

Mind and Enlightenment in Buddhism

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Abstract

This paper explores the relationship of Citta (Mind), Cetasika(Mental Concomitants) and Nibbāna (Enlightenment) based on Abhidhamma and related Buddhist literature. It explains how the mind is formed and works toward the realization of Nibbāna or Enlightenment. It points out the essential roles of the mental concomitants in the arising of the states of mind. There are seven mental concomitants or cetasika that are common to every consciousness: (1) Contact (phassa), (2) Sensation (vedana), (3) Perception (sanna), Volition (cetana), (5) One-pointedness of mind (ekaggata), (6) Faculty of life (jivitindriya) and Attention (manasikara). They are invariably present in all types of consciousness. They bear equal responsibility for the arising of any consciousness. As regards Nibbāna, there are four stages of enlightenment: the stages of the sotāpanna (streamwinner), the sakadāgāmī (once-returner), the anāgāmī (no-returner) and the arahat. At each of these stages, the lokuttara kusala citta, the magga-citta, arises which experiences nibbāna and eradicates defilements. The sotāpanna, the ariyan who has attained the first stage of enlightenment, has eradicated “ditthi” completely, so that it can never arise again, but he has not eradicated all defilements. Defilements are eradicated stage by stage and only when arahatship has been attained all defilements have been eradicated. Also, in this presentation, two types of meditation: Samatha and Vipassana, have been compared as the means to attain the highest spiritual achievement, Nibbāna, through the applications of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

Keyword: Mind; Enlightenment; Buddhism

Introduction

Mind or nama in Pali refers to mental phenomena which in Abhidhamma means mind and mental concomitants. Whether in man or animals or other beings, there are only 28 kinds of material qualities and 89 classes of consciousness (i.e., mind or mental state). Each of these kinds or classes stands close analysis. There are 52 kinds of mental concomitants. “**Citta**” means consciousness. It is conscious of sense objects. Sense object is called *Arammana* in Pali. Clearly, great teachers have not tried to translate *arammana*, lest there should occur inaccuracies in meaning.

In terms of number, Cittas can be counted as eighty-nine or as hundred and twenty-one. When cittas are counted as hundred and twenty-one, there are, instead of eight lokuttara cittas, forty lokuttara cittas, and these are lokuttara cittas accompanied by the jhāna-factors of the different stages of jhāna. As we have seen, there are five stages of rūpa-jhāna and at each stage jhāna-factors are successively abandoned, until at the fifth stage (or at the fourth stage of the fourfold system) there are the remaining factors of samādhi (concentration) and upekkhā (indifferent feeling) which arises instead of sukha (pleasant feeling). Lokuttara cittas can be accompanied by jhāna-factors of each of the five stages of jhāna. For example, when lokuttara cittas are accompanied by jhāna-factors of the fifth stage of rūpa-jhāna, it means that they are accompanied by samādhi and upekkhā.

As for arūpa-jhānacittas, they have meditation subjects which are different from the meditation subjects for rūpa-jhāna, but the jhāna-factors which accompany them are the same as the jhāna-factors of the fifth stage of rūpa-jhāna, namely samādhi and upekkhā. Thus, the jhāna-factors of the five types of rūpa-jhāna have to be taken into account when we classify lokuttara jhānacittas, lokuttara cittas accompanied by jhāna-factors of the different stages of rūpa-jhāna and arūpa-jhāna. Consequently, each one of the eight lokuttara cittas can be reckoned as fivefold and then there are forty lokuttara cittas.

Enlightenment is the unique element standing apart from the three other ultimate realities. This is a brief description of the four ultimate realities or *paramattha dhammas*. In this present discussion, we are going to focus our attention on mind: how it is formed and what are the essential roles of the mental concomitants in the arising of the states of mind.

