

Anguttara Nikāya

The Numerical Discourses

Navakanipāta
(Book of the Nines)

AN 9.34

Nibbānasukha Sutta
“The Bliss that is Nibbāna”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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This is what I personally heard.

Once, the Venerable Sāriputta was staying at the Squirrels’ Sanctuary, in the Bamboo Park within the Kingdom of Rājagaha.

There, the Venerable Sāriputta, while being among his fellow Bhikkhus, declared:

“Friends, this Nibbāna is bliss! This Nibbāna indeed is bliss!”

And just at that moment, on hearing this, the Venerable Udāyi turned to the Venerable Sāriputta and retorted:

“But Friend, where is the bliss, when there is nothing to be felt?”

And the Venerable Sāriputta quickly replied:

“That’s exactly it, friend! The very fact that there is nothing to be felt!

And he continued by instructing the Bhikkhus:

“Friends, there are these five strands of sensual stimulation. What five?

“Pleasant forms picked up by the eyes that are enjoyable and lovely, driving one to want to look at again, and for longer, provoking passions to arise and agitate the heart.

“Pleasant audible sounds picked up by the ears, that are enjoyable and lovely, driving one to want to listen to again, and for longer, provoking passions to arise and agitate the heart.

“Pleasant odors picked up by the nose, that are enjoyable and lovely, driving one to want to smell again, and for longer, provoking passions to arise and agitate the heart.

“Pleasant flavors picked up by the tongue, that are enjoyable and lovely, driving one to want to taste again, and for longer, provoking passions to arise and agitate the heart.

“Pleasant touches picked up by the body, that are enjoyable and lovely, driving one to want to touch again, and for longer, provoking passions to arise and agitate the heart.

“These, friends, are the five strands of sensual stimulation. Now, whatever happiness or pleasure that arises while being conditioned and caused by these five strands of sensual pleasure, is called ‘sensual pleasure.’

1. “But, friends, when the Bhikkhu, by secluding his mind and thus no longer running after things having to do with sensuality, pulls his attention inwards and becomes quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome and bad merit-making states, he enters upon and remains in the first *jhāna*, which is accompanied by thinking and pondering, while experiencing a strong flood of spiritual joy and ecstasy, all resulting from such seclusion.

“Now, while the Bhikkhu is in that *jhāna*, if by any chance perceptions or memories pertaining to sensual pleasures creep in, trying to shake his attention, he immediately experiences them as upsetting to his practice, seeing those sense pleasures as no more than a cruel harassment.

“After all, friends, for anyone experiencing happiness or pleasure, when its opposite or pain arises, that itself becomes upsetting, a harassing and cruel oppression, which one has to then endure.

“It is for this reason, friends, that The Blessed One has declared, how all oppressions that come to harass one are themselves none other than suffering.

“So, looking at it this way, it should be known and realized that Nibbāna is bliss!

2. “Again, friends, when the Bhikkhu, by stilling his thinking process and without fighting with himself, turns his attention away from his thoughts by not engaging with them any further, he comes to experience the disappearance of both thinking and pondering. In this way, he enters upon and remains in the second *jhāna*, which continues to be accompanied by a strong flood of spiritual joy and ecstasy, that are now the result of his growing and stable collectedness of heart, his *samādhi*.

“And while the Bhikkhu is in that *jhāna*, if by any chance perceptions or thoughts pertaining to memories creep in, trying to shake his attention, he immediately experiences them as upsetting to his practice, seeing those thoughts and memories as no more than a cruel harassment.

“After all, friends, for anyone experiencing happiness or pleasure, when its opposite or pain arises, that itself becomes upsetting, a harassing and cruel oppression, that one has to then endure.

“It is for this reason, friends, that The Blessed One has declared, how all oppressions that come to harass one are themselves none other than suffering.

“So, looking at it this way too, it should be known and realized that Nibbāna is bliss!

3. “Again, friends, when the Bhikkhu goes deeper in his meditation and without holding on to anything, including the experience of spiritual joy, he witnesses it to begin to vanish and cease. Thus, he abides in a state of equanimity, while being mindful and fully aware, still feeling a subtle ecstasy throughout, as he enters upon and abides in the third *jhāna*, for which reason the Noble Ones declare:

‘It is such a one indeed who is serenely mindful; abiding in happiness; with an ever-present sense of equanimity.’

“Now, while the Bhikkhu is in that *jhāna*, if by any chance perceptions or thoughts pertaining to joy creep in, trying to shake his attention, he immediately experiences them as upsetting to his practice, seeing those thoughts or perceptions about joy as no more than a cruel harassment.

“After all, friends, for anyone experiencing happiness or pleasure, when its opposite or pain arises, that itself becomes upsetting, a harassing and cruel oppression that one has to then endure.

“It is for this reason, friends, that The Blessed One has declared, how all oppressions that come to harass one are in themselves none other than suffering.

