

**Programme** : WBU BUDDHIST SUNDAY FORUM  
**Topic** : What is Nibbāna  
**Speaker** : Dhammadarsa Bhikkhu  
**Rapporteur** : **Suttinee Yavapras**

On the First Sunday of the Month of September, September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2553(2010), 12:00 – 13.30 P.M. Dhammadarsa Bhikkhu was the guest speaker of the Buddhist Forum talking on "What is Nibbāna." Dhammadarsa Bhikkhu was born in England in 1965, but migrated to Australia when he was only one and a half years old. He did most of his primary and secondary schooling in Sydney, New South Wales. In 1975, at the age of 10, his family did the Transcendental Meditation [TM] course and this was his first introduction to meditation. This is classed as a Samatha, or Calm practice in Buddhism. He took up Yoga during his high school studies in Sydney. In 1980 his family moved to Brisbane, Queensland where he completed the last year of his secondary education. During this time, He took up Judo and came into contact with Zen meditation. He became interested in Buddhism in 1985, when he moved to Melbourne, Victoria. There he studied Tai Chi, which would also be classed as a Samatha, or Calm practice in Buddhism. In 1986, he took ordination as a Thai Theravada Buddhist monk in Australia. This was probably the first Bhikkhu ordination in Australia. Shortly after ordination He started Buddhist Samatha meditation as taught in Wat Paknam, Bhasicharoen, Bangkok. In 1988 He first started Buddhist Vipassana meditation, at which time He spent three years in retreat in Thailand, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. In 1993 He met Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, who encouraged him to focus on the words of the Buddha, which he did and which clarified greatly the Buddha's teaching for him. In 1994, he returned to Australia and disrobed. In the 15 years as a layman, he continued his meditation practice and study of the Buddha's words. From the year 2000 He have given various public talks and written various articles on the Buddha's teaching. In 2004 He completed a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Studies in Religion [Buddhist Studies] and Mandarin [Modern Chinese Language]. In 2005 He published a book called "The Gift of the Buddha - A Happy Life" with an excellent foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In 2008, he re-ordained in Thailand. He wanted to do more intensive meditation, specifically a two year retreat before further study, but his preceptor thought he had done enough intensive meditation and encouraged him to enroll in a Masters of Arts Degree in Buddhist Studies at MCU in 2010.

Dhammadarsa Bhikkhu mentioned about **The Four Noble Truths which are**

1. Suffering – The Five Aggregates of Clinging
2. The Cause of Suffering
3. The Ending of Suffering
4. The Path to the Ending of Suffering

The First Noble Truth is suffering. Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow & lamentation are stressful, distress & despair are stressful; association with the unbeloved is stressful, separation from the loved is stressful, not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five aggregates of clinging are stressful."

The Third Noble Truth is the ending of suffering i.e. the ending of the Three Fires of:

1. Greed/Attraction
2. Hatred/Aversion
3. Ignorance/Delusion

Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism accept Nibbana as the third Noble truth. Yet, the two traditions conceive Nibbana differently. The Theravada considers it must be at least briefly realized individually first, one becomes a Stream Enterer, one bound

for enlightenment. It may be generally thought, by both traditions, that one would focus on oneself until arahatship. There are four Noble Ones as follows:

The Stream Enterer [Sotāpanna]	Bound For Enlightenment Maximum 7 more becoming Unshakable Faith Perfect Morality Cannot take birth in a lower realm Has cut the first 3 fetters
The Once Returner [Sakadāgāmi]	Perfecting Concentration Is cutting/Has cut the next 2 fetters [totalling the first 5]
The Non-Returner [Anāgāmi]	
The Worthy One [Arahant]	Perfect Concentration Perfect Wisdom Has cut the last 5 fetters [totalling 10 fetters]

This idea is not supported by the early texts. So there is no reason to think that, with a personal experience of the path and goal, a Stream Enterer would not help others to understand while they progressed along the path. Compassion is part of the Buddha's teaching in the early Pali texts and according to those texts, a Stream Enterer has, at most, 7 more births in which they could help others. Mahayana Buddhism teaches that to realize Nirvana one must commit to become a Buddha oneself, which takes many lives. One puts off one's own enlightenment until all others are liberated first. This intention is called Bodhicitta. We can see some overlap between these two approaches, in that enlightenment would benefit both oneself and others. While Theravada first become a Stream Enterer with the first personal experience of enlightenment and have seven more becoming to attain liberation and help others, Mahayana first develop Bodhicitta-the intention to become a Buddha then have many lives to liberate others in the process.

The idea of a partial and complete Nibbāna is found in the early Pali texts and the Itivuttaka. There seems to be two interpretations of this idea in the early Pali texts themselves, but only one seems to have survived in the Theravāda Tradition. Partial Nibbāna in the early Pali texts, is said to be "sa-upādi-sesa" meaning 'with upādi remaining'. It is differing interpretations of "upādi" that causes the difference in the two understandings.