All Buddhists have long been acquainted with Abhidhamma parlance so much so that daily use of such terms as 'rupa-yon' (*ruparammana*), sadda-yon, gandha-yon, rasa-yon, photthabba-yon, dhammayon, for the six sense-objects have come into vogue as though they belong to our mother tongue. Even if these terms were to be used in translation, such as eye-object, ear-object, nose-object, tongue-object, body-object and mind-object, they might sound strange to the ear

(though these are correct renderings). The hybrid Pali words (rupa-yon, etc.,) are readily accepted as the six sense-objects. Their pure vernacular terms as: visible objects, sound, smell, taste, tangible object and thought, might be used. Yet they also strike one as pedantic. So the hybrid words (rupa-yon, etc.) have become popular usage with us since the times of our forefathers.

When consciousness arises, that is, when the mind becomes aware of a sense-object, other mental factors also arise together with it: they are called *cetasika*, mental concomitants. There are four characteristic properties of a *cetasika*, namely:

- i: *Cetasika* arises together with consciousness;
- ii: It perishes together with consciousness;
- iii: It has an identical object with consciousness;
- iv: It has a common basis with consciousness.

The Seven 'Universals'

There are seven mental concomitants or *cetasika* that are common to every consciousness: they are: (1) Contact (*phassa*), (2) Sensation (*vedana*), (3) Perception (*sanna*), Volition (*cetana*), (5) One-pointedness of mind (*ekaggata*), (6) Faculty of life (*jivitindriya*) and Attention (*manasikara*). They are invariably present in all types of consciousness. They bear, so to speak, equal responsibility for the arising of any consciousness. Hence they are called 'Universals' or *sabbacittasadharana cetasika*.

Lokuttara Cittas (Supramundane Mind)

The Abhidhamma teaches us about different kinds of wholesome cittas. There are kāmāvacara kusala cittas (kusala cittas of the sensuous plane of consciousness, mahā-kusala cittas), rūpāvacara kusala cittas (rūpa-jhānacittas) and arūpāvacara kusala cittas (arūpa-jhānacittas). All these types of citta are kusala, but they do not eradicate the latent tendencies of defilements. Only lokuttara kusala cittas, magga-cittas (1), eradicate the latent tendencies of defilements. When all defilements are eradicated completely there will be an end to the cycle of birth and death. We may wonder whether lokuttara kusala cittas really eradicate defilements so that they never arise again. There are many defilements. We are full of lobha, dosa and moha. We have avarice, jealousy, worry, doubt, conceit and many other defilements. The clinging to the self is deeply rooted: we take our mind and our body for self. It is hard to understand how all these defilements can be eradicated. Defilements can be eradicated and there is a Path leading to it, but we have accumulated defilements to such an extent that they cannot be eradicated all at once. Ditthi, wrong view, has to be

eradicated first; so long as we take realities for self, there cannot be eradication of any defilement.

Four Stages of Enlightenment

There are four stages of enlightenment: the stages of the sotāpanna (streamwinner), the sakadāgāmī (once-returner), the anāgāmī (no-returner) and the arahat. At each of these stages the lokuttara kusala citta, the magga-citta, arises which experiences nibbāna and eradicates defilements. The sotāpanna, the ariyan who has attained the first stage of enlightenment, has eradicated “ditthi” completely, so that it can never arise again, but he has not eradicated all defilements. Defilements are eradicated stage by stage and only when arahatship has been attained all defilements have been eradicated.

