

# Dhammapada 90: The Arahant

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 19:46

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*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhodassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhodassa Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sambodasa.*

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

I'm looking at the *Dhammapada* number 90, and it's about what makes an *arahat*. It gives us some indication, shall we say. So I shall do the little chanting:

*Gatadino visokasa vimuttasa hi sabbadhi sabbaganthehi mutvasa parila na vijjati*

The translation from Gil Fronsdal is: "For someone at the journey's end, freed of sorrow, liberated in all ways, released from all bonds, no fever exists." And Thanissaro says: "In one who has gone the full distance, is free from sorrow, fully released in all respects, has abandoned all the bonds, no fever is found."

We'll go into exactly what all that means, but let's look at the little story which sometimes throws light. On one occasion, Devadatta tried to kill the Buddha by pushing a big rock on him from Vulture's Peak. The rock struck a ledge on the side of the mountain and a splinter struck the big toe of the Buddha. He was taken to the mangrove grove monastery of Jivaka. There, Jivaka, the renowned physician, attended to him and applied some medicine on the toe and bandaged it. Jivaka then left to see another patient in town but promised to return and remove the bandage in the evening.

When Jivaka tried to return, the city gates were already closed and he could not attend to the Buddha. He was very upset because if the bandage was not removed in time, the whole body would be affected and the Buddha would be very ill. The Buddha knew that Jivaka would not be able to attend him, so he asked Venerable Ananda to remove the bandage and found the wound was healed.

Jivaka came to the monastery early next morning to inquire whether he had felt great pain and distress the previous night. The Buddha replied, "Jivaka, ever since I attained enlightenment, I had the ability to stop pain and distress at any time whenever I needed to do so." Then the Buddha explained the nature of the mind of the enlightened one, and that's what this verse is.

It's interesting that he says pain doesn't feel pain, or he can stop the feeling of pain. I had a student who got kidney stones, and they're said to be extremely painful. He was in A&E and he decided to sit in meditation and the pain disappeared. When the nurse came to take him to the doctor, it reappeared again. So there's something about where your attention is, but I also think that the body does have an ability to

anaesthetise itself. I believe I'm right in saying that in war, if you're shot or if you have a serious injury, you don't actually feel it - you feel it afterwards.

But the Buddha says he has the power to stop that anyway. And distress, of course, would be a mental state. He would be free of that anyway. On that point, of course, there is the *arahat* who is suffering severely, very painful feelings from an illness. He's quite old and he goes to the Buddha and tells him, "I'm going to take the knife" - which was a way of saying he's going to commit suicide. And the Buddha simply said, "Well, do as you think is fit." And he did. He committed suicide, took his own life. So that's something to ponder about.

If we look at some of the words here, the *gata dino* - *gata* just means having done the path. So it is a fairly straightforward translation. *Visokasa* means without sorrow. This *soka* actually seemingly comes from the Vedic *shoka*, which actually means the flame of a fire, but then later had the sense of burning grief. So very strong words here.

Then he's free from these bonds, which we'll come to in a minute - they're a special classification. And the word used for the ending of sorrow is *parilaho* - free from fever. It's a very strong word, free from fever. It would seem to me that we're talking about fairly extreme emotional states here, but really somebody who's fully liberated wouldn't feel any negative feelings.

That doesn't mean to say that sorrow would not be felt. Sorrow is that heart connection with the suffering of somebody else, so I can't imagine that disappearing. But the big thing is, of course, that the *arahat* is liberated from these *gantha*. A *gantha* is a knot or a bond. The full word is *kaya gantha*. *Kaya* means body, and it refers both to the physical and the mental body. So it's basically saying those things that keep you tied to this form of becoming, this form of existence.

The four ties - you won't be surprised by them, I don't think - are covetousness (*abhija*), ill will (*vipada*), an attachment to rules and rituals, and dogmatic fanaticism. If we look at these, you'll see that they are all these lists of what is unwholesome in us - like the five hindrances, the ten fetters - they're always rooted in the three unwholesome roots, which is acquisitiveness, aversion (which remember includes both aversion and its sort of twin, which is fear), and delusion.

The first one, *abhija*, is obviously to do with *loba* - that's the word for it - which is greed or acquisitiveness. But here, it gives a certain slant to it. It's called covetousness. You always want what somebody else has. Sometimes when you're in line with monks for food and people put things into your bowl, you're often tempted to see what the other person got which you didn't get. So it's that wanting, not only just wanting something, coveting something, but this added thing of wanting what somebody else has.

You can see how greed creates that dissatisfaction, that conflict. As soon as you say, "I want what you have," you're putting yourself in a sense in competition with the other person or against the other person. So already it's not a great mental state to develop.

The next one, of course, is ill will, *byāpāda*, malevolence, ill will. So this gives it a more active, rather than a passive hatred - an active form where when your heart feels hatred, it'll manifest in some angry way, in some way which is antagonistic, conflictual. So those two things have gone in the *arahat*.

