is enormous, and if we strike a balance and write off so much sorrow for so much happiness, there remains a huge balance of misery in sentient existence; and this existence tends to Sorrow, that Sorrow is inherent in all possible forms of life. We, of course, are human beings, and very strong that springs up from natural causes, and the like. We are at the summit of terrestrial evolution, the lords and kings of earth; and just as kings are apt to disregard the sufferings of their poorest subjects, out of mere ignorance and lack of understanding, of course,—such ignorance as prompted the French Princess's naive enquiry, 'If the people have no bread, why don't they eat cake?'—so, I fear, are many of us, not through hard-heartedness, but just from ignorance and lack of observation, apt to disregard the awful unnecessary suffering of our observation of our brothers the brutes. But that suffering is very real, and, I fear, mankind rather increases than decreases it. And just as a king is never quite sure—especially in the democratic days—of being a king the day after to-morrow, so are we none of us secure from evolving such brutish tendencies that we ourselves (that is to say, the being on our line of Kamma), may not take birth amongst the lower forms of life. True, we may also leave behind us at our death, such noble tendencies as may bring about the birth of a far higher being than the human; but the circle is unending, and it is just the unending cycle of this continuous transition that we long to escape from.

I must apologise for the long digression into the subject of the nature of re-birth, but without some such explanation is it not possible to explain either the nature of Nibbāṇa or the object of the Buddhist in seeking to attain to it. For from this weary round of existences, with its eight causes of woe, its uncertainty, its necessary endless round of pain-filled lives, there is but one way of escape. That way is the Way to the Nibbāṇa,—to the Liberation from birth and death which our Master has made known to us. This, then, is the nature of Nibbāṇa:—deliverance from this painful round of lives, the overcoming of that Ignorance which is the ultimate cause of life as we know it; and, with that Ignorance, the overcoming of that Ignorance which is the ultimate cause of life as we know it; and, with that

Ignorance, the overcoming of hatred and wrath and delusion;—the living of a life, even whilst yet in this world, full of wisdom and of love. This attainment of Nibbāṇa in this life,—the Sa-upādisesa Nibbāṇa to which I have referred,—this is the state of Arahatta, the state of sanctification which is the Goal of Buddhism. For it is said that he who has attained to that Nibbāṇa realizes in that attainment that the causes of re-birth—the desires, the passions, the delusions whereby we are bound upon the wheel of life—that all these causes are at an end; and, unassailed by fears or doubts or mind-born woes, calm and secure the Arahata lives until his body dies, then to vanish from the world of being, even as the flame of a lamp vanishes, when oil and wick are spent.

In order to give some idea of what this state of Arahatta is, I do not think that I can do better than rehearse few some passages from our Scriptures in which that state is described; for in these passages we have the utterances of those great Arahans of old, who themselves were living in that glorious life to which we all aspire. Here, for instance, we have one of many such descriptions by our Lord Himself:—‘The disciple who has put off list and desire, the mighty in wisdom:—he here on earth has attained unto Deliverance from Death; the Peace, Nibbāṇa, the Eternal State.’ 10

Again, there is the wonderful description given by Mahā Kassapa subsequent to his attainment of Arahatta. This Mahā Kassapa was a Brahman, celebrated for his great knowledge of the mysteries of the Fire-sacrifice, and renowned far and wide for his penances. He had many followers, and the story of his conversion to Buddhism may be found in full in the Mahā Vagga. 11 After he had become one of the Master’s disciples, and had attained to Arahatta, the people, seeing him and his great following amongst the followers of the Buddha, could hardly believe that one so great and renowned for penances and rites had become a follower of our Master’s teaching; and some said that the Buddha had become Mahā Kassapa’s disciple; others stated the real facts of the case. And so the Buddha, addressing Mahā Kassapa, asks him where fore he has become His disciple:

“What hast thou seen, O thou of Uruvelā,
That thou, for penances so far renowned
Forsakest thus thy sacrificial fire?
I ask thee, Kassapa, the meaning of this thing.