We, nevertheless, may wonder how one can know that one has attained enlightenment. The lokuttara citta is accompanied by paññā (wisdom) which has been developed in vipassanā. One does not attain enlightenment without having developed insight-wisdom, vipassanā. There are several stages of insight-wisdom. First, doubt about the difference between nāma and rūpa is eliminated. It may be understood in theory that nāma is the reality which experiences an object and rūpa is the reality which does not know anything. However, theoretical understanding, understanding of the level of thinking, is not the same as direct understanding which realizes nāma as nāma and rūpa as rūpa. When there is, for example, sound, which is rūpa, there is also hearing, which is nāma, and these realities have different characteristics. There can be mindfulness of only one characteristic at a time and at such a moment right understanding of the reality which presents itself can develop. So long as there is not right mindfulness of one reality at the time there will be doubt as to the difference between nāma and rūpa. There has to be mindfulness of the different kinds of nāma and rūpa which appear in daily life in order to eliminate doubt. When the first stage of insight, which is only a beginning stage, is attained, there is no doubt as to the difference between the characteristics of nāma and rūpa. The characteristics of nāma and rūpa have to be investigated over and over again until they are clearly understood as they are and there is no more wrong view about them. The realization of the arising and falling away of nāma and rūpa is a higher stage of insight which cannot be attained so long as the characteristic of nāma cannot be distinguished from the characteristic of rūpa. All the different stages of insight have to be attained in the right order (2). Paññā should continue to investigate the characteristics of realities as they appear through the six doors so that the three characteristics of conditioned realities, namely: impermanence (anicca), dukkha and non-self (anattā), can be penetrated more and more. When paññā has clearly understood these three characteristics enlightenment can be

attained; paññā can then experience nibbāna, the unconditioned reality. When paññā has been developed to that degree there cannot be any doubt as to whether one has attained enlightenment or not.

As a matter of fact, the English word '**enlightenment**' can have different meanings and therefore it may create confusion. The Pāli term for enlightenment is '**bodhi**'. Bodhi literally means knowledge or understanding. The attainment of enlightenment in the context of the Buddhist teachings refers to paññā which has been developed to the degree that it has become "lokuttara" paññā, "supramundane paññā", which accompanies lokuttara cittas experiencing nibbāna. Enlightenment is actually a few moments of lokuttara cittas which do not last. Nibbāna does not arise and fall away, but the lokuttara cittas which experience nibbāna fall away and are followed by cittas of the sense-sphere; in the case of the ariyans who have not yet attained the fourth stage of enlightenment, also akusala cittas are bound to arise again. However, the defilements which have been eradicated at the attainment of enlightenment do not arise anymore.

In practice, only the right path, the Eightfold Path, can lead to enlightenment. If one develops the wrong path the goal cannot be attained. In the Abhidhamma defilements are classified in different ways and also different kinds of wrong view are classified in various ways. For instance, different kinds of wrong view are classified under the group of defilements which is clinging (upādāna). Three of the four kinds of clinging mentioned in this group are clinging to various forms of ditthi; these three kinds of clinging have been completely eradicated by the sotāpanna. One of them is: "**clinging to rules and ritual**" (sīlabbatupādāna), which includes the wrong practice of vipassanā. Some people think that they can attain enlightenment by following some path other than the Eightfold Path but this is an illusion. There are no other ways leading to enlightenment.

The Eightfold Path is developed by being mindful of the nāma and rūpa which appear in daily life, such as seeing, visible object, hearing, sound, thinking, feeling, attachment, anger or the other defilements which arise. If the Eightfold Path is not developed by being mindful of all realities which appear in one's daily life, wrong view cannot be eradicated and thus not even the first stage of enlightenment, the stage of the "sotāpanna", can be attained. Therefore, there is no way leading to enlightenment other than the development of right understanding of realities, which is the wisdom (paññā) of the Eightfold Path.

So long as one has not become a sotāpanna one may deviate from the right Path, there can be wrong practice. There is wrong practice, for example, when one thinks that there should be awareness only of particular kinds of nāma and rūpa, instead of being aware of whatever kind of nāma or rūpa appears.

People may for example believe that lobha, dosa and moha should not or cannot be objects of mindfulness. Nonetheless, akusala cittas are realities which arise because of their appropriate conditions, they are part of one's daily life. If one selects the objects of awareness, one will continue to cling to a concept of self who could exert control over one's life. Some people believe that *vipassanā* can only be developed when sitting in a quiet place, but then they set rules for the practice, and thus, they will not be able to see that mindfulness too is *anattā*.