“So, looking at it this way too, it should be known and realized that Nibbāna is bliss!

4. “Again, friends, when the Bhikkhu gives up both pleasure and pain, and having already gone beyond joy and anguish, he remains in the continuous state of purifying mindfulness with an ever-present sense of equanimity, as he enters upon and abides in the fourth *jhāna*, while experiencing neither pleasure nor pain, having now gone beyond both.

“Now, while the Bhikkhu is in that *jhāna*, if by any chance perceptions or thoughts pertaining to pleasure creep in, trying to shake his attention, he immediately experiences them as upsetting to his practice, seeing those thoughts about pleasure as no more than a cruel harassment.

“After all, friends, for anyone experiencing happiness or pleasure, when its opposite or pain arises, that itself becomes upsetting, a harassing and cruel oppression, that one has to then endure.

“It is for this reason, friends, that The Blessed One has declared, how all oppressions that come to harass one are in themselves, none other than suffering.

“So, looking at it this way too, it should be known and realized that Nibbāna is bliss!

5. “Again, friends, by having completely transcended and gone beyond the confines of the physical world and of tangibility, along with the disappearance of perceptions dealing with

sensory reflexive contact, and by no longer paying any attention to the multiplicity of unending perceptions, and instead, remaining fully aware of how ‘space is infinitely boundless,’ the Bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the dimension of ‘Boundless Infinity of Space.’

“Now, while the Bhikkhu is in that dimension, if by any chance perceptions or thoughts pertaining to forms creep in, trying to shake his attention, he immediately experiences them as upsetting to his practice, seeing those thoughts about forms as no more than a cruel harassment.

“After all, friends, for anyone experiencing happiness or pleasure, when its opposite or pain arises, that itself becomes upsetting, a harassing and cruel oppression, that one has to then endure.

“It is for this reason, friends, that The Blessed One has declared, how all oppressions that come to harass one are in themselves none other than suffering.

“So, looking at it this way too, it should be known and realized that Nibbāna is bliss!

6. “Again, friends, having completely transcended and gone beyond the perception of space being infinitely boundless, and by experiencing and being fully aware of how ‘consciousness is boundlessly infinite,’ the Bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the dimension of ‘boundless infinity of Consciousness.’

“Now, while the Bhikkhu is in that dimension, if by any chance perceptions or thoughts pertaining to space being infinitely boundless creep in, trying to shake his attention, he immediately experiences them as upsetting to his practice, seeing those thoughts about space being infinitely boundless as no more than a cruel harassment.

“After all, friends, for anyone experiencing happiness or pleasure, when its opposite or pain arises, that itself becomes upsetting, a harassing and cruel oppression, that one has to then endure.

“It is for this reason, friends, that The Blessed One has declared, how all oppressions that come to harass one are in themselves none other than suffering.

“So, looking at it this way too, it should be known and realized that Nibbāna is bliss!

7. “Again, friends, having completely transcended and gone beyond the perception of consciousness being infinitely boundless, and by experiencing and being fully aware of how ‘there is only nothingness,’ the Bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the dimension of ‘nothingness.’

“Now, while the Bhikkhu is in that dimension, if by any chance perceptions or thoughts pertaining to consciousness being infinitely boundless creep in, trying to shake his attention, he immediately experiences them as upsetting to his practice, seeing those thoughts about consciousness being infinitely boundless as no more than a cruel harassment.

“After all, friends, for anyone experiencing happiness or pleasure, when its opposite or pain arises, that itself becomes upsetting, a harassing and cruel oppression, that one has to then endure.

“It is for this reason, friends, that The Blessed One has declared, how all oppressions that come to harass one are in themselves none other than suffering.

“So, looking at it this way too, it should be known and realized that Nibbāna is bliss!

8. “Again, friends, by having completely transcended and gone beyond the perception of nothingness, the Bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the dimension of ‘neither perception nor non-perception.’

“Now, while the Bhikkhu is in that dimension, if by any chance perceptions or thoughts pertaining to the ‘dimension of nothingness’ creep in, trying to shake his attention, he immediately experiences them as upsetting to his practice, seeing those thoughts about nothingness as no more than a cruel harassment.

“After all, friends, for anyone experiencing happiness or pleasure, when its opposite or pain arises, that itself becomes upsetting, a harassing and cruel oppression that one has to then endure.

“It is for this reason, friends, that The Blessed One has declared, how all oppressions that come to harass one are in themselves none other than suffering.

“So, looking at it this way too, it should be known and realized that Nibbāna is bliss!

9. “Again, friends, by having completely transcended and gone beyond the state of neither perception nor non-perception, the Bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the ‘cessation of perceptions and feelings.’ Thus, by having directly seen with wisdom, his heart’s contaminants (*āsavas*) all come apart and are fully destroyed.

“So, looking at it this way too, it should be known and realized that Nibbāna is bliss!”

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