Nibbidā

Disillusionment and revulsion

[The arhat's awareness of and response to true reality]
An introductory essay
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1 Insight of the masters

During meditation, when the mind is utterly still and the bright sign (*nimitta*) has arisen[1] [10.2], we no more see the body in the manner of everyday virtual reality, but as it really is, by way of *true reality*. Such a special way of knowing at this level provides the basis for wise attention and development of insight. At this point, **Ajahn Chah** advises thus:

> You should bring this kind of insight right inside your heart: as you do this more and more, it becomes the cause for insight knowledge to arise by itself. Sometimes, when you turn your attention to reflecting on the subject of *asubha* [the impurities],[2] images of different unattractive aspects of the body can manifest in the mind automatically. These images are clearer than any you could try to summon up with your imagination and lead to insight of a far more penetrating nature than that gained through the ordinary kind of discursive thinking.
>
> This kind of clear insight has such a striking impact that the activity of the mind is brought to a stop, followed by the experience of a deep sense of dispassion. The reason it is so clear and piercing is that it originates from a completely peaceful mind.
>
> Investigating from within a state of calm leads you to clearer and clearer insight, the mind becoming more peaceful as it is increasingly absorbed in the contemplation. The clearer and more conclusive the insight, the deeper inside the mind penetrates with its investigation, constantly supported by the calm of *samādhi*. This is what the practice of *kammaṭṭhāna* [meditation] involves. Continuous investigation in this way helps you to repeatedly let go of and ultimately destroy attachment to personality view [*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*]. It brings an end to all remaining doubt and uncertainty about this heap of flesh we call the body, and letting go of blind attachment to rites and practices. (Chah 2001:4; Pali normalized & paragraphed)

Ajahn Chah then explains how this level of insights allows us to see a clear distinction between the mind and the body,[3] which means that we are seeing its true nature, and which leads us to experience a strong sense of revulsion (*nibbidā*) towards it:

> Even in the event of serious illness, tropical fevers or different health problems that normally have a strong physical impact and shake the body up, your practice of calm and insight remains firm and imperturbable. Your understanding and insight allows you to make a clear distinction between mind and body—the mind is one phenomenon, the body another. Once you see body and mind as completely and indisputably separate from each other, it means that the practice of insight has brought you to the point where your mind sees for certain the true nature of the body.

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[1] For an introd to this section, see ***Nimitta*** = SD 15.12(11).

[2] *Asubha*, in the Suttas, refers to the 31 (or 32) parts of the body, ie *asubha,saññā* (perception of foulness): see **Giri-m-ānanda S** (A 10.60.6/5:109) = SD 19.16. On details of practice, see **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22.5/2:293 = M 10.10) = SD 13.2-3; **Kāya,gatā,sati S** (M 119.7/3:90) = SD 12.21 Intro (5). See also **Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.29/5:277 f), on the analysis of will or desire (*chanda*).

[3] This mind-body distinction although explicitly stated here is implicitly but clearly evident in such discourses as **Roga S** (A 4.157.1.2:142 f): see SD 5.4(3), **Nakula,pitā S** (S 22.1/3:1-5) = SD 5.4; cf Sn 1120-1123: see SD 5.4(3). The term *asubha,nimitta* (the sign of foulness) in Comys, refers to one or other of the 10 foul objects, ie bodily remains in one of the 10 stages of decomposition (Vism 6.1-11/178 f).

Seeing the way the body truly is, clearly and beyond doubt from within the calm of *samādhi,* leads to the mind experiencing a strong sense of weariness and detachment *(nibbidā).* This weariness comes from the sense of sadness and dispassion that is the natural result of seeing the way things are. It's not the same as ordinary worldly moods such as fear, revulsion or other unwholesome qualities like envy or aversion. It's not coming from the same root as those defiled mental states.

This is weariness that has a spiritual quality to it and is different from the normal moods of boredom and tiredness experienced by ordinary unenlightened human beings *(puthujjana).* Those more common moods of boredom and feeling fed up with life that people experience, don't lead to insight, a desire to see images of unattractive parts of the body or to contemplation of impermanence. The experience is not the same.

The sense of world-weariness that grows with insight leads to detachment and aloofness that comes naturally from investigating and seeing the truth of the way things are. It is free from attachment to a sense of self that attempts to control and force things to go according to your desires. Rather, you let go with an acceptance of the way things are. The clarity of insight is so strong that you don't experience any sense of a self that has to go against the grain of its desires or endure through attachment.

The three fetters of personality view, doubt and blind attachment to rites and practices that are normally present underlying the way you view the world can't delude you or cause you to make any serious mistakes in practice. This is the very beginning of the path; the first clear insight into ultimate truth and paves the way for further insight.

You could describe it as penetrating the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are things to be realized through insight. Every monk and nun, who has ever realized them, has experienced such insight into the truth of the way things are. You know suffering, know the cause of suffering, know the cessation of suffering and know the path leading to the cessation of suffering. Understanding of each Noble Truth emerges at the same place within the mind. They come together and harmonize as the factors of the Eightfold Noble Path, which the Buddha taught are to be realized within the mind. As the path factors converge in the center of the mind, they cut through any doubt and uncertainty you still have concerning practice.

(Chah 2001:4; Pali normalized & paragraphed)

2 Definition and context of *nibbidā*

2.1 TRANSLATION. If there is a single word that could be a shibboleth[4] that separates the truly spiritually inclined from the more worldly, it would be ***nibbidā***, that is, both what the word *means* and how it is *translated.* The meaning of *nibbidā* is easier to fathom after we have discussed how it should be translated. The more common translation of *nibbidā* is "disillusionment, disenchantment" but the more serious spiritual practitioners generally prefer "revulsion," even "disgust." The reasons and evidence for this will be examined in this essay.

True spiritual attainment entails a turning away from worldliness, that is, we are no longer emotionally dependent on it, and a re-turning of the consciousness into inner stillness. Such a life-change is initiated by a powerful vision of the true nature of reality, so that we can but shrink back from the dangers and suffering that the world really is. The term *revulsion* aptly describes such a mental state.

[4] **Shibboleth** (IPA: ˈʃɪbəlɛθ) (Hebrew שבולת, "stream, torrent") is any language usage indicative of one's social or regional origin, or more broadly, any word, catch-phrase or practice that identifies members of a group. Its origin is biblical: the word was used by Jephthah to distinguish the Ephraimites, who were unable to pronounce it, from his own men, the Gileadites (Judges 12:4-6). The Ephraimite dialect lacked the post-alveolar |ʃ|sound (as in ***sh**oe*), mispronouncing it as the alveolar |s|. The Ephraimites killed all those they caught who could not articulate *Shibboleth* according to their dialect.

Medically, *revulsion* refers to "an act or technique of turning or diverting a disease or blood from a diseased region in one part of the body to another (as by counterirritation)."[5] Similarly, with growing spiritual maturity, our minds are gradually or dramatically diverted from unwholesome states and distractions to wholesome habits and greater mindfulness. Our growing awareness of our spiritual potential commensurably directs our energies to self-betterment culminating in spiritual liberation

2.2 CONTEXT. The term *nibbidā* forms the first of a well known series of words describing the spiritual turning-point to sainthood: *nibbidā* (revulsion), *virāga* (dispassion), *vimutti* (liberation) and *nibbāna* (nirvana), as in the well known stock passage:

> it leads to **utter revulsion**, to dispassion, to ending (of suffering), to peace [stilling], to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana.
>
> *etaṁ* ***ekanta,nibbidāya*** *virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhismāya abhisaññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṁvattanti*.[6]

The verb for *nibbidā* is ***nibbindati,*** resolved as *nis* + *vindati*, "he knows; he finds." The root is √**vid**, "to know" (clearly and truly), as in *vijjā,* "religious knowledge, spiritual wisdom." Its translation as "revulsed (at)," "repelled (by)," or even "disgusted (by)," may appear strong to some, but the awakened mind apparently sees worldly experience just as we would recoil at seeing a rotting body or dung (MA 3:129)! The early Buddhists, however, do *not* regard the body as being impure or evil, nor do they regard it as good and pleasurable in itself, but they are well aware of its true nature as being impermanent and in need of constant cleaning and maintenance.

2.3 STOCK PHRASE. As we shall see, ***nibbidā*** and its related forms are commonly found throughout the early Suttas. The stock phrase used in contexts which refer to *nibbidā*, is ***aṭṭiyati harāyati jigucchati***, ("he is pained [sickened], ashamed, disgusted (with)"[7] is explained as follows:

Aṭṭiyati means "(one is) pained, distressed, horrified, worried, bored, incommoded, troubled" and is the denominative[8] of *aṭṭa* (Skt *ārta*), "hurt, afflicted, tormented, desperate" (Sn 694). The Commentary on the Amba,laṭṭhika Rāhulôvāda Sutta (M 61) glosses ***aṭṭiyitabbaṁ*** as *aṭṭena pīḷitena bhavitabbaṁ,* "one should be distressed, (feel) harrassed" (MA 3:129). The Majjhima Commentary on the Vitakka,saṇṭhāna Sutta (M 20) explains ***aṭṭiyeyya*** as "(he) would be pained" (*aṭṭo dukkhito bhāveyya,* MA 2:90). The Vinaya Commentary says that one reflects in such a situation, thus, "when now will I be free from the sickness?" (*kadā nu kho gilānato muccissāmâ ti* ***aṭṭiyanti,*** VA 467).

Harāyati, meaning "ashamed," is the denominative of *hiri* (moral shame). The Majjhima Commentary glosses *harāyeyya* as *lajjeyya*, "one would be ashamed" (MA 2:90), and *harāyitabbaṁ* as *lajjitabbaṁ,* "one should be ashamed" (MA 3:129).

Jigucchati (Skt *jugutsati*), "he shuns, avoids, loathes, detests, is revulsed at, is repelled by, is disgusted with, sickened by, horrified at," is the desiderative (expressing desire) or reduplicative (expressing repetitiveness) of √**gup**, "to protect." The Majjhima Commentary explains *jigucchitabbaṁ* as *gūthaṁ disvā viya jigucchā uppādetabbā,* "one should arouse disgust (in oneself) as if looking at dung" (MA 3:129).[9]

2.3 *NIBBIDĀ* AND *ATAMMAYATĀ*. There is another interesting aspect of *nibbidā:* it is closely connected with ***atammayatā*** (non-identification). The Majjhima Commentary on the Alaggadûpama Sutta (M

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[5] Webster's 3rd New International Dictionary. A "counterirritant" is an agent applied locally to produce superficial inflammation with the object of reducing inflammation to deeper adjacent structures (as a mustard plaster applied to the chest in bronchitis (id).

[6] D 1:189; S 5:82, 179, 255, 361; A 3:83, 4:143, 5:216. For other connections, see PED: *nibbidā.*

[7] Bodhi: "horrified, ashamed, disgusted." This is stock: V 1:87, 88, 2:292, 3:68; D 1:213; M 1:120, 423 = A 4:374; M 3:300; S 4:62; A 1:45, 4:435, 5:111 (by all formations); U 23; It 43; J 2:143, 5:280. It is used by Sāriputta in a positive sense at A 9.11.4/4:374-376. See 3.6 below.

[8] Ie, a noun or verb derived from a noun or adjective, eg "man" (a fleet) or "localize" (from "local").