As we know, the *sotāpanna* has eradicated other defilements as well. He has eradicated doubt or *vicikicchā*. Doubt is classified as one of the "hindrances"; it prevents us from performing *kusala*. We may doubt about the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, about the right practice. The *sotāpanna* has no more doubt. Another *akusala cetasika*, eradicated by the *sotāpanna*, is stinginess, *macchariya*. The *Visuddhimagga* (XXII, 52) mentions five kinds of avarice: The kinds of avarice are the five, namely, avarice about dwellings, families, gain, Dhamma and praise, which occur as inability to bear sharing with others any of these things beginning with dwellings.

In The *Atthasālinī* (Expositor, Book II, Part II, Chapter II, 374, 375), it is explained that there is stinginess if one does not want to share any of these things with others. However, there is no stinginess if one does not want to share these things with someone who is a bad person or someone who would abuse these things. For instance, if one does not teach Dhamma to someone who will abuse Dhamma, there is no stinginess as to Dhamma. Thus we see that the eradication of stinginess does not mean sharing everything one has with anybody. The *sotāpanna* has eradicated stinginess; the five kinds of stinginess just mentioned do not arise anymore. Moreover, the *sotāpanna* has eradicated envy, *issā*. Envy can arise with *dosa-mūla-citta* (citta rooted in aversion). The *Visuddhimagga* (XIV, 172) states concerning envy:

Envy is envy. It has the characteristic of being jealous of others' success. Its function is to be dissatisfied with that. It is manifested as averseness from that. Its proximate cause is another's success...

In theory, the *sotāpanna* is an ariyan, a "noble person", although not all defilements are eradicated by him. He is an ariyan, because at the moment of enlightenment, when the *magga-citta* arose, he became a different person; he is no longer a "worldling", *puthujjana*. There are no more latent tendencies of wrong view, *ditthi*, and doubt, *vicikicchā*, accumulated in the *citta*, and there are no more inclinations to stinginess, *macchariya*, or envy, *issā*. The *sotāpanna* has not eradicated all defilements. One may wonder whether he can still talk in an unpleasant way to others. Of the ten kinds of *akusala kamma-patha* (unwholesome courses of action) there are four *akusala kamma-patha* through speech which are: lying, slandering, rude speech and idle, useless talk. The

sotāpanna has eradicated lying. He can still speak in an unfriendly way to others or use harsh speech, but not to the extent that it would lead to rebirth in a woeful plane. The sotāpanna cannot be reborn in a woeful plane anymore.

At the moment of enlightenment, nibbāna is the object which is experienced by the lokuttara citta. Some people think that nibbāna is a place which one can reach, a plane of life. In order to have more understanding of what nibbāna is, we have to consider what our life now is: nāma and rūpa arising and falling away. Our life is dukkha, because what arises and falls away is unsatisfactory. If nibbāna would be a plane where we would continue to live, there would be no end to the arising and falling away of nāma and rūpa, no end to dukkha. Nibbāna, however, is the unconditioned dhamma, it does not arise and fall away. Nibbāna is therefore the end of the arising and falling away of nāma and rūpa, the end of birth, old age, sickness and death. Nibbāna is the end to dukkha. When one has attained the first stage of enlightenment, the stage of the sotāpanna, it is certain that there will eventually be an end to the cycle of birth and death, an end to dukkha. When the person who is not an arahat dies, the last citta of his life, the cuti-citta (dying-consciousness) is succeeded by the patisandhi-citta (rebirth-consciousness) of the next life and thus life goes on. So long as there are defilements life has to continue. The fact that we are here in the human plane is conditioned by defilements. Even if there is birth in a heavenly plane, in a rūpa-brahma plane or in an arūpa-brahma plane, it is conditioned by defilements.