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How comes it that thine altar lies deserted?
What is it, in the world of men or Gods
That thy heart longs for? Tell me that, Kassapa!"
And the erstwhile devotee of ritual replies:
"That State of Peace I saw, wherein the roots
Of ever fresh re-birth are all destroyed, and greed
And hatred and delusion all have ceased!
That State from lust for future life set free,
That changeth not, can ne'er be led to change.
My mind say That:—what care I for those rites?" 12

But perhaps the best, because the most complete, of these word-pictures of Nibbāṇa is that found in the Milinda-pañha; where Milinda, the Greco-Indian King of Sāgala has demanded from the Arahān Nāgasena, a full description of the Nibbāṇa. "Do not, venerable Nāgasena" says the King, "do not clear up this difficulty by making it dark. It is a point on which this people is bewildered, plunged into perplexity, lost in doubt. Dissipate this guilty uncertainty; it pierces like a dart!"

And Nāgasena answers:

"That Principle of Nibbāṇa, O king, so peaceful, so blissful, so delicate, exists. And it is that which he who orders his life aright, grasping the idea of all things (of the Confections, Sarhkhara) according to the Teaching of the Conquerors, realises by his wisdom—even as a pupil, by his knowledge, makes himself, according to the instruction of his teacher, master of an art. And if you ask. 'How is Nibbāṇa to be known?' It is by freedom from distress and danger, by confidence, by peace, by calm, by bliss, by happiness, by delicacy, by purity, by freshness. . . .

"And if again you should ask: 'How does he who orders his life aright realise that Nibbāṇa?' I should reply, 'He, O king, who orders his life aright grasps the truth as to the development of all things, and when he is doing so he perceives therein birth, he perceives old age, he perceives disease, he perceives death. But he perceives not therein, whether at the beginning, or the middle, or the end, anything worthy of being laid hold of as a lasting satisfaction. ... And discontent arises in his mind when he thus finds nothing fit to be relied on as a lasting satisfaction, and a fever takes possession of his body, and without a refuge or protection, hopeless, he

becomes weary of repeated lives. And in the mind of him who thus perceives the insecurity of transitory life, (of starting afresh in innumerable births), the thought arises: ‘All on fire is this endless becoming, burning and blazing! Full of pain is it, of despair! If only one could reach a State in which there were no becoming there would there be calm that would be sweet—the cessation of all these conditions, the getting rid of all these defects (of lusts, of evil, and of Kamma),—the end of cravings, the absence of passions, the Peace, Nibbāna.’

“And therewith does his mind leap forward into that State in which there is no becoming, and then has he found Peace, then does he exult and rejoice at the thought, ‘A refuge have I found at last!’ And he strives with might and main along that path, searches it out, accustoms himself thoroughly to it,—to that end does he make firm his self-possession, to that end does he hold fast in effort, to that end does he remain steadfast in love (toward all beings in all the worlds);—and still to that does he direct his mind again and again; until, gone far beyond the transitory, he gains the Real, the Highest Fruit (of Arahatsip). And when he has gained that, O king, the man who has ordered his life aright has realised, seen face to face Nibbāna!” 13

Such are a few of the descriptions of the Ideal of Buddhism—the state of Arahatta, of one who has gained Nibbāna even in this life. Our books are filled with such descriptions—filled with such words as these: the awe-stricken wondering articulations of those who had attained, even in this life, to the Goal of our Religion, to the glorious life of utter Peace, to the incomparable security of the Nibbāna:—who had got rid of delusion, wrath and passion, who had given up all vain longings for a future existence,—that vain hope of immortality which is the bane of all true grandeur in our life. ‘I long not for Death, I long not after Life,—I wait till mine hour come, alert and with watchful mind.’ 14 What grander ideal than that expressed in these words of the Buddha’s most eminent disciple? It is the apotheosis of sanity:—no vain longing after future states of bliss, but the attainment even in this life, of that Goal of Happiness after which humanity has craved, since first speech became articulate—the bliss that comes to him who has put aside the causes of woe—who lives freed from the passions, hatreds, and illusions that enchain us,—his life filled with the unutterable Peace, his heart filled with love and helpfulness to all living