[9] See also SD 1.17 Intro (3).

22), in glossing *nibbidā* ("revulsion, disenchantment") as "the insight leading to the ascent (to the path)" (*vuṭṭhāna,gaminī,vipassanā*), says that amongst its synonym is "the exhaustion of *tammayatā*" (*tammayatā,pariyādānan ti*)" (MA 2:114). Hence, understandably, *nibbidā* and *atammayatā* mean the same thing. Indeed, we can easily see that the explanation of *atammayatā* perfectly describes *nibbidā*, too.[10]

Above all, knowing the correct meaning of *nibbidā* is vital in understanding why the Buddha and the saints live *in* the world without being a part *of* the world. Although living apart from the world, the spirituality of their presence is always within the reach of anyone who seeks liberation, even to this very day. Indeed, the healer has to heal himself first, before he can truly heal others.

3 *Nibbidā* in the Suttas

3.1 THE ALAGADDÛPAMA SUTTA. The main purpose of the Buddha's teaching is spiritual liberation. The path-progress to sainthood is clearly stated in these stock passages or pericopes found in such suttas as **the Alagaddûpama Sutta** (M 22), thus:

[Impermanence of the aggregate:]

26 (1) "Bhikshus, what do you think? Is **form** permanent or impermanent?"
"Impermanent, venerable sir."

[Unsatisfactoriness of the aggregate:]

"Is what is impermanent painful or pleasurable?"
"Painful, venerable sir."

[An aggregate has no "self":]

"Is what is impermanent, painful, and subject to change, fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine; this I am; this is my self'?"
"No, venerable sir."
(2) "…Is **feeling** permanent or impermanent?"…
(3) "…Is **perception** permanent or impermanent?"…
(4) "…Are **formations** permanent or impermanent?"…
(5) "…Is **consciousness** permanent or impermanent?"
"Impermanent, venerable sir."
"Is what is impermanent painful or pleasurable?"
"Painful, venerable sir."
"Is what is impermanent, painful, and subject to change, fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine; this I am; this is my self'?"
"No, venerable sir."[11]

[Dealing with the 5 aggregates:]

27 Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of **form** whatsoever—whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near[12]—all forms should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:

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[10] See ***Atammayatā*** = SD 19.3.

[11] On this and the following section, Norman says: "It is important to note that this answer can only be given by those who know, in advance, that the term *attā* is by definition *nicca* [permanent] and *sukha* [pleasant], and therefore anything which is *anicca* and *dukkha* cannot be *attā.* This gives us a clear indication of the type of *attā* that is being discussed. It is the Upanishadic idea of an *ātman* which is *nitya* and *sukha,* and this is in complete agreement with the fact…that some of the phraseology of the non-Buddhist view which is being rejected has Upanishadic echoes." (Norman 1981:22)

[12] See **Khandha S** (S 22.48/3:47) = SD 17.1. This "totality formula" classification of the aggregates (see prec n) is explained in detail in **Vibhaṅga** and briefly in **Visuddhi,magga**: **"**internal**"** = physical sense-organs; **"**external**"** = physical sense-objects; **"**gross**"** = that which impinges (physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, wind, fire); **"**subtle**"** = that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water); **"**far**"** = subtle objects ("difficult to penetrate"); **"**near**"** = gross objects ("easy to penetrate") (Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f;

'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'[13]
Any kind of **feeling** whatsoever…
Any kind of **perception** whatsoever…
Any kind of **formations** whatsoever…
Any kind of **consciousness** whatsoever—whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all forms should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:
'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'

[Revulsion (*nibbidā*):]

28 *Evaṁ passaṁ bhikkhave sutavā ariya,sāvako*	Seeing thus, bhikshus, an instructed noble disciple
rūpasmiṁ nibbindati	**is revulsed at form;**
vedanāya nibbindati	**he is revulsed at feeling;**
saññāya nibbindati	**he is revulsed at perception;**
saṅkhāresu nibbindati	**he is revulsed at formations;**
viññāṇasmiṁ nibbindati.	**he is revulsed at consciousness.**
29 *Nibbindaṁ virajjati,*	Revulsed, he is dispassionate [lust fades away].
virāga vimuccati,	Through the fading away of lust [that is, dispassion], (his mind) is liberated.
vimuttasmiṁ vimuttam iti	When it is liberated, he knows: "It is liberated."
ñāṇaṁ hoti, khīṇā jāti,	There is the knowledge, "Birth is destroyed,
vusitaṁ brahma,cariyaṁ,	the holy life has been lived,
kataṁ karaṇīyaṁ	what should be done is done,
nâparaṁ itthattāyâ ti pajānāti.	there is no more of this state of being," so he knows. (M 22.26-29/1:138 f)

The Sutta Commentary explains the key sentences (actually only a single word each) as follows:

"He is revulsed" (*nibbindati*): He is discontented (*ukkaṇṭhati*) (with worldly reality). This revulsion marks the culmination of insight, just before the attainment of the supramundane path.

"His is dispassionate" (*virajjati*) marks the attainment of the supramundane path (*magga*), when the mental fetters[14] are finally eliminated.

"It [the mind] liberated" (*vimuttaṁ*) refers to the attainment of the supramundane fruition (*phala*). (MA 2:114; Vism 21.43-44/650 f)

The arhat's subsequent review knowledge (*paccavekkhaṇa,ñāṇa*) is shown by the phrase "there comes the knowledge" and "he understands: 'Birth is destroyed…'," in the following paragraph.[15]

Abhs 6.7). "Whether or not the details of the Vibhaṅga exposition are accepted as valid for the *nikāyas*, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each *khandha* is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable variety and also a certain hierarchy" (Gethin 1986:41). See Gethin 1986:40 f; Karunadasa 1967:38f; Boisvert 1995:43-48. As regards the terms "internal" (*ajjhatta*) and "external" (*bahiddhā*), it should be noted that they have two applications: (1) the aggregates (*khandhā*) composing a particular "person" are "internal" to them and anything else is "external"; (2) the sense-organs are "internal" and their objects—which may include aspects of the person's own body or mind, which are "internal" in the first sense—are "external." Boisvert (1995: 43, 47), however overlooks these applications.

[13] See **Anatta,lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59.27).

[14] **Mental fetters** (*saṁyojanā*). There are 10 of them: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), (2) persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rites (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa,rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 5:13, Vbh 377). In some places, no. 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by illwill (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*oram,bhāgiya*) that bind one to the "lower" realm, ie the sense world, and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddham,bhāgiya*) that bind one to the "higher" realms, ie the form and formless worlds.

A shorter version of this statement is found in **the (Sabb'upādāna) Pariññā Sutta** (S 35.60):

> Seeing thus, the learned noble disciple is revulsed (*nibbindati*) towards the eye, towards forms, towards eye-consciousness, towards eye-contact, towards feeling…[and towards each of the other five sense-bases, sense-objects, sense-consciousnesses, sense-contacts, and feelings]…
> **Being revulsed (at reality) (*nibbindaṁ*), he becomes dispassionate**.
> Through dispassion (*virāga*), [his mind] is liberated.
> With liberation (*vimokkha*),[16] he understands, "Clinging has been fully understood by me."
> (S 35.60/4:33)

The Pali of the highlighted (bold) line simply reads *nibbindaṁ virajjati.* The word ***nibbindaṁ*,** "revulsed (at)" is the present participle of *nibbindati,* "he feels revulsion towards, is wearied with, is disgusted with, disenchanted with, disillusioned, indifferent towards, averse to," and is usually applied to the awakening to true reality.[17] Here, Buddhist practitioners often translate *nibbidā* with the strongest of the sense here, namely, "revulsion" [6]. Other suttas with this stock passage include **the Sabb'upādāna Pariññā Sutta** (S 35.60)[18] and **the Sabb'upādāna Pariyādāna Sutta 1** (S 35.61).[19]

3.2 THE POṬṬHAPĀDA SUTTA.

3.2.1 The four noble truths and *nibbidā*. In **the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta** (D 9), we see how the four noble truths are related to *nibbidā.* At the climax of the Sutta, when Poṭṭhapāda questions the Buddha on the ten indeterminable points (*avyākata*), the Buddha explains why:

> "Why, venerable sir, has the Blessed One left them [the 10 indeterminable points][20] undeclared?"
> "Because
> it [their declaration] is not connected to the goal;
> it is not connected to the Dharma;
> it does not belong to the fundamentals of the holy life;
> it does not lead to revulsion, nor to dispassion, nor to cessation (of suffering), nor to inner peace, nor to direct knowledge, nor to awakening, nor to nirvana."[21]
> (D 9.28/1:188 f) = SD 7.14

Then, the Buddha, when further questioned by Poṭṭhapāda on what he actually teaches, declares that he teaches the four noble truths, and his reasons are:

> Because
> it [their declaration] is connected to the goal;
> it is connected to the Dharma;
> it belongs to the fundamentals of the holy life;
> it leads to revulsion (*nibbidāya*),
> to dispassion (*virāgāya*),
> to cessation (of suffering) (*nirodhāya*),

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[15] See Appendix below for a list of such suttas.

[16] "Liberation," *vimokkha.* On the usu application of this term here, in **(Sabb'upādāna) Pariññā S** (S 35-60), see SD 7.4 Introd n.

[17] Skt & BHS *nirvid* or *nirveda.*

[18] S 35.60/4:33 f.

[19] S 35.61/4:34.

[20] The Pali text uses *taṁ*, "that" or idiomatically "it," ie the 10 indeterminable points. For a detailed analysis of these 10 points, see **Māluṅkya,putta S** (M 63) = SD 5.8 Introd (2).