The Arahat has no more defilements, he does not have to be reborn in any plane. The Arahat has to die, because he was born and birth has to be followed by death. However, for him the cuti-citta will not be succeeded by a patisandhi-citta. Thus, for him there will not be the arising of nāma and rūpa in a new life any more, and this means the end to the cycle of birth and death. The development of wisdom brings a kind of happiness which is different from what one used to take for happiness. Our defilements are the real cause of disturbance, worry and restlessness, they are the cause of all sorrow. Nibbāna is the end of lobha, dosa and moha, and thus the end of all sorrow.

Nibbāna can be experienced at the attainment of enlightenment, but enlightenment cannot be attained unless paññā has been developed to the degree that it can experience the conditioned dhammas as they are: impermanent, dukkha and non-self (anattā). At the attainment of enlightenment the magga-citta (lokuttara kusala citta) directly experiences nibbāna. When the magga-citta has fallen away, it is succeeded immediately by the phala-citta (lokuttara vipākacitta) which experiences the same object. Kāmāvacara kusala kamma may produce vipāka in the same lifespan but never in the same process. Rūpāvacara kusala citta and arūpāvacara kusala citta produce vipāka only in a next life as rebirth-consciousness and bhavangacitta. It is different in the case of the magga-citta

which is followed immediately, in the same process, by the phala-cittas, which are two or three moments of *vipākacitta*, depending on the individual.

When someone attains enlightenment of the stage of the *sotāpanna*, the *magga-citta* and the *phala-cittas* of the *sotāpanna* arise. The *magga-citta* of the *sotāpanna* eradicates the defilements which are to be eradicated at that stage, and this is once and for all. Thus, the *magga-citta* of the *sotāpanna* can arise only once in the cycle of birth and death. The *phala-citta* can arise again in other processes of citta if enlightenment has been attained with *lokuttara jhānacitta*. Someone who has developed *jhāna* and acquired "mastery" in *jhāna* (Vis. IV, 131) and also develops insight can attain enlightenment with *lokuttara jhānacitta*, *lokuttara citta* accompanied by *jhāna-factors* of one of the stages of *jhāna*. It is extremely difficult to acquire "mastery" in *jhāna*; one should be able, for example, to determine when one enters *jhāna* and when one emerges from *jhāna*. Only if mastery has been acquired, *jhāna* can be a "base" for insight, that is, an object of mindfulness in *vipassanā*. In that way the clinging to a self who attains *jhāna* can be eliminated. Those who attain enlightenment have different accumulations and according to one's accumulations the *lokuttara jhānacittas* are accompanied by *jhāna-factors* of different stages of *jhāna*. The *phala-citta* which is accompanied by *jhāna-factors* can arise many times again, experiencing *nibbāna*.

Nibbāna or Enlightenment

The way to Nibbāna or Enlightenment seems to be extremely long and we may wonder how we could ever reach that goal. We should not be impatient and wish for a result that is far off. Instead, we should consider what has to be done at the present moment: the development of right understanding of the *nāma* and *rūpa* appearing right now. In this way there will be conditions eventually to attain nibbāna. One cannot attain enlightenment without having cultivated the right conditions. The first condition, association with the righteous person, is most important. It would not be possible to find the right path by oneself. Only Buddhas have accumulated such wisdom that they can find the Path by themselves, without the help of a teacher. Other people, however, need the teachings of a Buddha in order to find the right path, because ignorance has been accumulated for an endlessly long time.

When we have heard the Dhamma from the right person, we should "apply the mind"; this is the third condition. We should not blindly follow the person who teaches us Dhamma, but we should investigate the scriptures ourselves, ponder over the Dhamma, and consider it carefully, in order to test the truth. The real test of the truth is the practice itself. Therefore, the fourth condition is "conforming to the Dhamma", which is the development of the

Eightfold Path. By being mindful of the phenomena appearing through the six doors we can find out ourselves whether it is true that these phenomena are only *nāma* and *rūpa*, arising because of conditions. We can investigate ourselves whether they are impermanent or permanent, whether they are *dukkha* or happiness, whether they are non-self, *anattā*, or "self". We can find out through the practice itself whether we really understand the teachings.