things. And yet, with such a hope as this its Goal, Buddhism has been stigmatised as pessimism, as a dreary, hopeless creed, whose votaries, seeing no better hope, are fain to plunge into the oblivion of annihilation. If that were so, surely suicide would be the salvation of the Buddhist! But no! Our goal is happiness:—happiness to which no earthly bliss can be compared—the freedom from these vain shadows, from these fierce cravings that make the agony of man. ‘Let us live happily, then, free from hatred amongst the hating:—among men who hate, let us dwell free from hatred! Let us live happily, then, calling nought our own:—We shall be as the bright Gods, feeding upon Happiness!’ That is the goal and aim of Buddhism:—that the prize to be won by him who enters on the Noble Path,—the Arahatta State, the attainment of Nibbāṇa;—‘the attainment of a final and an inalienable Happiness, even here and now, here in this life!

Now pass we on to the far more difficult consideration of the Anupādisesa Nibbāṇa—to the Nibbāṇa in itself. We have seen in what consists the attainment of Nibbāṇa in this life—we have heard out of the Books, out of the mouths of those who had attained it, the pictured glory of the Arahatta State, of the life of one for whom all ignorance and evil, and the woe these bring, is at an end:—how the attainment of Nibbāṇa, the utter ecstasy of that Liberation from all woe, causes to spring up in him who has won to it these mental states of bliss depicted all-too feebly even in the Books—for what earthly words indeed could tell of the utter ecstasy of that woe-enfranchised life? But how shall we describe the Nibbāṇa in itself? How shall we, living and knowing and thinking,—we, with our ever-changing minds, meditate on That which is past Life and Knowledge, past Death and Change:—the Immutable, the Uncaused, the Supreme:—That which no thought can realise, and no words make known? It is beyond us, except we shall attain to It, even as the glory of the light of day is unknown and unknowable to one born blind; and the best that we can do is to gain some mental, dim conception of that Light beyond, by means of similes and pictures, as a man may gain some faint remote inkling of Infinity by use of finite mathematics. And yet, how hopeless is the task! We must conceive it Existence—for the shadows of our highest conceptions of being fade before the Light of Its unutterable Reality:—and yet, Existence for us means change, and It is past all change and evanescence. We must call It Unconditioned:—we, whose every thought is a conditioning; we must conceive It Infinite, Eternal:—we, whose very beings are finite, who are

ourselves but the children of the waning hours. We, whose life is a becoming, must meditate It Absolute, unaltering, neither springing into being nor yet passing away. And yet, It exists— even our very reason must tell us this, for we know that we can conceive a thing only by comparison with that which is not it. Thus if I say a thing is white, I speak with reference to and by comparison with that which is not white, and so with all our mental concepts. Comprehending then, as we do comprehend, the conditioned, the evanescent, the known universe in which we live, we may—nay—must deduce a state which is Unconditioned, Unchanging, and Unknown. As it is said in the Udāna ‘There exists, Brothers, an unborn, unoriginated, un compounded, unformed. Were there not, O Brothers, this unborn, unoriginated, un compounded, unformed, there would be no possible exit from this World of the born, the originated, the compounded, the formed.’ 15

There is one simile which may, I think, serve to enable us to get a conception of not only of the Nibbāṇa-dhātu in itself, but also of the relation which our consciousness must hold—to what, for want of a better term, I must call the Absolute Consciousness. It will also serve to illustrate how the term ‘Existent’ which we are compelled to apply to the Nibbāṇa must have really quite another meaning to one who can perceive and realise that state. Let us imagine Space. Now by this word ‘Space’ we mean two very different things—which yet are in a certain way related to each other—we mean on the one hand infinity, and on the other finite extension. We say a cube occupies space in the latter sense of the term, but we are of course aware that its so doing does not detract anything from the Infinite Space; for a cube, howsoever big it might be, could, of course, never take up any room at all in infinite space. No formed thing ever could,—for anything having a shape is necessarily finite;—what we call the form of a thing is just the collective appearance of its boundaries; and as space in the infinite sense has no boundaries, you cannot, for instance, have an infinite cube. So a cube, whatever size it is, is always finite, and as such it occupies finite space, and takes up no room at all in infinite space, which remains the same whether the cube is there or not. Now conceive of infinite space, and let us imagine it filled by an homogeneous medium—a sort of very thin jelly, like the Æther of modern science; and let us suppose this space-jelly to have a single property, that of consciousness per se. This thought-space symbolises our Nibbāṇa-dhātu; but inasmuch as what we call thought or