[21] *Kasmā bhante bhagavatā avyākatan ti. | Na h'etaṁ Poṭṭhapāda attha,saṁhitaṁ na dhamma,saṁhitaṁ na ādi,brahma,cariyakaṁ* ***na nibbidāya*** *na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya saṁvattati.*

to inner peace (*upasamāya*),
to direct knowledge (*abhiññāya*),
to awakening (*sambodhāya*),
to nirvana (*nibbānāya saṁvattati*).[22] (D 9.30/1:189) = SD 7.14)

3.2.2 Commentarial explanation. The Majjhima Commentary to **the Alaggadûpama Sutta** (M 22) explains *nibbindati* and *nibbidā* quite comprehensively thus:

> ***Nibbindati*** (v) means "he is discontented" (*ukkaṇṭhati*), and here by ***nibbidā*** (n) "the insight leading to emergence (of the path)" (*vuṭṭhāna,gāminī,vipassanā*) is meant. However, the insight leading to path-emergence has many names. In some places, it is called "the peak of consciousness" (*saññ'agga*) [D 9.17, 19]. In some places, it is "the knowledge of the fixity of reality [true nature of things] (*dhamma-ṭ,ṭhiti,ñāṇa*)" In some places, it is "the factors of the effort for purity" [ie effort for the purity of moral virtue, of mind, of view, of liberation]. In some places, it is "the insight that is the knowledge and vision of the path-progress" (*paṭipadā,ñāṇa,dassana,visuddhi,-padhāniy'aṅga*). In some places, it is "the taking up of not-thatness" ["the attainment of non-identification"] (*atam,mayatā*).[23] In some places, it has three terms [names]; in some places, two.
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> Here, in **the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta**, it refers to just this: "It is consciousness, Poṭṭhapāda, that arises first, and then knowledge" [D 9.20], thus it is said in reference to "the peak of consciousness."
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> In **the Susima Sutta** [S 12.70/2:124]: "Susima, first comes the knowledge of the fixity of reality [the stability of the Dharma], then knowledge arises," thus it is said in reference to "the knowledge of the fixity of reality" (*dhamma-ṭ,ṭhiti,ñāṇa*).
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> In **the Das'uttara Sutta** [D 34.2.2(1)/3:288]: "the factor of the effort for purification by knowledge and vision of path-progress" (*paṭipadā,ñāṇa,dassana,visuddhi,padhāniy'aṅga*), thus it is said in reference to "the factor of effort."
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> In **the Ratha,vinīta (Sutta)** [M 24.9/1:147]: "What then, friend, is it for the sake of purification by knowledge and vision of the path-progress that the holy life in lived under the Blessed One?" thus it is said in reference to "the insight that is the knowledge and vision of the path-progress."
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> In **the Saḷāyatana Vibhaṅga (Sutta)** [M 137.20/3:220], "Bhikshus, by depending and relying on not-thatness [non-identification] (*atam,mayatā*), abandon and go beyond equanimity that is unified, based on unity," thus it is said in reference to "the taking up of not-thatness."[24]
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> In **the Paṭisambhidā,magga** [Pm 5.84/2:64]: "The desire for deliverance, the contemplation of reviewing, and the equanimity regarding formations—these dharmas are one in meaning, but only different in the letter," thus it is called in three terms.
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> In **the Paṭṭhāna** [Paṭ 1.417/1:92, 159]: "Adaptation to change-of-lineage is related to the path by proximity condition; adaptation to purification is related to the path by proximity condition," thus it is called in two terms.
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> But in **this Alagadda Sutta** [Alagaddûpama Sutta, M 22.29/1:139], the term *nibbidā* [revulsion] occurs as *nibbindati* [he is revulsed]. Here, in "**being revulsed, he is dispassionate,**" dispassion (*virāga*) refers to the path. Here, in "**being dispassionate, he is liberated,**" means that he is liberated through dispassion on account of the path. Thus it is spoken as the fruit (of liberation). (MA 2:114 f; cf Vism 21.135/671)[25]

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[22] *Etam hi Poṭṭhapāda attha,saṁhitaṁ etaṁ dhamma,saṁhitaṁ etaṁ ādi,brahma,cariyakaṁ etaṁ* ***nibbidāya*** *virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṁvattati*.

[23] *Atammayatā*, lit "not-that making," more fully, "non-fabrication of identity." See Sn 846b, where Comy glosses as *taṇhā,diṭṭhi,vasena tammayo,* "*tammayo* is that which is under the power of craving and wrong view" (SnA 2:547). See Amaro 2003 & Santikaro 1991, 1993.

[24] See ***Atammayatā*** = SD 19.3.

[25] ***Nibbindatî*** *ti ukkaṇṭhati. Ettha ca* ***nibbidâ*** *ti vuṭṭhāna,gāminī,vipassanā adhippetā. Vuṭṭhāna,gāminī,vipassa-*

3.2.2 Abhidhamma definition. **The Vibhaṅga**, in its analysis of knowledge (*ñāṇā,vatthuni*), succinctly describes how revulsion forms the basis for seeing true reality: "When there are perception and attention accompanied by dispassion and directed to fading away of lust [dispassion], it is the wisdom that partakes of penetration (into reality)." (Vbh 330)[26] This is spoken of each of the four dhyanas and the four formless attainments (Vbh 330 f).

In the closing paragraph, the sentence "(his) lust fades away [he is dispassionate]" (*virajjati*) marks the attainment of the supramundane path (*magga*), that is, sainthood, when the fetters are finally eliminated. "It [the mind] is liberated" (*vimmutan ti*) refers to the attainment of the supramundane fruition (*phala*). The arhat's subsequent review knowledge (*paccavekkhaṇa,ñāṇa*) is shown by the phrase "there comes the knowledge" and "he understands: 'Birth is destroyed….'"

3.3 THE GIRI-M-ĀNANDA SUTTA. In the Suttas, the term *nibbidā* frequently occurs (as we have seen above) in a stock phrase describing conditional states, including *virāga* (dispassion) and *vimutti* (liberation), leading to the attainment of nirvana.[27] These two important terms—*virāga* and *vimutti*—are explained in **the Giri-m-ānanda Sutta** (A 10.60) as the sixth and seventh of ten perceptions, thus:

> And what, Ānanda, is **the perception of fading away (*virāga,saññā*)**?[28]
>
> **9** Here, Ānanda, a monk who has gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty house, sits down, and having crossed his legs and keeping his body upright, considers thus:
>
> "This is peaceful! This is sublime! That is, the stilling of all formations, the letting go of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, the letting go [dispassion], nirvana."
>
> This, Ānanda, is called the perception of fading away.
>
> And what, Ānanda, is **the perception of cessation (*nirodha,saññā*)**?
>
> **10** Here, Ānanda, a monk who has gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty house, sits down, and having crossed his legs and keeping his body upright, considers thus:

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nāya hi bahūni nāmāni. Esā hi katthaci saññ'aggan ti vuttā. Katthaci dhamma-ṭ,ṭhiti,ñāṇan ti. Katthaci pārisuddhi,-padhāniy'aṅgan ti. Katthaci paṭipadā,ñāṇa,dassana,visuddhî ti Katthaci tam,mayatā,pariyādānan ti. Katthaci tīhi nāmehi. Katthaci dvīhî ti.

Tattha ***Poṭṭhapāda,sutte*** *tāva "saññā kho, poṭṭhapāda, paṭhamaṁ uppajjati, pacchā ñāṇan" ti* [D 9.17, 19] *evaṁ* ***saññ'aggan*** *ti vuttā.*

Susima,sutte *"pubbe kho, susima, dhamma-ṭ,ṭhiti,ñāṇaṁ pacchā nibbāne ñāṇan" ti* [S 12.70/2:124] *evaṁ dhamma-ṭ,ṭhiti,ñāṇan ti vuttā.*

Dasuttara,sutte *"paṭipadā,ñāṇa,dassana,visuddhipadhāniy'aṅgan" ti* [D 34.2.2(1)/3:288] *evaṁ pārisuddhi,-padhāniy'aṅgan ti vuttā.*

Rathavinīte *"kin nu kho, āvuso, paṭipadā,ñāṇadassana,visuddh'atthaṁ bhagavati brahma,cariyaṁ vussatî" ti* [M 24.9/1:147] *evaṁ pāṭipadāñāṇadassanavisuddhî ti vuttā.*

Saḷāyatana,vibhaṅge *"atam,mayataṁ, bhikkhave, nissāya atam,mayataṁ āgamma yāyaṁ upekkhā nānattaṁ nānattasitā, taṁ abhinivajjetvā yāyaṁ upekkhā ekattā ekattasitā, taṁ nissāya taṁ āgamma evametissā pahānaṁ hoti, evametissā samatikkamo hotî" ti* [M 137.20/3:220] *evaṁ tam,mayatā,pariyādānan ti vuttā.*

Paṭisambhidā,magge *"yā ca muñcitu,kamyatā, yā ca paṭisaṅkhânupassanā, yā ca saṅkhār'upekkhā, ime dhammā ekatthā vyañjanam eva nānan" ti* [Pm 5.84/2:64] *evaṁ tīhi nāmehi vuttā.*

Paṭṭhāne *"anulomaṁ gotra,bhussa anantara,paccayena paccayo, anulomaṁ vodānassa anantara,paccayena paccayo" ti* [Paṭ 1.417/1:92, 159] *evaṁ dvīhi nāmehi vuttā. Imasmiṁ pana* ***Alagadda,sutte*** [M 22.29/1:139] *nibbindatî ti nibbidā,nāmena āgatā.*

Nibbidā virajjatî *ti ettha virāgo ti maggo virāgā vimuccatî ti ettha virāgena maggena vimuccatî ti phalaṁ kathitaṁ. Vimuttasmiṁ vimuttam iti ñāṇaṁ hotî ti idha paccavekkhaṇā kathitā.* See SD 17.10(3).

[26] *Nibbidā,sahagatā saññā,manasikārā samudācaranti virāgûpasaṁhitā nibbedha,bhāginī paññā.*

[27] D 1:189; S 5:82, 179, 255, 361; A 3:83, 4:143, 5:216. In other connections: V 1:15 (*nibbidāya cittaṁ saṇṭhāsi*); D 3:130 f; S 2:30, 3:40, 179, 189, 4:86, 141; A 1:51, 64, 3:19, 200, 325 f, 4:99, 336, 5:2 f, 311 f; J 1:97, 4:471, 473; Sn 340; Pm 1:195, 2:43 f; Vbh 330; Nett 27, 29; Vism 650. Cf **abhinibbidā** (Nett 61, 98), CPD says this is a wr of *abhinibbhidā*..

[28] Sometimes rendered as "the perception of dispassion."

"This is peaceful! This is sublime! That is, the stilling of all formations, the letting go of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, the cessation, nirvana."

This, Ānanda, is called the perception of cessation. (A 10.60/5:110 f = SD 15.15)

3.4 INDRIYA,BHĀVANĀ SUTTA. The "learner on path" (*sekha pāṭipada*), that is, a saint short of an arhat, is defined by in **the Indriya,bhāvanā Sutta** (M 152) in terms of the cultivation of the faculties and the arising of revulsion, as follows

And how, Ānanda, is one **a learner on the path**?[29]

(1) Here, Ānanda, when a monk sees a **form** with the eye, (in him) the agreeable arises, the disagreeable arises, both the agreeable-and-disagreeable [the neutral] arises.

He is pained, ashamed, revulsed by the agreeable that has arisen, by the disagreeable that has arisen, by the agreeable-and-disagreeable that has arisen.

(2) When he hears a **sound** with the ear,….

He is pained, ashamed, revulsed by the agreeable that has arisen, by the disagreeable that has arisen, by the agreeable-and-disagreeable that has arisen.

(3) When he smells a **smell** with the nose,….

He is pained, ashamed, revulsed by the agreeable that has arisen, by the disagreeable that has arisen, by the agreeable-and-disagreeable that has arisen.

(4) When he tastes a **taste** with the tongue,….

He is pained, ashamed, revulsed by the agreeable that has arisen, by the disagreeable that has arisen, by the agreeable-and-disagreeable that has arisen.

(5) When he feels a **touch** with the body,….

He is pained, ashamed, revulsed by the agreeable that has arisen, by the disagreeable that has arisen, by the agreeable-and-disagreeable that has arisen.

(6) When he cognizes a **mind-object** with the mind, (in him) the agreeable arises, the disagreeable arises, both the agreeable-and-disagreeable arises.

He is pained, ashamed, revulsed by the agreeable that has arisen, by the disagreeable that has arisen, by the agreeable-and-disagreeable that has arisen.

This, Ānanda, is how one is a learner on the path. (M 152.10/3:300 f) = SD 17.13

This Sutta passage refers the learner (*sekha*), that is, a saint short of an arhat. **Bodhi,** in his translation of the Indriya,bhāvanā Sutta, notes: "Although the *sekha* has already entered upon the way to final deliverance, he is still prone to subtle states of liking, aversion, and dull indifference in regard to sense objects. He experiences these, however, as impediments to his progress, and thus becomes repelled, humiliated, and disgusted by them" (M:ÑB 1366 n1357).