Lokuttara cittas cannot arise without the cultivation of the right conditions. Some people wish for an end to *dukkha* but they do not develop understanding in daily life. They hope that one day lokuttara cittas will arise. The Buddha pointed out that the realization of the four noble Truths is difficult, and he said this, not in order to discourage people, but in order to remind them not to be heedless. In the Kindred Sayings (V, Mahā-vagga, Book XII, Kindred Sayings about the Truths, chapter V, paragraph 5, The keyhole), it states when the Buddha was staying at Vesālī in Great Grove, Ānanda went into Vesālī on his rounds for almsfood. In Vesālī he saw the Licchavi youths practising archery. He then went to see the Buddha and said:

"Here, lord, robing myself in the forenoon and taking bowl and outer robe I set out for Vesālī on my begging rounds. Then, lord, I saw a number of Licchavi youths in the gymnasium making practice at archery, shooting even from a distance through a very small keyhole, and splitting an arrow, shot after shot, with never a miss. And I said to myself, lord: 'Practised shots are these Licchavi youths! Well practised shots indeed are these Licchavi youths, to be able even at a distance to splinter an arrow through a very small keyhole, shot after shot, with never a miss!'"

"Now what think you, Ānanda? Which is the harder, which is the harder task to compass: To shoot like that or to pierce one strand of hair, seven times divided, with another strand?"

"Why, lord, of course to split a hair in such a way is the harder, much the harder task."

"Just so, Ānanda, they who penetrate the meaning of: This is *dukkha*, this is the arising of *dukkha*, this is the ceasing of *dukkha*, this is the practice that leads to the ceasing of *dukkha*, pierce through something much harder to pierce.

"Wherefore, Ānanda, you must make an effort to realize: This is *dukkha*. This is the arising of *dukkha*. This is the ceasing of *dukkha*. This is the practice that leads to the ceasing of *dukkha*."

If one develops the right path, one will realize the four noble Truths; one will attain enlightenment. The way to realize the four noble Truths is to be mindful of the realities which appear now: seeing, visible object, lobha, dosa or

any other reality. We should not be discouraged when we do not seem to make rapid progress. Most people cling to a result and they become impatient when they do not notice an immediate result; clinging to a result, however, is not helpful for the development of wisdom, it is akusala.

Samatha and Vipassana

Samatha, if developed in the right way, has tranquillity as its result. When jhāna is attained, lobha, dosa and moha are temporarily eliminated. However, the attainment of jhāna is extremely difficult and many conditions have to be cultivated. When one is developing samatha, the hindrances may still arise: there will be sensuous desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, worry and doubt, until "access-concentration" or jhāna has been attained.

The aim of vipassanā is not tranquillity, but the eradication of wrong view and eventually of all defilements. This goal may seem far off, but each short moment of right awareness of nāma and rūpa is very fruitful; it will help to eliminate clinging to the concept of self. While one is mindful, there are no lobha, dosa or moha. Although tranquillity is not the aim of vipassanā, at the moment of right mindfulness there is kusala citta, and kusala citta is accompanied by calm. Vipassanā or insight is the development of right understanding of all nāmas and rūpas which present themselves in daily life. Insight is developed in different stages and in the course of its development the characteristics of nāma and rūpa will be understood more clearly, and their arising and falling away will be known through direct experience.