The popular idea is that Nibbāna attained by the Buddha under the Bodhi Tree at Bodhgāya, at age 35, was in some way partial, but complete Nibbāna [parinibbāna] was only attained at the end of his life, at age 80 under the Sal trees at Kusinagāra. In this view "upādi" is the five aggregates and "sa-upādi-sesa" means 'with the five aggregates remaining'. This view explains that clinging to the aggregates stopped from the time under the Bodhi tree and therefore **gross** suffering stopped, but since the five aggregates were still there for 45 years, there was still subtle suffering. So once a Worthy One [Arahat, including the Buddha] comes to the end of his lifespan and the five aggregates break up, then he is totally free from suffering, thus 'parinibbāna' full extinguishment.

The Buddha referred to the end of the lifespan of Arahats as "breaking of the body" [kāyabheda]. He never referred to it as "complete extinguishment" [parinibbāna], which is what later tradition uses. Quite the opposite, the Buddha used different forms of the word parinibbāna to refer to LIVING Arahants.

"From the time, Ananda, when a monk ... clings to nothing in the world; not clinging, ... he gains personal liberation [paccattaññeva parinibbāyati], and he knows: "Birth is finished, the holy life has been led, done was what had to be done, there is nothing more [of suffering] here."

Again, a monk through the full extinction [parinibbāyī] of the corruptions reaches in this very life the uncorrupted deliverance of mind, the deliverance through wisdom, which he has realized by his own insight.

The idea of partial and complete Nibbāna that doesn't seem to have survived in the Theravāda tradition is that they are both to be experienced in this very life, that the Buddha experienced FULL Nibbāna [parinibbāna] for 45 years, from the time under the Bodhi Tree at Bodhgāya. In this case, the idea of a partial and complete Nibbāna would correspond to the Nibbāna of the Trainers and Non-Trainer [Worthy One] respectively. In this case, the "upādi", which is a contracted form of upādāna according to the PTS Dictionary (Rhys Davis TW 1994), is clinging [upādāna]. The three types of Noble One's who have not yet realized Arahantship would then be those "with clinging remaining" [sa-upādi-sesa].

Apart from the use of "kāyabheda" referring to the end of the life of an Arahant above and the use of "parinibbāna" referring to living Arahants, there are some further supporting texts for this second interpretation. There are quotes from the Buddha in the early Pali texts that say he IS liberated without remainder. Two examples are:

"... I say, a Tathāgata [One-Thus-Come], with the ending, fading out, cessation, renunciation, and relinquishment of... all I-making and me-making and the underlying tendency to conceit, is liberated without remainder [an-upādā vimuttoti]."

"...and having truly understood the arising and passing away of feelings, their attraction and peril and the deliverance from them, the Tathāgata [One-Thus-Come] is liberated without remainder [an-upādā-vimutto]."

According to Dhammadarsa Bhikku, this second interpretation of "upādi" is more in line with the flavour of the Buddha's teaching, especially his emphasis on the Dhamma being practical, or to be seen here and now and this very life, or the timelessness of the Dhamma [akāliko]. The most meaningful definition of Nibbāna is: the total ending of greed, hatred and delusion. This can be achieved in this very life and doing so will enable one to be of most benefit to oneself and others.

The Bodhisatta [the Buddha to be] tested indulgence in sense pleasure as the highest happiness in this very life, which he found unsatisfactory. Then he tried the famous yogic teachers of his day. They also believed in Nibbāna in this very life, but they associated it with the formless, trancelike states of meditation. They taught these

to the Bodhisatta [the Buddha to be] as Enlightenment. The Bodhisatta mastered the states and found them unsatisfactory. These are two forms of pleasures, the first is disconnected from the mind, focused on the body, and the second disconnected from the body, focused on the mind. Having tested them, he decided to try self-mortification, that is inflicting pain on himself, as a means to liberation, this is punishing the body and training the mind. This he also found unsatisfactory. Then he remembered a time under the Rose Apple tree as a young boy when he attained a pleasant abiding which was not associated with sense indulgence nor trance like states of deep meditation, nor was he punishing the body. We can say that this experience valued both the body and mind. He wasn't indulging the body, or punishing it and he was training both.