The final two - the first one is an attachment to ritual, to rules and rituals. Does that mean that we shouldn't be doing any? No, it's really what we believe the ritual to be doing. So for instance, when we take refuges and precepts, it's really just creating an atmosphere within us of devotion, of commitment, of reminding ourselves what our path is. But if we were to believe that taking the refuge and precepts was quite enough and we don't have to do anything else - just light a few candles, burn a joss stick, say the refuges and precepts and that's it, I'll get on with my life, I'll keep on being as I am - then I think we'd be sorely disappointed.

It's a case of recognising that there are bound to be rituals in our lives. In fact, we have rituals that we keep, just as the morning ablutions, for instance. There'll be a little ritual that we've performed for ourselves when we prepare our meals. So it's not as though rituals don't have a place in our lives - it's an habitual thing. But I think what a ritual does is it gives it meaning. So rather than just slapping the food on the plate and chucking it down into the stomach, if one takes one's time with a little reflection and then eats mindfully, it gives it meaning. It gives it meaning in the fullness of our practice. And that's what a ritual is meant to do.

When it comes to rules, there are overt and covert rules. Obviously when you go into somebody's house, it's presumed that you're not going to steal from them. That's an obvious rule, you might say. But there are also covert rules, like you don't move the furniture around when you're staying at somebody's house. I always remember, I invited my mother to come and stay with me. She came and I had a flower pot with a flower flowering in the front room. When I came down, she'd moved it. It was just one of those things that your mother does that just presses the button. I remember shouting at her, "This is my house, leave me alone! It goes here." Sort of like a little kid. Dear me. Wouldn't have been so bad if I weren't over thirty.

So there are these rules and regulations. Rules, of course, are what establish an institution. Every institution has a set of rules. The big ones, like democracy, you've got your constitution. The monks have their own rules and regulations. So they have a place.

But if I as a monastic were to say to myself, "My job is to keep the rule absolutely perfectly and in so doing I will become enlightened," I again would be very disappointed because that is not an end in itself. Often you do meet monks who have that mentality because you get caught in this double bind, a catch-22. You can't become fully liberated until you are ethically completely purified. But you can't be ethically completely purified until you become liberated because you don't lose the core reason for our unwholesomeness until the point of liberation. And that is the sense of self or the notion of self. That doesn't go to the last bit.

So it's an impossible situation to try and negotiate. One works on one side, purifying the heart, doing the

right thing, and you keep on investigating the process. At some point, hopefully, we'll find ourselves liberated from all suffering.

The next one is this dogmatic fanaticism. That of course again is based on misunderstanding, upon delusion. The Buddha points to three qualities when we have that "I'm right and everybody else is wrong and this is the way, this is the only way" and all that. He says, first of all, there is the wrong view. Even if the wrong view is "this is the only way" or "I'm right," and even if I'm right, I'll be wrong in saying that this is the only way.

Although he does say it at the beginning of the discourse on how to establish right mindfulness: "This is the one-way path." But he doesn't say this is the only way. By the way, it has been translated as that. But in fact, this *ekayano* - just as a little aside - this one-way path is meant to be as opposed to the two-way path, which is concentration plus insight practice. So what the Buddha is saying is that you don't need the concentration, you can just go straight with the insight practice. That's what it's referring to. But you'll find, for instance, Nyanaponika translating it as "this is the only way." So there is that misunderstanding, that wrong understanding.

Then there's that emotional attachment to it. There's always a clinging around it, and that's what causes us to be angry when people disagree with us. And of course, underneath all that, there is the sense of me. So I'm defining myself as "this is me. This is my understanding. I am a socialist. I am a capitalist. I am a Christian," and so on. That connection of an identity brings about this emotional clinging to a particular view, and that's what causes us to get into arguments. War, for instance.

So how do we get out of that? Well, it's recognising that we all have opinions. That's the way it is. Everybody has a view, an opinion. But when we actually begin to perceive that as a perspective, it does allow us to listen to other people. It doesn't mean to say that we're going to be converted by them. It may be that it nuances what we actually believe. It may be that it changes what we actually believe. But in order to do that, you've got to let go of this business of "I'm right and everybody else is wrong."

So here is another thing that disappears with the Buddha. It's interesting when people come to him and say, "I believe this - what do you believe?" He always asks them first of all to explain what they actually believe, what is their position. Then having heard it, he will begin to question it and slowly undermine that position if it's wrong. Once the person begins to feel that their argument isn't so strong, it's not right, that's when the Buddha puts in the Four Noble Truths and away they go.

So just to go over those things, go back to the original verse. We're talking about our practice coming to a fulfilment, the journey's end. We can be free of all sorrow. Sorrow is such a big word. It's not only grief about something, it's perhaps grief about something that we ought to have done, something that we did do, and so on. Of course it's liberated in all ways, and that's defined in this particular verse as released from all the bonds.

These bonds we find are this acquisitiveness, this aversion and finally these two wrong understandings which are around rules and rituals and opinions. The final result, of course, is to be liberated from all the emotional distress that comes from having these wrong views and these wrong attitudes. All that disappears. And that's the wonder of the practice.

So that's the verse on number 90 on what it is to become an *arahat*. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and that by your devotion to practice you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

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