The Indriya,bhāvanā Sutta instructs on how the good worldling (*kalyāṇa puthujjana*) and the learner on the path (*sekha pāṭipada*) should cultivate, and how the arhat "cultivates," the sense-faculties when sense-experiences occur. All this is summarized in this table (the details of (2) have been given above):

[29] *Sekho…pāṭipado* (sometimes wr as *paṭipadā*: see SD 12.14 Introd 2), where ***sekha*** means "learner" and ***pāṭipada*** is an adj meaning "of the way," ie, one who has entered the noble eightfold path, and bound for awakening, referring to all the saints except the arhat who is an adept (*asekha*). Here PTS & Se give an abridged reading, but Ce gives in full, which I follow. The *sekha pāṭipada* is the theme of **Sekha S** (M 53/1:353-359) = SD 12.14 Introd 2.

The practitioner	Feeling	Cultivation of the faculties
(1) The supreme cultivation of the faculties in the noble one's discipline (*ariyassa vinaye anuttarā indriya,bhāvanā*): a good worldling	When a monk ⟨experiences a sense-object⟩ with ⟨the sense-organ⟩, (in him) the agreeable arises, the disagreeable arises, the agreeable-and-disagreeable [the neutral] arises.	He notes the sensation, and regards it as "conditioned, gross, and dependently arisen." And he notes its momentariness or impermanence. [§§4-9]
(2) The learner on the path (*sekha pāṭipada*): the stream-winner, once-returner, or non-returner		"He is pained, ashamed, disgusted" by the sensation (whether they are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral). [§10]
(3) The noble one developed in the cultivation of the faculties (*ariya bhāvita indriya,bhāvanā*): the adept or arhat		He is a master of the 5 perceptions, applying them "as he wishes."[30] [§§11-16]

Table 3.4 The five perceptions (Indriya,bhāvanā Sutta, M 152 = SD 17.13)

3.5 WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE WORLD. From this table, we can see that the good worldling, that is, an ordinary follower (monastic or lay) who has some faith or wisdom in Dharma practice, should regard all sense-experiences as being *impermament;* that is, they should constantly practise the perception of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*).[31] The learner on the path, that is, all the saints, short of the full-fledged arhat, should or would be "pained, ashamed, disgusted" at all sense-experiences [2.2]. In the case of the arhat (including the Buddha), however, as "masters of the five perceptions," would

(1) direct his *lovingkindness* towards disagreeable objects, or regard them as *physical elements*;
(2) direct the thought of *foulness* towards agreeable objects, or regard them as *impermanent*;
(3) pervade both with *lovingkindness*, or regard both as *physical elements*;
(4) direct the thought of *foulness* towards both, or regard both as *physical elements*; or
(5) be neither glad nor sad, but abide in *equanimity* regarding both, mindful and fully aware.

In short, the arhat does *not* feel "pained, ashamed, disgusted."

However, in **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11), the Buddha himself uses these same words in disapproving of psychic exhibitions before the unordained: "I am pained, shamed, revulsed (regarding them)" (*aṭṭiyāmi harāyāmi jigucchāmi*).[32] Evidently, the Buddha is emphasizing his disapproval in the strongest terms. There are at least three ways of understanding the import of the stock passage, *aṭṭiyati harāyati jigucchati* [2.2]:

[30] Here the 5 perceptions are powers accomplished in the arhat. Elsewhere, the Buddha teaches them to his unawakened disciples as a way to overcome the three unwholesome roots (greed, hate and delusion). See **Indriya,-bhāvanā S,** M 152.11n & Table 4 in SD 17.13.

[31] See eg **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1) = SD 16.7.

[32] See **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11.5 +7/1:213) = SD 1.7.

(1) the Buddha is expressing his perception of sense-experiences in a language best understood by the unawakened, but his attitude is that of true *equanimity*; or
(2) that the reciters are simply expressing his disapproval in conventional terms, or
(3) it is natural that such sentiments would naturally arise reflecting the occasion, but the saint, knowing them to be impermanent, is unaffected by them, unlike a worldling.

In any case, the arhat is always in control of his feelings.[33]

3.6 *NIBBIDĀ* AND THE THREE CHARACTERISTICS. The Vitakka,saṇṭhāna Sutta (M 20) gives a good idea of the meaning of the stock phrase "pained, ashamed, disgusted" (***aṭṭiyāti harāyati jigucchati***):

> Bhikshus, just as a young man or woman, well-dressed and fond of ornaments, would feel pained, ashamed, disgusted[34] by a carcass of a snake, a dog, or a human hung around his or her neck, even so should the monk get rid of the evil unwholesome thoughts by examining the dangers of those thoughts, thus: "These thoughts are unwholesome, they are blameworthy, they bring suffering." (M 20.4/1:119 f) = SD 1.6

Evidently, from this passage, we can deduce that feeling "**pained [sickened]**" (*aṭṭiyāti*) is a practitioner's or saint's response to the unwholesomeness of the thought; "**ashamed**" (*harāyati*), to its blameworthiness; and "**disgusted (with)**" (*jigucchati*), to its resulting in suffering. [2.2]

We can however go further in our reflections on the stock phrase ***aṭṭiyati harāyati jigucchati***, ("he is pained [sickened], ashamed, disgusted (with)" and *nibbidā,* that is, seeing their connection in terms of the three characteristics. The Buddha often says that he is "pained, ashamed, disgusted" with worldly things. On a simple level, as unawakened beings, we can benefit in a profound spiritual way by examining reality in this manner.

From **Table 3.4** (above), we can see that the good worldling (*kalyāṇa puthujjana*) and the learner on the path (*sekha pāṭipada*) should cultivate, and how the arhat "cultivates," the sense-faculties when sense-experiences occur. The good worldling, that is, an ordinary follower (monastic or lay) who has some faith or wisdom in Dharma practice, should reflect all sense-experiences as being *impermament;* that is, they should constantly practise the perception of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*).[35] The learner on the path, that is, all the saints, sort of the full-fledged arhat, should or would be "pained, ashamed, disgusted" at all sense-experiences. The worldling however can still experience these responses in the practice of the perception of impermanence.

The world is *impermanent,* and so are its pleasures. In fact, we run after pleasures because we are constantly pursued by feelings we dislike. Jilted by the momentariness of pleasure, we are **pained** (*aṭṭiyati*), being unable to really find what we seek, that is, lasting pleasure. When we understand this pervading nature of the painfulness of momentary pleasure, we are also pained knowing that others too would suffer similar pain, chasing after pleasures that can never last.

That which is impermanent is necessarily *unsatisfactory,* giving at best only momentarily, which, even then, we only enjoy if we are mindful of the moment. And being mindful of the moment, we notice that pleasurable feeling is always attended by its darker side: *painful feeling.* They go together. The wisdom of this pervading unsatisfactoriness, and our erstwhile chasing after it or our attachment to it, becomes a laughing matter of cosmic proportions: it is an irony, since what we took to be delightful is not satisfying, after all. Understandably, the wise feel **ashamed** (*harāyati*) about all this.

We clearly have no control over what is impermanent and unsatisfactory. They have no abiding entity that we could put a finger on: things are not what they appear to be, and we have been superimposing our own biased views and hopes on all our sense-experiences. When we try to give up both pleasure and pain, we find ourselves suffocating in the ensuing boredom of neutral feeling. When we finally realize that we have been pulled and pushed about by our craving and ignorance, we finally decide to have nothing to do

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[33] See SD 1.7 Intro (3). On "The arhats are in full control of their feelings," see SD 17.3(7).
[34] *Aṭṭiyāti harāyati jigucchati* (2.2).
[35] See eg **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1) = SD 16.7.

with them any more: we are simply **disgusted** (*jigucchati*) at feeling. We are beginning to see the true reality of no-self, that there is no abiding entity, no essence whatever in the world.

4 *Nibbidā* and the 7 awakening factors

In this section, we will go on to examine a few Sutta passages that show how *nibbidā* arises in spiritual training.

4.1 THE UPANISĀ SUTTA. The Upanisā Sutta (S 12.23) is a remarkable but rarely quoted discourse in the Nidāna Saṁyutta of the Saṁyutta Nikāya.[36] It gives an insight into how suffering leads to faith, and so on through *nibbidā* to liberation:

> Suffering is the condition for faith (*saddhā*);
> Faith is the condition for gladness (*pamojja*);
> Gladness is the condition for zest (*pīti*);[37]
> Zest is the condition for tranquillity (*passaddhi*);
> Tranquillity is the condition for happiness (*sukha*);
> Happiness is the condition for concentration (*samādhi*);
> Concentration is the condition for knowledge and vision of reality (*yathā,bhūta.ñaṇa.dassana*);
> Knowledge and vision of reality is the condition for revulsion [disenchantment] (*nibbidā*);
> Disenchantment is the condition for dispassion [letting go of lust] (*virāga*);
> Dispassion is the condition for liberation (*vimutti*); and
> Liberation is the condition for the knowledge of the destruction of the cankers (*āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa*).
> (S 12.23.12-/2: 31 f)

The lesson of the Upanisā Sutta is a powerful one: **suffering** is a great teacher, if we are willing to learn. The lesson of suffering is clear: nothing of this world is totally satisfactory. The reason for this unsatisfactoriness is that all things of the world are *impermanent.* This understanding arouses faith in spiritual development, because we are not to be blamed for our failures, nor are others to be blamed: it is the nature of reality, that there is nothing in this world that is worth clinging to.[38]

Through faith, the mind become more positive and wholesome, becoming progressively **more happy,** so that it becomes more **calm and concentrated.** The calm and concentrated mind is able to see true reality, that is, "the knowledge and vision of reality is the condition for revulsion."[39] When you know and see the world as it really us, you are no more cheated nor pained by it: the joy arising from this is characteristic of spiritual liberation. In short, this is how the wheel of dependent arising is reversed, turning into the dependent ending of suffering, leading to liberation.

4.2 THE NINE HELPFUL STATES. The Das'uttara Sutta (D 23), in its section on nines, presents *nibbidā* in a slightly different context: as the seventh of "the nine states of great help (towards awakening)" (*nava dhammā bahu,kāra*), that is, the nine conditions rooted in wise consideration (*yoniso,manasikāra,mūlakā dhammā*), namely,

1. through wise consideration, joy arises	*yoniso,manasikaroto pāmojjaṁ jāyati;*
2. when one is joyful, zest arises	*pamuditassa pīti jāyati;*
3. when one is zestful, one's body (*kāyo*) is calmed	*pītimanassa kāyo passambhati;*
4. when the body is calmed, one knows happiness	*passaddha,kāyo sukhaṁ vedeti;*
5. the happy mind becomes concentrated	*sukhino cittaṁ samādhiyati;*
6. when the mind is concentrated, one knows and sees things as they really are	*samāhite citte yathā,bhūtaṁ jānāti passati;*

[36] See **Upanisā S** (S 12.23) = SD 6.12 & Bodhi, "Transcendental Dependent Arising," 1980:14 f & Gethin 1998:157-159.

[37] "Zest." *pīti,* also as "joy," ie "joyful interest and energy."