There are ten types of happiness as follows:

1. The Happiness [sukha] of the Five Senses	Only Concerned with the body – disassociated from the mind. [One Extreme?]
2. The First Level of Awareness [jhāna 1]	Concerned with the body and mind inter-related and co-dependent.  "Consciousness is bound up with the body." M 77 – M ii 17  [The Middle Way?]
3. The Second Level of Awareness [jhāna 2]	
4. The Third Level of Awareness [jhāna 3]	
5. The Fourth Level of Awareness [jhāna 4]	
6. The First Formless State – Infinite Space	
7. The Second Formless State – Infinite Consciousness	Only Concerned with the mind – disassociated from the body.  [The Other Extreme?]
8. The Third Formless State – Nothingness	
9. The Fourth Formless State – Neither-conception-nor-non-conception	
10. Cessation of Sensation and Conception	

There are Cunda, these four kinds of life devoted to happiness [sukha], which are entirely conducive to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to tranquility, to realization, to awakening, to extinguishment (of greed, hatred and delusion). What are they? Firstly a mendicant, detached from all sense-pleasures, detached from unwholesome processes, enters and remains in the first jhāna, ...the second jhāna, ...the third jhāna and ...the fourth jhāna.

These are the life devoted to pleasure, which are entirely conducive to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to tranquility, to realization, to awakening, to extinguishment (of greed, hatred and delusion). So if the wanderers from other sects should say that the followers of the Sakyan are addicted to these forms of pleasure-seeking, they should be told: "Yes", for they would be speaking correctly about you, they would not be slandering you with false or untrue statements.

Rather than think the body is the only source of true pleasure, or the mind is the only source, he realized that the pleasure which values both the body and mind, seeing their inter-relatedness, or interdependence is a harmless pleasure that is fully conducive to Enlightenment. These pleasures he called the Four Jhāna and said that his disciples are rightly addicted to these pleasures, but he said these pleasures are NOT Enlightenment. Even identifying the Four Jhāna as Enlightenment is wrong, but we must develop them. The four are taught as part of the way in the Noble Eightfold Path. From the Sutta explanations, it is the four FORMLESS states [Four Arūpajhāna] that are trancelike not the Four Jhāna. It seems like the later tradition has overlaid the deep, trancelike qualities of the FORMLESS states to the Four Jhāna. The Four Jhāna are spoken of as wholesome focused states attainable in everyday life.

To come to this understanding, it is advised to study carefully the sutta descriptions of the Four Jhāna and question Buddhaghosa's doctrine. This understanding has brought a lot of benefit.

So? What is Nibbāna? It is not a particular type of experience that the Buddha points to as Enlightenment. The pleasure of the five senses or the four formless states are particular TYPES of experience, which happen to be one sided, either favouring the body or the mind. The Four Jhāna are also particular types of experience, but are praised as totally conducive to Nibbāna. It is integrating both body and mind.

**Wholesome Awareness  
[Right Concentration - Jhāna]  
in Everyday Life?**

<b>Jhāna Level</b>	<b>Possible Daily Life Experience</b>
One	Studying, analysing, investigating, planning, developing an hypothesis/theory
Two	Testing the plan/hypothesis in experience
Three	Experiencing the fruits of the testing. Resting from projects, e.g. practising mindfulness of breathing.
Four	Reviewing the above three activities.

Nibbāna is a WAY of experiencing, rather than a particular type of experience. That way is, experiencing without greed, hatred and delusion. For example, one could start eating a meal with greed and during the meal give up the greed. In one way we could say it is a different experience, in another way, it is not. It's different because there is no greed, but it's the same, because the same tastes are involved. Like any experience, we cannot directly give it to another, by any amount of explanation, but we CAN explain the WAY we came to the experience. This is what the Buddha did in the suttas. Thus we have the following conversation with the Buddha:

“When Master Gotama’s disciples are advised and instructed by him, do they all realize Extinction [Nibbāna], the ultimate goal, or do some not realize it?”

“Some do and some don’t.”

“What is the reason for this?”

“As to that Priest, I will ask you a question in return. Answer it as you choose. What do you think, Priest, are you familiar with the road leading to Rājagaha?”

“Yes, Master Gotama, I am.”

“Well suppose a man came to you who wanted to go there and said, ‘Please show me the road to Rājagaha.’ Then you told him, ‘Now, good man, this road goes to Rājagaha. Follow it for a while and you will see a certain village, go a little further and you will see a certain town, go a little further and you will see Rājagaha with its lovely parks, groves, meadows and ponds.’ Then having been thus advised and instructed by you, he took a wrong road and would go to the west. Then a second man came with the same purpose and having been instructed and advised by you, he arrived safely at Rājagaha. Now since Rājagaha exists and the path leading to it exists and you are present as a guide what is the cause and reason why, when those men have been thus advised and instructed by you, one man takes a wrong road and goes to the west and one arrives safely in Rājagaha?”

“What can I do about that, Master Gotama? I am only one who shows the way.”

“So too, Priest, Extinction [Nibbāna] exists and the path leading to it exists and I am present as the guide. Yet when my disciples have been thus advised and instructed by me, some of them realize Extinction, the ultimate goal and some do not. What can I do about that, Priest? The One-Thus-Come is only one who shows the way.”