consciousness implies the comparison of two things, and as in our infinite thought-space there is nothing else but the thought-jelly to begin with, it is quite obvious that that consciousness or thought which it has will be utterly different from what we mean by those words. Now suppose a cube—a solid cube—to come into existence in that thought-space. This cube must be imagined to consist of some other substance than the thought-jelly, and to definitely displace, say a cubic inch, of that material. Now, if I may be permitted the use of a rather loose expression, we may regard the thought-space as bounded towards its centre (the centre being merely the point which we are considering) by the walls of the cube. Now at those walls there will spring up a consciousness in the thought-aether such as we know, i. e., a differentiation-consciousness; for the thought-æther on one face of the cube will conceive itself an individual, separate thing. It will think ‘Here am I. On my right hand is that surface, over there is a corner, here is a line,’—and so on. Let then the cube change form betimes—sometimes it becomes a rhomboid, sometimes its corners vanish and it becomes a sphere, and so on:—it is composed of an infinitude of little particles that are never still for an instant. With every movement in the cube a new sort of consciousness—or rather series of consciousnesses—will spring up in the adjacent thought-ether:—now a cube-consciousness; now a sphere-consciousness; again a rhomboid, then a tetrahedron. Now just as that inch-cube does not take up any room in infinity, so all these little sorts of consciousness,—differentiation-consciousnesses,—do not in the least degree alter the general noëtic consciousness of the thought-space; and if that cube were to be suddenly annihilated, then the differentiation-consciousnesses rising at its faces will vanish too; that is, in their place the infinite space-thought, the undifferentiated absolute consciousness alone will remain. Now, the Nibbāṇa-dhatu is typified in this illustration by the infinite thought-jelly, and man’s being by the changing cube. The form of that cube is the symbol of his Rūpa; its capacity of responding to external vibrations, his Vedanā; its faculty of discriminative perception, his Sañña; and the inherent ‘cubeness’ of it, so to speak, his Saṃkhārā. When the Arahāṇa dies, these four Khandas or groups break up altogether—there are no Tendencies left to build up a new being:—and so the Viññāṇaṃ no longer arises in dependence on those groups, and that being, as far as our comprehension of him goes, ceases to exist as a separate entity. The

Nibbāṇa Dhātu is—that is all that we can predicate concerning the Arahan after death.

One more similitude—one applicable to the Nibbāṇa considered from either aspect—and I have done. When we sleep, we enter, as it were, into a new world—the world of the shadows of the night. Therein we pass from dream to dream in swift confusion, as from life to life here in the slower, statelier passage of our waking existences. Now through the Gates of Horn we gaze upon the mysteries of the world beyond; and now through the Ivory Gate vain fleeting visions rise; some fair, some fearful, all wavering and changeful as foam upon the waves. Often we pass through dream succeeding dream, never doubting but that they are real; rejoicing at their joy, grieving and fearing at their woe or horror, quite as satisfied of their reality as here we are satisfied of the reality of our life on earth. Perhaps for many times we thus dream on, till at the last we chance upon some dream of woe or horror,—grief too heavy to be borne, or fear too awful to be endured. Perhaps someone whom in our dream we love is dying, and we can do naught to save; or perhaps we find ourselves alone in some dim haunted tenement, stricken with fear, yet knowing not whither we may fly. And, as our grief or horror fill our inmost being, we suddenly realise that all the dream-life is evil, that it is all fleeting all sorrow-bearing, all unreal. And then, having got thus far, we suddenly realise that its unreality, in some strange, little-comprehended way, depends upon ourselves,—that there is a real life beyond this grim fantasy, that these woes or terrors of the night are but our own creation. And then we make a great effort of the will to wake—and in a second or two we are laughing at ourselves for being so foolish as to have been tortured by that woe or haunted by that fear;—recognising that it all was born out of our own mind, our sleeping ignorance, our dreaming state.