[38] See eg **(Moggallāna) Pacalā S** (A 7.58) = SD 4.11.

[39] *Yathā,bhūta,ñāṇa,dassanûpanisā nibbidā.*

7. knowing and seeing things as they really are, one is revulsed	*yathā,bhūtaṁ jānaṁ passaṁ nibbindati;*
8. being revulsed, lust fades away	*nibbindaṁ virajjati;*
9. through the fading away of lust, (the mind) is liberated	*virāgā vimuccati.*

Clearly, these "nine states of great help," although differently worded and arranged, are very similar to the seven awakening factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*), namely:[40]

The awakening-factor of mindfulness	(*sati*),
The awakening-factor of mental investigation	(*dhamma,vicaya*),
The awakening-factor of effort	(*viriya*),
The awakening-factor of zest	(*pīti*),
The awakening-factor of tranquillity	(*passaddhi*),
The awakening-factor of concentration	(*samādhi*),
The awakening-factor of equanimity	(*upekkhā*).

The nine-state system closes with (8) fading away of lust (*virāga*) and finally (9) liberation (*vimutti*).[41] Both these states are implicit in the awakening factor of **equanimity** (*upekkhā*), that is, the on-looking mind of true wisdom. Before the moment of awakening itself, this equanimity is still tinged with some level of aversion or disgust, but in the awakened mind, this is the mirror-like wisdom of true emptiness, reflecting only what is before it but untouched by it, illusion-free and delusion-free.[42] It is possible to tabulate these two sets to show the relationships, thus:

The nine states of great help	**The seven awakening factors**
	1. Mindfulness (*sati*)
[ ] Wise consideration (*yoniso manasikāra*)	2. Mental investigation (*dhamma,vicaya*)
1. Joy (*pāmujja*)	3. Effort (*viriya*)
2. Zest (*pīti*)	4. Zest (*pīti*)
3. Bodily calm (*passaddha,kāya*)	5. Tranquillity (*passaddhi*)
4. Happiness (*sukha,citta*)	
5. Mental concentration (*samādhi*)	6. Concentration (*samādhi*)
6. Insight into reality [*vipassanā*]	
7. Revulsion (*nibbidā*)	
8. Fading away (of lust) (*virāga*)	7. Equanimity (*upekkhā*)
9. Liberation (*vimutti*)	

The awakening-factors approach begins with mindfulness (*sati*), or what we today call "meditation." "Mindfulness," however, is more specific that "meditation," which may be taken as a modern translation of *bhāvanā* ("mental cultivation"), which refers to a broad array of conditions and practices that conduce to the rise and stability of mindfulness, which is the sustained and proper attention to a meditation object or a meditation sign.[43] Here "meditation object" and "meditation sign" are translations of different usages of the same term, *nimitta.*[44]

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[40] See **Āhāra S** (S 46.51) = SD 7.15 & **Anīvaraṇa S** (S 46.38b) = SD 3.2(5).

[41] Also elsewhere called *vimokkha* (eg **Sabb'upādāna Pariññā Sutta,** S 35.60/4:33 f, & **Sabb'upādāna Pariyādāna Sutta 1,** S 35.61/4:34) or *vossagga* (eg **Saṅgīti S,** D 33.1.11(10)/3:226).

[42] On "emptiness" here, see eg **Cūḷa Suññata S** (M 121) = SD 11.3 & **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122) = SD 11.4.

[43] A "meditation object" (*nimitta*), also called *ārammaṇa* in the Commentaries, refers to a chosen specific mode of meditation, eg the breath, as taught, eg, in **Ānâpāna,sati S** (M 118) = SD 7.13. A "meditation sign" (*nimitta*) refers usu to an intruding thought or distraction that is unwholesome (rooted in greed, hate, or delusion), as described, eg, in **Vitakka,saṇṭhāna S** (M 20) = SD 1.6. On *bhāvanā,* see SD 15.1.

[44] See **The Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** = SD 13.3.1d & **(Nimitta) Jāta,rūpa S** (A 1.100/1:253-258) = SD 19.11 Introd.

The "nine states" method starts with **(1)** wise consideration (*yoniso manasikāra*), which is a type of mindfulness practice, best summarized as the application of the three characteristics (*ti,lakkhaṇa*), especially the first, the characteristic of impermanence, to the meditation object or the meditation sign.[45] On that level, the awakening-factor approach applies mental investigation (*dhamma,vicaya*), the examination of mental states, or the practice of satipatthana, that is, properly focussing one's attention on the body, on feelings, on the mind, or on dharmas as taught in **the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas** (D 22; M 10).[46]

In the "nine states" method, wise consideration (resulting in not being oppressed by any *nimitta*) leads to **(2)** joy (*pāmujja* or *pāmojja*),[47] that is, a wholesome delight that lasts conditioned by one's meditation. This joy (in the nine states) and this effort (in the awakening factors) lead to **(3)** zest (*pīti*), a joyful interest in one's enterprise, that is, one's meditation here. This zest, much more profound than the initial joy, too, is conditioned by one's meditation and is impermanent. However, unlike worldly zest (or better, rapture), the impact of *pīti* is so profound that even its memory has a wholesome calming effect long after the experience is gone.

In the awakening factors, mental investigation is followed by effort (*viriya*): noting as they really are the various states that arise, one is not troubled by negative thoughts and distractions, and so one's energies are progressively focussed. This is the energy of joyful interest (*pīti*) that sustains our mindfulness and meditation. In other words, this joy is already present before such effort could arise.

From here on, the rest of stages in both methods are remarkably identical except for their number and wording. Zest, in the nine states, leads one to enjoy a somewhat body-based joy, called **(4)** bodily calm (*passaddha,kaya*), which in turn is the basis for a subtler mind-centred happiness (*sukha,citta*). The awakening factors system call the former stage tranquillity (*passaddhi*): in fact, the words are effectively synonymous, and includes mental happiness. In both systems, this is the basis for **(5)** mental concentration or samadhi, which (explicit in the nine states, and implicit in the awakening factors), allows one **(6)** to see things as they really are (*yathā,bhūta,ñāṇa,dassana*), that is, insight into reality (*vipassanā*).

With one's coloured glasses and blinkers removed one but is at first **(7)** utterly revulsed (*nibbinda*) at true reality, so that one simply decides not to have anything to do with it: one is simply disenchanted by the world; one sees beyond all the illusions and falsehood and no more wants to be cheated by it. The best historical example of this is, of course, that of the Bodhisattva Siddhattha's revulsion with the world as dramatized in the story of the four sights or "divine messengers" (*deva,dūta*).[48]

The nine states system goes on to list **(8)** fading away of lust (*virāga*) and finally **(9)** liberation (*vimutti*).[49] Both these states are implicit in the awakening factor of equanimity (*upekkhā*), that is, the onlooking mind of true wisdom.[50] Before the moment of awakening itself, this equanimity is still tinged with some level of aversion or disgust, but in the awakened mind, this is the mirror-like wisdom of true emptiness, reflecting only what is before it but untouched by it, illusion-free and delusion-free, ever-ready to respond in compassion where needed.[51]

Both the nine states and the seven awakening factors progressively lead one to awakening. Apparently, while the nine states initially focus on "joy" (*pāmojja*), the goal clearly is that of "wisdom" (*paññā*) or

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[45] See esp **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1) = SD 16.7, & the "contemplation of mind-objects" in **Ānâpāna,sati S** (M 118.21/3:83) = SD 7.13).

[46] D 22/2:290-315; M 10/1:55-63 = SD 13. **The Kāya,gata,sati S** (M 119) = SD 12.21.

[47] *Pāmujja:* D 1:72, 196; S 3:134, 4:78, 351; 5:156, 398; A 3:21, 5:1 f, 311 f, 339, 349 Sn 256. *Pāmojja* (Skt *prāmodya*): D 2:214. 3:288; M 1:37, 98; S 1:203, 2:30,5:157; Dh 376, 381; Pm 1:177; Dhs 9, 86.

[48] The Bodhisattva's experience here is usu described as *saṁvega* [4]. See esp **Deva,dūta S** (M 130) = SD 2.23.

[49] Also elsewhere called *vimokkha* (eg **Sabb'upādāna Pariññā Sutta,** S 35.60/4:33 f, & **Sabb'upādāna Pariyādāna Sutta 1,** S 35.61/4:34) or *vossagga* (eg **Saṅgīti S,** D 33.1.11(10)/3:226).

[50] It is important to note that the "equanimity" here is *neither* worldly nonchalance (*gehasita upekkhā,* M 3:217-220; S 4:232; Vbh 382; MA 3:731; SA 3:84), *nor* "indifferent feeling" (*adukkham-asukhā vedanā*, D 3:275*;* M 1:396; S 2:53, 83, 3:86, 87, 4:114 f, 207, 223 f; A 1:173, 4:442; It 46, 47), but is "centredness" (*tatra,majjhattatā,* Nm 1:144; PmA 1:190; Vism 14.153/466 f), a quality of all pure consciousness and a moral quality of the formations-group (*saṅkhāra-k,khandha*).

[51] On "emptiness" here, see eg **Cūḷa Suññata S** (M 121) = SD 11.3 & **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122) = SD 11.4.

"insight" (*vipassanā*), that is, "seeing things as they really are. The seven awakening factors, on the other hand, constitutes the "calmness" (*samatha*) approach. It is interesting to note that in both cases "zest" (*pīti*), that is, dhyana or mental absorption (*jhāna*), is present. This is understandable as the early teachings do not differentiate meditation as *samatha* and *vipassanā,* both being varying aspects of the same mental cultivation process. While suttas like **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1)[52] would exemplify the "nine-state" approach to awakening, **the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas** (D 22; M 10)[53] famously describe the "awakening-factor" approach to spiritual liberation.

How the awakening factors function is presented the *viveka,nissita* ("dependent on solitude") formula, where "solitude" (*viveka*) is placed between *upekkhā* and *virāga,* such as this very common pericope that ends **the Ānâpāna,sati Sutta** (M 118):[54]

> **[88] 41** And how, monks, are the seven awakening-factors cultivated and often developed to bring true knowledge and liberation to perfection?[55]
>
> **42** Here, monks,
>
> (1) a monk cultivates the awakening-factor of mindfulness that is founded on **solitude**,[56] dependent on fading away (of lust),[57] dependent on cessation (of suffering),[58] ripening in letting go (of defilements).[59]
>
> (2) He cultivates the awakening-factor of dharma-investigation…
>
> (3) He cultivates the awakening-factor of effort…
>
> (4) He cultivates the awakening-factor of joy…
>
> (5) He cultivates the awakening-factor of tranquillity…
>
> (6) He cultivates the awakening-factor of concentration…
>
> (7) He cultivates the awakening-factor of equanimity that is dependent on **solitude**, dependent on fading away (of lust), dependent on cessation (of suffering), ripening in letting go (of defilements).[60] (M 118.41-41/3:88) = SD 7.13

Considering the juxtaposition of solitude (*viveka*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*) in the *viveka,nissita* formula, and the close connection between the nine states and the awakening factors, it is obvious that *viveka* is here a synonym of the fading away of lust (*virāga*), arising from *nibiddā.* In fact, some areas of *nibbidā*

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[52] S 25.1/3:225 = SD 16.7.

