

Cessation of Suffering

The Third True Reality for the Spiritually Ennobled: The Cessation of the Painful – *Nirvana*

The third True Reality is described in the first sermon as follows:

Now *this*, monks, for the spiritually ennobled, is the ceasing-of-the-painful true reality. It is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it (*Samyutta Nikāya* v.420-4).

That is, the ending of thirst for the 'next thing', so as to give full attention to what is here, now; abandoning attachments to past, present or future; freedom that comes from contentment; not relying on craving so that the mind does not fixate on anything, adhering to it, roosting there. When craving and other related causes thus come to an end, *dukkha* ceases.

This is equivalent to *Nirvana* (Pali *Nibbana*), also known as the 'unconditioned' or 'unconstructed' (*asankhata*, Skt *asamskrta*), the ultimate goal of Buddhism.

As an initial spur to striving for *Nirvana*, craving for it may play a role (A.II.145), but this helps in the overcoming of other cravings, is generally replaced by a wholesome aspiration, and is completely eradicated in the full experience of *Nirvana*: *Nirvana* is only attained when there is total non-attachment and letting go.

Nirvana literally means 'extinction' or 'quenching', being the word used for the 'extinction' of a fire. The 'fires' of which *Nirvana* is the extinction are described in the 'Fire sermon' (S.IV.19–20; *BW*.346; *SB*. 222–4). This teaches that everything internal and external to a person is 'burning' with the 'fires' of attachment, hatred (*raga*, *dosa*; Skt *dvesa*) and delusion (*moha*) and of birth, ageing and death. Here the 'fires' refer both to the causes of *dukkha* and to *dukkha* itself.

Attachment (i.e. sensual and other forms of lust) and hatred are closely related to craving for things and craving to be rid of things, and delusion is synonymous with spiritual ignorance. *Nirvana* during life is frequently defined as the destruction of these three 'fires' or defilements (e.g. S.IV.251; *BW*.364; *EB*.3.4.1)). When one who has destroyed these dies, he or she cannot be reborn and so is totally beyond the remaining 'fires' of birth, ageing and death, having attained final *Nirvana*.

Both during life and beyond death, *Nirvana* pertains to the *Arahat*, one who has direct knowledge that he or she has destroyed the four 'taints' [*asava*, Skt *asrava*: the most deeply rooted spiritual faults, which are likened to festering sores, leeching off energy from the mind, or intoxicating influxes on the mind. These are the taints of (i) sense-desire, (ii) attachment to 'being' and to a prized identity, (iii) views, and (iv) spiritual ignorance, which are all seen as conditioning, and being conditioned by, spiritual ignorance (*M.I.54-5*); p. 68].

Nirvana in life is described as 'with remainder of what is grasped at' (*sa-upadi-sesa*, Skt *sopadhi-sesa*), meaning that the *khandhas*, the result of past grasping, still remain for him. *Nirvana* beyond death is described as 'without remainder of what is grasped at' (*an-upadi-sesa*, Skt *nir-upadhi-sesa*), (*It.38-9*; *BTTA.97*; *BW.366- 7*).

Source: Excerpted, with minor edits, from Harvey, P. (2013) *An introduction to Buddhism: teachings, history and practices*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Pages 73-74.)