So is it here in the Ocean of Existence. From life to life we pass, now happy, now in suffering; and for long we go on living thus, passing from birth to death without ever once considering who we are or why we live. But, some time or other, great sorrow comes to us, and then for a minute do we pause, then for an instant do we wonder what reigns behind all this darkling mystery of life. And presently, as life succeeds to life, we suddenly realise the sorrow inherent in this continued changefulness; and, with that realisation of the Dukkha-Sacca, comes the deep inward

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perception of the Transition, the Misery, the Unreality of all the manifold conditionings of life.

Thus do we win to Sorrow's Truth, realising, like Nagasena's aspirant of old:—'All on fire is this endless Becoming, burning and blazing! Full of pain is it, and despair!' Like him, too, we aspire after a State wherein becoming shall have ceased, wherein hatred shall be replaced by Pity, craving by Love, delusion by Knowledge; and all life's turmoil by Nibbana's Peace.

Thus realising, we determine to make great effort to awaken out of the Dream of Life—thus aspiring, we seek for some path that shall lead us from the endless sorrow of existence. We habituate ourselves to keep the Sila, the Precepts of Virtue, in order that we fulfil the injunction 'Abstaining from all evil acts.' We practise Dāna, charity, seeking ever to do good to others, to feed the poor, to help the needy, to live in love with all mankind; as it is said 'Fulfilling all good deeds.' And, finally, we enter on the practise of Bhāvana, Meditation, to gain that concentration and force of mind which alone can break through these bonds of illusion, which alone can open for us the Nibbāṇa-Magga, the Way to the Great Peace, by 'the purification of the heart':—and these three, Sīla, Dāna, Bhāvana, are together the whole practise of our Buddhist Faith. 16

To one thus living in the Law, thus dwelling in peace and beneficence to all,—thus meditating on the nature of this life,—to such an one there comes some day the Great Awakening. 17 To him to whom that Awakening has come,—even although he has as yet seen the glory of Nibbāṇa but as from afar—to him comes Peace, and him no more these shows of earth can blind. Like as the awakened man realises his dream as the creation of his mind, so even unto him thus wakened is this dire Dream of Life—these worlds but builded out of thought, this pilgrimage of unnumbered lives but a seeming and a dreaming. To him thus wakened is this life of ours in sooth the World of Dreams:— his awakenings his hours of Meditation, and his true life lived past time, past space, past thought.

And so to conclude. If I am asked, 'Is the Nibbāṇa Annihilation? Is it Cessation? Is it the End of All?' I reply, thus even have we learned. It is Annihilation—the annihilation of the threefold fatal fire of Passion, Wrath and Ignorance. It is Annihilation—the annihilation of conditioned being, of

all that has bound and fettered us; the Cessation of the dire delusion of life that has veiled from us the splendour of the Light Beyond. It is the End of All—the end of the long torturous pilgrimage through worlds of interminable illusion; the End of Sorrow, of Impermanence, of Self-deceit. From the torment of the sad Dream of Life an everlasting Awakening,—from the torture of selfhood an eternal Liberation;—a Being, an Existence, that to name Life were sacrilege, and to name Death a lie:—unnameable, unthinkable, yet even in this life to be realised and entered into:—thus is the glory of Nibbāṇa by our Lord declared, and such the Goal of this our Buddhist Faith.