[53] D 22/2:290-315; M 10/1:55-63 = SD 13.

[54] On the awakening factors (*bojjhaṅga*), see SD 10.15 & the *viveka,nissita* formula, see SD 20.4. See also Gethin 2001:162-168.

[55] This closing section (M 118.41-44/3:88) is a periscope = **Ānanda S 1** (S 54.13-14/5:333) = **Ānanda S 2** (S 54.14/5:335).

[56] Here "solitude" (***viveka***) (or seclusion) has special reference to the overcoming of the 5 mental hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇā*). This whole phrase, beginning with "dependent on solitude"—*viveka,nissitaṁ virāga,nissitaṁ nirodha,nissitaṁ vossagga,nissitaṁ vossagga,pariṇāmiṁ dhamma,vicaya,sambojjhaṅgaṁ*—is called **the *viveka,-nissita* formula**. See Gethin 2003:162-168. According to **Paṭisambhidā,magga,** there are 5 kinds of "solitude" (*viveka*), ie overcoming of the hindrances: (1) solitude through suppression (*vikkhambhana viveka*); (2) solitude through the substitution of opposite or displacement by opposites (*tad-aṅga viveka*); (3) solitude through cutting off (*samuccheda viveka*); (4) solitude through tranquillization (*paṭipassaddhi viveka*); and (5) solitude through escape (*nissaraṇa viveka*) (Pm 1:27, 2:219-224; Vism 13.12/410, 22.110/693). See also **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** = SD 13.1 §4.2c.

[57] ***Virāga,*** also tr as "dispassion."

[58] ***Nirodha,*** ie, "cessation of suffering."

[59] MA says that there are 2 kinds of letting go or relinquishment (of suffering) (***vossagga***): "giving up" (*paric-cāga*), ie the abandonment of defilements, and "entering into" (*pakkhandana*), ie culminating in nirvana. **Gethin** notes that this phrase is not unique to the 7 *bojjhaṅgā*, but is also found in connection with the factors of the noble eightfold path, the *indriyā* and *balā* (2001:162 f). This formula shows that that each *bojjhaṅga* is to be developed successively "as dependent on seclusion, fading away (of lust) [dispassion], and cessation" (Gethin 2001:166).

[60] D 33.1.11(10)/3:226; M 2/1:11, 77/2:12, 118/3:88, 146/3:275, 277; S 1:88, 4:365 f; S 5:2, 4, 11, 30, 31, 33 f, 36, 38-40, 42 f, 45-52, 54-56, 58, 61, 63 f, 72, 75 f, 78 f, 83, 86-88, 91, 101 f, 119 f, 128-131, 133 f, 137, 239, 241, 249, 251, 312 f, 333, 340; A 1:153, 2:16, 3:390; Pm 219 f, 223.

and of *viveka* overlap, especially when *viveka* is taken to mean "seclusion," that is, detachment from the world.

This same teaching, differently worded, is found in **the Nibbidā Sutta** (S 46.20), where the Buddha says, "Bhikshus, these seven awakening-factors, when developed and often cultivated, lead to utter revulsion, to dispassion, to ending, to peace [stilling], to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana." (S 46.20/5:82). Then the Sutta goes on to list the seven awakening factors.[61]

We even have a "lost" Buddha-word recorded in **the Netti-p,pkaraṇa,** where the Buddha admonishes the monk Rādha, thus:

> Rādha, look not longingly to past form, nor delight in future form; in the present form [in the form that now arises], practise the way to revulsion, fading away (of lust), ending (of suffering), giving up (of ignorance), and letting go (defilements)." (Untraced)[62]

The Netti reminds us, by invoking **the Yamak'ovāda Sutta** (S 22.85),[63] that although only form (*rūpa*) is mentioned here, the text implies all the other four aggregates (feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness) (Nett 173/30). The point is very clear: revulsion is intimately connected with the awakening to the true reality of the world.

5 *Nibbidā, saṁvega* and *pasāda*

If *nibbidā* refers to a negative side of spiritual realization, ***atammayatā*** (non-identification with things) reflects its positive aspect [2.3]. The difference between the two near-synonyms is a subtle one, and is really a matter of emphasis. While *nibbidā* emphasizes the seeing or *knowing* (*vindati*) of the negative aspects of reality, that makes us let go of that reality [2.1], *atammayatā* focusses on the *letting-go* with or non-identifying with such virtual realities so that we are truly liberated. Both concepts are founded on the notion of letting-go.

From dependent ending formula found in **the Upanisā Sutta** (S 12.23) [4.1], it is helpful to note that suffering and states of joy both arise *before nibbidā* (and *ayammayatā*). The realization that our suffering is not worth it, we turn to higher things, and in due course, through inner calm and clarity, realize a higher happiness and pleasure.

Matta,sukha,pariccagā	One should give up a lesser happiness	
passe ce vipulaṁ sukhaṁ	if one sees a greater happiness.	
caje mattā sukhaṁ dhīro	Let the wise let go of the lesser happiness,	
sampassaṁ vipulaṁ sukhaṁ	for the sake of a greater happiness.	(Dh 290)

That higher happiness and pleasure come from the taste of dhyana, or even from the zest or joyful energy that comes with the peace of mindfulness practice balanced with lovingkindness.[64]

As such, both *nibbidā* and *atammayatā* are supremely empowering spiritual forces within ourselves that arise from the knowledge and vision of true reality [2.3]. In the early stages of our mindfulness training, *we are empowered by joy*, or more specifically, a "bright joy" (***pasāda***),[65] which may arise through mere faith or through discriminating wisdom.[66] This profound joy may arise when we have a powerful religious experience, such as meeting a truly spiritual person, or in the presence of a very peaceful place, or a beautiful natural scenery, such as looking at a cloudless moonless clear starry sky.

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[61] For details, see **(Bojjhaṅga) Sīla S** (S 46.3) = SD 10.1.

[62] *Atīte Rādha, rūpe anapekkho hohi, anāgataṁ rūpaṁ mā abhinandi paccuppannassa rūpassa nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya cāgāya paṭinissaggāya paṭipajja.* (qu in Nett 173/30). The last 2 parenthetical amplifications are my own.

[63] S 22.85/3:113 = SD 26.14. More specifically, Nett says, "Because all the five aggregates in oneself have a single [common] characteristic in the sense of being the victim of a murderer." (id)

[64] On how not knowing such pleasures, leads us to cyclic pains, see SD 19.13(7.5).

[65] On the importance of joy in meditation, see "A pleasure thast is wholesome" = SD 10.10 Intro (3).

[66] See eg **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1) = SD 16.7.

Religious experience can also arise when we are faced with "life-and-death" situations or near-death experiences, such as those experiences recounted in the story of Siddhattha's four sights.[67] Such a religious experience profoundly jolts us, at least momentarily, into facing with true reality, so that we asks ourselves the fundamental questions of life: what is my real purpose in life, what is life about, what happens to me after death? And so on. Such thoughts are often powerful enough to move us to seek satisfying answers or at least to lead more selfless lives. This is what motivated Siddhattha to leave home and seek awakening. The religious experience is called ***saṁvega***.

There are texts that try to capture the feeling of samvega. **The Udaya Sutta** (S 7.12), for example, evokes the crushing humdrum of the repetitive cycle of life:

Again and again, they sow the seeds;	*Punappunaṁ c'eva vapanti bījaṁ*
Again and again, down comes the rain;[68]	*punappunaṁ vassati deva,rājā*
Again and again, the farmers plough the fields;	*punappunaṁ khettaṁ kasanti kassakā*
Again and again, the land yields grain;	*punappunaṁ aññam upeti raṭṭhaṁ*
Again and again, the beggars beg;	*punappunaṁ yācakā yācayanti*
Again and again, the master givers give;	*punappunaṁ dāna,patī dadanti*
Again and again, when the master givers' given,	*punappunaṁ dāna,patī daditvā*
Again and again, they find a place in heaven;	*punappunaṁ saggam upeti ṭhānaṁ*
Again and again, the milkers milk the cows;	*punappunaṁ khīranikā duhanti*
Again and again, the calf goes to its mother;	*punappunaṁ vaccho upeti mātaraṁ*
Again and again, one struggles and suffers;	*punappunaṁ kilamati phandati ca*
Again and again, the foolish finds the womb;	*punappunaṁ gabbham upeti mando*
Again and again, he is born and he dies;	*punappunaṁ jāyati miyyati ca*
Again and again, they take him to the cemetery.	*punappunaṁ sīvathikaṁ haranti*
But when one has found the path to no more rebirth,	*maggañ ca laddhā apunabbhavāya*
One great in wisdom, is not born again and again!	*na punappunaṁ jāyati bhūri,pañño ti*

(S 7.12/1:173 f) = SD 16.13

The Dhammapada preserves a verse that hints at samvega, especially in its first line:

Jigacchā paramā rogā	Hunger is the greatest of diseases;	
saṅkhārā paramā dukhā	conditioned states are the greatest ill:	
etam ñātvā yathā,bhūtaṁ	having known this as true reality,	
nibbānaṁ paramaṁ sukhaṁ	nirvana is the highest happiness.	(Dh 203)

We go through the daily rituals of eating so often that we rarely notice or care about how it affects our bodies, that too little or too much of it can cause ill-health, disease, even death. We almost never question why we should ever eat or to eat so often. The urge to preserve life keeps us in the rut of eating: even in the midst of a great battle or a busy business life or even when doing nothing, we have to take time off to eat. We may see repetitive need for food as a problem, until when we find that certain food do not satisfy us, or at certain times we simply cannot eat even when we need to. A medieval Jewish sage was moved to say, "I am fed up with being hungry again and again, and I hunger after final satiety."[69] **Nyanaponika,** in his booklet on "The Four Nutriments of Life," reflects:

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[67] See **Deva,dūta S** (M 130) = SD 2.23 Intro (2).

[68] *Puna-p,punaṁ vassati deva,rājā,* lit "again and again the rain-gods rains down."

[69] Abraham ben Chisdai, in *Ben-hamelekh we-hanasir* (*The Prince and the Ascetic*). This is an old Hebrew version of the "Barlaam and Joasaph" story which unwittingly carried the main features of the Buddha's life story through a major part of the medieval world. The Hebrew version has several distinct traces not only of the Buddha's life story, but also of Buddhist ideas, like the one quoted above. Only a comparison of the numerous versions of the "Barlaam and Joasaph" story could decide on whether these ideas were part of the tradition and common to other versions, or whether they originated in the Hebrew author's mind. This is from Nyanaponika 1981.

This is the suffering inherent in the very function of eating, though mostly hidden by the habituation to this most elementary feature of routine life. The concrete suffering and pain involved in the search for food and its acquisition, is obvious enough to all and this misery was, is and will be life's constant companion. There is the mute suffering in the animal world where "devouring each other is the law" (and man joining in it by even rearing animals for food); we also know of primitive man's fight for pasture land (basically the same as modern man's wars for "world markets"); we also know of the pangs of hunger among the poor, and of starving children the world over. And though the resources for feeding humanity have grown considerably in our days, man still has not controlled famine, even where it would be in his power to do so; and all progress in the field of food-production threatens to be dwarfed by the rapid growth of world population. This problem looms large on the horizon of present-day humanity and may well become desperate if the disparity between available food and increasing population reaches a critical point. Should that critical point be reached, we do not know what dire consequences may follow from that situation, unless a united mankind can solve the problem by concerted action and peaceful means. Hence, also for mankind's future, what the Dhamma teachers of old said remains true: that the search for food (*āhāra,pariyeṭṭhi*) is an ever-present source of suffering (*vattamāna dukkha*) and as such it can stir man's sense of urgency (*saṁvega*) when he considers, in the light of "nutriment," man's own nature, his incessant needs and his situation in the world. (1981: 3)[70]

6 The pervasiveness of *nibbidā*

6.1 ALLUSIONS TO *NIBBIDĀ*. Practising Buddhist, especially the forest monks, generally agree that *nibbidā* refers to a very powerful spiritual experience. There are several points in the suttas which suggest that the meaning of *nibbidā* is something quite strong. Here are some examples:

(1) The Vitakka,saṇṭhāna Sutta (M 20) gives five methods on stilling the unquiet mind during meditation,[71] the fourth of which is relevant here, that is, one which might be called "aversion therapy," thus:

If, bhikshus, while the monk is paying attention to a different meditation sign, and there still arises in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate or delusion, then he should examine the dangers (*ādīnava*) of those thoughts, thus: "These thoughts are unwholesome, they are blameworthy, they bring suffering."[72]

Then the evil unwholesome thoughts are eliminated and disappear. By their elimination, the mind thus stands firm internally, settles down, becomes unified and concentrated.

SIMILE: THE WELL-DRESSED. Bhikshus, just as a man or a woman, young ,well-dressed and fond of ornaments, would feel pained, ashamed, disgusted[73] by a carcass of a snake, a dog, or a human hung around his or her neck, even so should the monk get rid of the evil unwholesome thoughts by examining the dangers of those thoughts, thus: "These thoughts are unwholesome, they are blameworthy, they bring suffering."

Then the evil unwholesome thoughts are eliminated and disappear. By their elimination, the mind thus stands firm internally, settles down, becomes unified and concentrated.

(M 20.4/1:119 f) = SD 1.6

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[70] On ***saṁvega***, further see SD 9(7f); on ***pasāda,*** see further SD 9(7h).

[71] Briefly, the 5 methods are: (1) attending to a different meditation object; (2) examining the dangers of the unwholesome thought; (3) simply disregarding the negative thought; (4) analysing the thought; and (5) sheer determination. See SD 1.6.

[72] This method was used by the Bodhisattva as recorded in **Dvedhā,vitakka S** (M 19.3-5). Reflecting on the unworthiness of the evil thoughts arouses a sense of shame (*hiri*); reflecting on their dangerous consequences arouses the fear of evil karma (*ottappa*) (A 1:51; It 36).

[73] *Aṭṭiyāti harāyati jigucchati* (2.2).

As we have earlier noted [3.6], this passage gives a clear hint that ***aṭṭiyāti*** refers to a practitioner's response to the unwholesomeness of a thought, ***harāyati*** to its blameworthiness, and ***jigucchati*** to its resulting in suffering. Although there is no mention of *nibbidā* here, it is clearly implied.

(2) The Putta,maṁsa Sutta (S 12.63). Another simile for how we would experience *nibbidā* is when we understand the nature of sense-contact "as it really is" (*yathā,bhūtaṃ*), as "food" for consciousness, is in the Putta,maṁsa Sutta, where sense-contacts (*phassa*) are said to be like a flayed cow painfully stung by bugs and insects no matter where is stands.[74] Although the Sutta does not mention *nibbidā,* it is describing such an experience.

(3) The (Satta) Saññā Sutta (A 7.46) describes seven perceptions as mindfulness practices that can lead us to "the deathless" (nirvana). The first of these seven perceptions is that of foulness (*asubha,-saññā*),[75] regarding which the Buddha declares:

> Bhikshus, when a monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of foulness, his mind shrinks away from sexual intercourse, turns away from it, rolls back from it.[76] He is not drawn to it. Either *equanimity* or *loathsomeness* is established in him.[77]
>
> (A 7.46.4a/4:46 f) = SD 15.4

The practice of the perception of foulness establishes our minds in equanimity (*upekkhā*) or loathsomeness (*pāṭikkūlyatā*). This latter term is a synonym for *nibbiddā.*

(4) The Vuṭṭha Sutta (A 9.11) is interesting in that Sāriputta, in nine verses, describes his practice of body-based mindfulness, tempered with lovingkindness. In his last two verses, he says:

> …bhante, just as woman or a man, young, youthful, well-dressed and fond of ornaments, would feel pained, ashamed, disgusted[78] by a carcass of a snake, a dog, or a human hung around his or her neck, even so, bhante, I feel pained, ashamed, disgusted at this foul body of mine.
>
> …bhante, just as a man were to carry around fat [oil] in a bowl, full of holes and cracks, oozing and dripping, even so, bhante, do I carry around this body, full of holes and cracks, oozing and dripping. (A 9.11.8-9/4:377 f) = SD 34.15

In the first four verses, Sāriputta declares that, just as whatever dirt or impurity that are thrown into any of the four physical elements, they are *not* pained, ashamed, or disgusted, so too, practising the element-like meditations, he has immeasurable lovingkindness towards all. And in the last two verses, shown above, he reflects on the nature of his own physical body, implying that he has not craving either. Although there is no mention of *nibbidā* here, it is again clearly implied in these two verses.

(6) **Tālapuṭa Thera,gāthā** (Tha 1091-1145). The main theme running through the verses of the elder **Tālapuṭa,** although unstated, is *nibbidā.* Take for example these two verses:

> **1093** Seeing by insight that this body is impermanent,
> A nest of destruction and disease, assailed by decay and death—

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[74] S 12.63/2:99 = SD 29.9.

[75] *Asubha,saññā,* in the Suttas, refers to the 31 (or 32) parts of the body, ie *asubha,saññā* (perception of foulness): see **Giri-m-ānanda S** (A 10.60.6/5:109) = SD 19.16. On details of practice, see **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22.5/2:293 = M 10.10) = SD 13.2-3; **Kāya,gatā,sati S** (M 119.7/3:90) = SD 12.21 Intro (5). See also **Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.29/5:277 f), on the analysis of will or desire (*chanda*).

[76] This is the *result* of the perception of foulness; for the actual practice, see eg **Giri-m-ānanda S** (A 10.60.6/-5:109) = SD 15.15.

[77] *Asubha,saññā,paricitena bhikkhave bhikkhuno cetasā bahulaṁ viharato methuna,dhamma,samāpattiyā cittaṁ paṭilīyati paṭikuṭati paṭivattati na sampasārīyati, upekhā vā pāṭikkūlyatā vā saṇṭhāti.* Here "loathsomeness" (*pāṭikkūlyatā*) refers to a feeling close to or leading to "revulsion" (*nibbidā*), in terms of specific objects, such food. The pervading mood here is not a negative one, but a careful mind in the sense of a burnt child dreading the fire, or being once bitten twice shy. The stress on celibacy here suggests that the goal is arhathood. For an alternative, albeit lower goal, one should at least work towards stream-winning: see **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225) = SD 16.7.

[78] *Aṭṭiyāti harāyati jigucchati*: see **Nibbidā** = SD 20.1(2.2).

When shall I dwell alone in the woods, free of fear?
When indeed will it be?

1094 Having seized the sharp sword of wisdom made,
Having cut the creeper of craving, creeping everywhere,
Breeder of fear, bringer of pain—
When indeed will it be? (Tha 1093-1095) = SD 20.9

These two verses reflect Tālapūta's mind before he goes into retreat, yearning for the freedom from suffering. Having seen with insight the true nature of reality, he does not want to have anything more to do with the world: he is disgusted with it, filled with revulsion towards suffering. The sense of *nibbidā* pervades these verses.

The experience of *nibbidā* arises from seeing the true nature of reality. **The Cetanā Akaraṇīyā Sutta** (A 10.2) show how a practitioner,

beginning with moral virtue (*sīla*),
would naturally experience non-remorse (*avippaṭisāra*) (freedom from sense of guilt),
which leads to joy (*pamudita*),
which leads to zest (*pīti*),
which leads to a tranquil body (*passadha,kāya*),
which brings happiness (*sukha*),
which conduces to mental concentration (*samādhi*),
which allows us to see true reality (*yathām,bhūta*),
which leads to revulsion (*nibbidā*), and
which results in the knowledge and vision of liberation (*vimutti,ñāṇa,dassana*).
(A 10.2/5:2-4) = SD 41.6

In short, a morally virtuous person, through his calm, clear and joyful mind, will attain such mental focus that his vision of true reality will naturally cause revulsion for worldliness to arise, so that he gains spiritual liberation.

6.2 CONTEMPORARY REMARKS ON *NIBBIDĀ*. Commenting on such passages as these, **Bhikkhu Santi**[79] notes:

> Although I don't think any of these passages, and there are more, actually use the word *nibbidā* they obviously refer to a very powerful experience of disgust, revulsion, even aversion, so I think even "disenchantment" is too soft here.
>
> Etymologically I think "aversion" is quite good, since it literally means "turning away," although "turning inwards" would be more accurate, and in the experience in some ways the negative side of "aversion, disgust or revulsion" is present, but it's also usually associated with some kind of *pīti,sukha* (joy and bliss), usually down-flowing *pīti,* and the results of course are not negative. However, I also wouldn't use "aversion" in a translation because of the way it is likely to be misunderstood, but I might use it when explaining it in more detail.
>
> (Santi, in email, Pali Yahoo Groups, 14 Jan 2006)

Santi goes on to give a very sobering observation and reminder:

> …I think we have to be very careful of assuming as mostly scholars and relatively inexperienced meditators, and of course I'm including myself, that the "soft" or mild way in which we've experienced *nibbidā* is all there is to it. Again, I've heard from some of the great meditation masters in Thailand that they experienced what you might call *nibbidā* extremely strongly. I

[79] Ie **Bhikkhu Santi** of the Santi Forest Monastery, 6 Coalmines Road (PO Box 132), Bundanoon, NSW 2578, Australia. Abbot: Bhante Sujata. Tel: [66] 02 4883 6331.

> remember Luangphor Liem[80] gave the simile of when someone goes fishing for eels, and they reach down into their net to pull out an eel, and as they pull it out they realise that they have got hold of a very poisonous snake, and without hesitation or any regret they throw it away as far as they can. He says that's what it's like when you see the true nature of all kinds of existence.
>
> (Santi, in email, Pali Yahoo Groups, 14 Jan 2006)

Luangphor Liem alludes to Buddhaghosa's parable of the fisher and the watersnake in **the Visuddhi,-magga**, given here in full:

> A man thinking of catching fish, it is said, took a fishing-net and cast it into the water. He put his hand into the mouth of the net under the water and seized a snake by the neck. He was glad, thinking, "I have caught a fish!" Thinking he had caught a big fish, he lifted it up to look at it. Seeing it has three marks, he recognized it to be a snake, and was terrified. He saw the danger, felt revulsion for what he had seized, and wished to be free from it. Seeking a way to free himself, he uncoiled it from his arm, starting from its tail. Then, raising his arm above his head, he swung it around a couple of times to weaken it. Then, he flung it away, crying, "Away with you, foul snake!" and quickly scrambled up to dry land. He stood looking back the way he had come, thinking, "Indeed, I've been freed from the jaws of a huge snake!" (Vism 21.49/652)

To convey the twin notions of *nibbidā* being a state of wisdom-produced revulsion and yet not a hate-rooted affection, **Dhammanando** (of the forest tradition)[81] proposes that there is no better word than "**displacency**." Unfortunately, by the 19th century, he notes, the meaning of this word had changed to "incivility," and in the present degenerate age it has become entirely obsolete.[82] Still, it might be worth reviving. Another possibility, he proposes, is "**disrelish,**" which has an advantage over displacency, in that it can also be used as a verb (unlike "displacency," which has no verb form for translating *nibbindati*).