Beyond the radiance of Sun and Moon and Star, further than the Dark Void beyond, far past the Gates of Birth and Death It reigns, Immutable, Supreme. Beyond the inner Consciousness of man, wherein these worlds and systems and the far-reaching. Æther that includes them float like a grain of dust in the abyss of space;—beyond that vaster sphere where Thought and Non-thought co-existent dwell, where the last faint passing echoes of act and speech and thought blend with the Silence and are heard no more:—beyond all these It is; yet here, here in our hearts this day, albeit uncomprehended and unperceived; to be gained in this our human life alone, to be attained here on earth by him who follows on the Eightfold Way our Master taught.

Each noble act we do, each loving word we say, and every highest hope and aspiration of our minds, brings us a step yet nearer unto that unutterable Bliss. Not in the worlds beneath, not in the life of the Radiant Ones may we attain thereto; but here and now,—here, in this life that seems so puny and bedarkened, so commonplace, so full of care;—this human life that yet is greater than the life of Gods; in that herein, by self-control and effort supreme, by utter Renunciation, by Love, by Wisdom, by Compassion,—may we enter in very truth upon That Path which leads to Liberation and the Deathless Shore, out of life's dreamshadows into the Reality, Nibbāṇa's changeless Light:—out of life's woe to Joy Unnameable, out of life's war to Everlasting Peace!

1. Saṃyutta Nikāya.
2. See Dr. Rhys David's translation in Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XI., p. 177.
3. In Cullavagga v. 33. 1: translated in Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XX. pp. 150. 151 and Dr. Rhys David's note thereto.
4. See Childers' Dictionary of the Pāli Language S. V. Nibbāṇa, p. 268; and Dr. Rhys David's introduction to Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XI, p. xxxii.
5. See Pāli Dictionary, S. V. Nibbāṇam.
6. Cf. Brahmajāla Sutta, Sacred Books of the Buddhists, Vol. II. Dialogue I. p. 46, et seq.
7. In Pāli, Rūpa, Vedanā, Saññā, Saṃkhārā and Viññānam.
8. Sir Edwin Arnold well expresses this Buddhist denial of re-incarnation in Book VIII of "The Light of Asia:"—

"Say not 'I am,' 'I was,' or 'I shall be';
Think not ye pass from house to house of flesh
Like travellers who remember and forget
Ill-lodged or well-lodged. Fresh
Issues upon the Universe that sum
Which is the lattermost of lives."
9. For an exposition of these Eight causes of Woe, see Milinda-Pañha, translated by Dr. Rhys Davids in Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XXXV, p. 191.
10. Suttasaṅgahā, see Dr. Hoey's translation of Oldenberg's "Buddha," p. 264.
11. See Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XIII, p. 118, et seq.
12. Rhys David's American Lectures on Buddhism, p. p. 166, 167.

13. Translated by Dr. Rhys Davids in Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XXXVI, pp. 196–201.

14. Ibid., XXV, p. 70.

15. The Udāna, translated by Major-General D. M. Strong. p. 112.

16. Sabbapāpassa akaranam, kusalassa upasampadā, sa citta pariyodapanam:—Etam Buddhānasasanam. This verse,—Dhammapada 183,—has been called the ‘Buddhist Creed,’ containing as it does, in the short compass of a single stanza, the essence of the entire Religion. Besides the above classification of its three propositions as referring to Dāna. Sīla, and Bhāvana respectively, it is also held to sum up the entire Tipiṭaka:—the Abstention from Sin being the Discipline of the Vinaya: the practise of Good, the Teaching of the Sutta; and the Purification of the Heart or Mind by Meditation, the Doctrine of the Abhidhamma. It also summarises the Noble Eightfold Path, whereof Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood are the Noble Training in Conduct,—the Avoidance of all Sin: Right Aspiration, Right Effort and Right Mindfulness, the Noble Training in Meditation,—the training of the Mind for Good; whilst Right Rapture and Right Views together constitute the Noble Training in the Higher Wisdom, the Fruits of progress in the other Paths,—the true and final Purification of the Mind.

17. In this connection note that the title Buddha is derived from the Pāli Root Buaha and means literally “The Awakened.”