The point is that even the best definition or term cannot give the taste of awakening to the unawakened. It is difficult to properly put into words what can only be directly experienced. *Nibbidā,* as a term, serves as a sort of peep-hole for the curious or opinionated worldling: we may be able to peep through the hole, but what we make of what we see depends on our ability to see beyond the eye. Nirvana is not a word: it is a personal experience.

— — —

[80] Luangphor Liem Ṭhitadhammo (1941-) is the current abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat, succeeding Ajahn Chah. This is where contemporary Western forest monks such as Ajahns Sumedho and Brahmavamso were trained.

[81] Email dated 13 Jan 2006.

[82] For a delightful 18th century example, see the opening paragraph of part II of Sir Thomas Browne's "Christian Morals": http://penelope.uchicago.edu/cmorals/cmorals2.html.

Appendix: Suttas with *nibbidā* passages

Listed here are suttas, like **the Alaggadûpama Sutta** (M 22) [1], almost all of which apply the three characteristics to the teachings mentioned here leading up to this stock passage on *nibbidā:*

> Seeing thus, bhikshus, an instructed noble disciple becomes revulsed at form, revulsed at feeling, revulsed at perception, revulsed at formations, revulsed at consciousness.
>
> Being revulsed, lust fades away. Through the fading away of lust [that is, dispassion], (the mind) is liberated. When it is liberated, there comes the knowledge: "It is liberated."
>
> He knows: "Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what had to be done, there is no more of this state of being."

Dīgha,nakha Sutta	(M 74.10/1:500)	The 3 kinds of feelings
Alaggadûpama Sutta	(M 22.26-29/1:138 f)	The 5 aggregates
Cūḷa Rāhulovāda Sutta	(M 147.9/3:279 f)	The 5 aggregates
Cha,chakka Sutta	(M 148.40/3:286 f)	Revulsion towards the 6 senses
Assutavā Sutta 1	(S 12.61/2:95)	Revulsion towards body and mind; dependent arising
Assutavā Sutta 2	(S 12.62/2:98)	Revulsion towards body and mind; dependent arising
Susima Sutta	(S 12.70/2:125)	The 5 aggregates
Cakkhu Sutta	(S 18.1/2:245)	The impermanence of the 6 senses
Khandha Sutta	(S 18.10/2:249)	The impermanence of the 5 aggregates
Cakkhu Sutta	(S 18.11/2:250)	The 6 internal senses & 6 external objects
Anicca Sutta	(S 22.12/3:21)	The impermanence of the 5 aggregates
Anatta Sutta	(S 22.14/3:28)	The 5 aggregates are not self
Soṇa Sutta	(S 22.49/3:50)	The 5 aggregates
Anatta,lakkhaṇa Suta	(S 22.59/3:68)	The 5 aggregates
Āditta Sutta	(S 22.61/3:71)	The 5 aggregates are on fire
Arahanta Sutta 1	(S 22.76/3:83)	The 5 aggregates
Arahanta Sutta 2	(S 22.77/3:84)	The 5 aggregates
Khajjanīya Sutta	(S 22.79/3:90)	The 5 aggregates
Pheṇa,piṇḍûpama Sutta	(S 22.95/3:142)	The 5 aggregates
Kukkuḷa Sutta	(S 22.136/3:177)	The 5 aggregates are "blazing" (*kukkuḷa*)
Māra Sutta	(S 23.11/3:195)	The 5 aggregates are "death" (Māra)
Adukkhamadukkhī S	(S 24.96/3:224)	The 5 aggregates
Ajjhattânicca Sutta	(S 4:2/35.1)	The 6 internal senses
Bāhirânicca Sutta	(S 35.4/4:3)	The 6 external senses
Āditta Sutta	(S 35.28/4:20)	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings are "burning"
Addha,bhūta Sutta	(S 35.29/4:21)	The 6 senses are "oppressive"
Samugghāta Sappāya S	(S 35.32/4:26)	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings: conceivings
Anicca Sutta	(S 35.43/4:28)	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings are impermanent
Upassaṭṭha Sutta	(S 35.44/4:29)	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings are "afflicted"
Sabb'upādāna Pariyādāna Sutta 1	(S 35.61/4:33)	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings
Sabb'upādāna Pariyādāna Sutta 2	(S 35.62/4:35)	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings
Cha,phass'āyatana Sutta 3	(S 35.73/4:45)	The 18 senses (organs, objects, and contacts)
Gilāna Sutta 1	(S 35.74/4:47)	The 18 senses (organs, objects, and contacts)
Saṅkhitta Dhamma Sutta	(S 35.86/4:54)	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings
Bāhiya Sutta	(S 35.89/4:64)	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings
Upādāya Sutta	(S 35.105/4:86)	The 6 senses
Seyyo'ham-asmi Sutta	(S 35.108/4:88)	The 6 senses
Rāhulovāda Sutta	(S 35.121/4:106)	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings
Ajjhattânicca Sutta	(S 35.140/4:129)	The 6 senses are impermanent
Ajjhatta,dukkha Sutta	(S 35.141/4:130)	The 6 senses are suffering
Ajjhattânatta,hetu Sutta	(S 35.142/4:132)	The 6 senses are not self
Bahirânicca Sutta	(S 35.143/4:129)	The 6 sense-objects are impermanent
Bahira,dukkha Sutta	(S 35.144/4:130)	The 6 sense-objects are suffering

Bahirânatta,hetu Sutta	(S 35.145/4:132)	The 6 sense-objects are not self
Nibbāna Sappāya Sutta	(S 4:136/4:135 f)	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings
Ajjhattâtītânicca Sutta	(S 35.186/4:151)	The past 6 senses are impermanent
Ajjhattânāgatânicca Sutta	(S 35.187/4:151)	The future 6 senses are impermanent
Ajjhatta,paccuppannânicca Sutta	(S 35.188/4:151)	The present 6 senses are impermanent
Ajjhattâtīta,dukkha Sutta	(S 35.189/4:152)	The past 6 senses are suffering
Ajjhattânāgata,dukkha Sutta	(S 35.190/4:152)	The future 6 senses are suffering
Ajjhatta,paccuppanna,dukkha Sutta	(S 35.191/4:152)	The present 6 senses are suffering
Ajjhattâtītânatta Sutta	(S 35.192/4:152)	The past 6 senses are not self
Ajjhattânāgatânatta Sutta	(S 35.193/4:152)	The future 6 senses are not self
Ajjhatta,paccuppannânatta Sutta	(S 35.194/4:152)	The present 6 senses are not self
Bahirâtītânicca Sutta	(S 35.195/4:152)	The past 6 sense-objects are impermanent
Bahirânāgatânicca Sutta	(S 35.196/4:152)	The future 6 sense-objects are impermanent
Bahira,paccuppannânicca Sutta	(S 35.197/4:152)	The present 6 sense-objects are impermanent
Bahirâtīta,dukkha Sutta	(S 35.198/4:152)	The past 6 sense-objects are suffering
Bahirânāgata,dukkha Sutta	(S 35.199/4:152)	The future 6 sense-objects are suffering
Bahira,paccuppanna,dukkha Sutta	(S 35.200/4:152)	The present 6 sense-objects are suffering
Bahirâtītânatta Sutta	(S 35.201/4:152)	The past 6 sense-objects are not self
Bahirânāgatânatta Sutta	(S 35.202/4:152)	The future 6 sense-objects are not self
Bahira,paccuppannânatta Sutta	(S 35.203/4:152)	The present 6 sense-objects are not self
Yad-ânicca Ajjhattâtīta Sutta	(S 35.204/4:153)	That which is impermanent are the past 6 senses
Yad-ânicca Ajjhattânāgata Sutta	(S 35.205/4:153)	That which is impermanent are the future 6 senses
Yad-ânicca Ajjhatta,paccuppanna S	(S 35.206/4:153)	That which is impermanent are the present 6 senses
Yan,dukkha Ajjhattâtīta Sutta	(S 35.207/4:154)	That which is suffering are the past 6 senses
Yan,dukkha Ajjhattânāgata Sutta	(S 35.208/4:154)	That which is suffering are the future 6 senses
Yan,dukkha Ajjhatta,paccuppanna S	(S 35.209/4:154)	That which is suffering are the present 6 senses
Yad-anatta Ajjhattâtīt Sutta	(S 35.210/4:154)	That which is not self are the past 6 senses
Yad-anatta Ajjhattânāgata Sutta	(S 35.211/4:154)	That which is not self are the future 6 senses
Yad-anatta Ajjhatta,paccuppanna S	(S 35.212/4:154)	That which is not self are the present 6 senses
Yad-ânicca Bahirâtīta Sutta	(S 35.213/4:154)	That which is impermanent are the past 6 sense-
organsYad-ânicca Bahirânāgata Sutta	(S 35.214/4:154)	That which is impermanent are the future 6 sense-organs
Yad-ânicca Bahira,paccuppanna S	(S 35.215/4:154)	That which is impermanent are the present 6 sense-organs
Yan,dukkha Bahirâtīta Sutta	(S 35.216/4:155)	That which is suffering are the past 6 sense-organs
Yan,dukkha Bahirânāgata Sutta	(S 35.217/4:155)	That which is suffering are the future 6 sense-organs
Yan,dukkha Bahira,paccuppanna S	(S 35.218/4:155)	That which is suffering are the present 6 sense-organs
Yad-anatta Bahirâtīta Sutta	(S 35.219/4:155)	That which is not self are the past 6 sense-organs
Yad-anatta Bahirânāgata Sutta	(S 35.220/4:155)	That which is not self are the future 6 sense-organs
Yad-anatta Bahira,paccuppanna S	(S 35.221/4:155)	That which is not self are the future 6 sense-organs
Āyatana Ajjhattânicca Sutta	(S 35.222/4:155)	The 6 senses are impermanent
Āyatana Ajjhatta,dukkha Sutta	(S 35.223/4:155)	The 6 senses are suffering
Āyatana Ajjhattânatta Sutta	(S 35.224/4:156)	The 6 senses are not self
Āyatana Bahirânicca Sutta	(S 35.225/4:156)	The 6 sense-objects are impermanent
Āyatana Bahira,dukkha Sutta	(S 35.226/4:156)	The 6 sense-objects are suffering
Āyatana Bahirânatta Sutta	(S 35.227/4:156)	The 6 sense-objects are not self
Āditta,pariyāya Sutta	(S 35.235/4:171)	The 18 senses, contacts & feelings
Anurādha Sutta	(S 44.2/4:383)	The 5 aggregates.[83]

[83] PTS ed says this is identical to S 22.86/3:116-119 (without *nibbidā* passage); but CSCD:Be has the *nibiddā* passage here.

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