In brief here, the cittas in the process during which enlightenment is attained are the following:

- * mano-dvārāvajjana-citta
- * parikamma (preparatory consciousness; for some people not necessary)
- * upacāra (proximity consciousness)
- * anuloma (conformity or adaptation)
- * gotrabhū (change of lineage)
- * magga-citta
- * phala-citta (two or three moments, depending on the individual)

Nibbāna can be the object of kāmāvacara cittas which arise after the lokuttara cittas have fallen away. Before someone becomes an ariyan there can only be speculation about nibbāna. For the ariyan, however, it is different. Since he has directly experienced nibbāna, he can review his experience afterwards. We read in the Visuddhimagga (XXII,19) that the person who attained enlightenment reviews, after the lokuttara cittas have fallen away, the path, the

fruition, the defilements which have been abandoned, the defilements which are still remaining and nibbāna. He reviews these things in different mind-door processes of citta.

If one is on the right path, paññā or wisdom can be developed, no matter what the circumstances are, even to the degree of enlightenment. People may wonder whether it would be possible to notice it when a person attains nibbāna. But can one see whether someone else is mindful or not mindful? Who knows the cittas of other people? We cannot know when someone else is mindful of nāma and rūpa or when he attains nibbāna.

However, the question may arise whether all four stages of enlightenment (the stages of the sotāpanna, the sakadāgāmī, the anāgāmī and the arahat) can be attained in the course of one life. We read in the suttas about disciples of the Buddha who attained the ariyan state but not yet arahatship and realized arahatship later on in life. Ānanda, for example, did not attain arahatship during the Buddha's life, but he became an arahat after the Buddha had passed away, the evening before the first great council was to start (the "Illustrator of Ultimate meaning", commentary to the "Mangala-sutta" or "Good Omen Discourse", Minor Readings, Khuddaka Nikāya).

In reality, the arahat has eradicated all defilements and thus he has reached the end of the cycle of birth, old age, sickness and death; he has realized the end of dukkha. The arahat will not be reborn, but he still has to die and therefore one may ask whether he really has attained the end of dukkha at the moment he realizes arahatship. Even the arahat is subject to death, since he was born. He can also experience unpleasant results of akusala kamma committed before he became an arahat. However, he has no more defilements and cannot accumulate any more kamma which might produce vipāka, he is really free from dukkha.

Conclusion

When insight has been developed stage by stage, the nāma and rūpa which present themselves through the six doors can be clearly seen as impermanent, dukkha and non-self, anattā. When paññā has been developed to the degree that enlightenment can be attained, the unconditioned reality, nibbāna, is directly experienced. The direct experience of nibbāna is different from thinking about nibbāna. Nibbāna is directly experienced during a mind-door process of cittas. Nibbāna cannot be experienced through any of the five senses, it can be experienced only through the mind-door.

There are four stages of enlightenment: the stages of the sotāpanna (streamwinner), the sakadāgāmī (once-returner), the anāgāmī (no-returner) and the arahat. At each of these stages the lokuttara kusala citta, the magga-citta,

arises which experiences nibbāna and eradicates defilements. The sotāpanna, the ariyan who has attained the first stage of enlightenment, has eradicated “ditthi” completely, so that it can never arise again, but he has not eradicated all defilements. Defilements are eradicated stage by stage and only when arahatship has been attained all defilements have been eradicated.

In the process during which enlightenment is attained, the manodvārāvajjana-citta (the mind-door-adverting-consciousness) takes as its object one of the three characteristics of reality: impermanence, dukkha or anattā. This simply means that the reality presenting itself at that moment is seen either as impermanent, or as dukkha or as anattā. Anicca, dukkha and anattā are three aspects of the truth of conditioned realities. Thus, if one sees one aspect, one also sees the other aspects. However, the three characteristics cannot be experienced at the same time, since citta can experience only one object at a time. It depends on one's accumulations which of the three characteristics is realized in the process of cittas during which enlightenment is attained: one person views the reality appearing at that moment as impermanent, another as dukkha, and another again as non-self, anattā.

When someone has become an arahat there will be no more rebirth for him. When someone has attained enlightenment to the stage of the sotāpanna, he has become an ariyan, but he has not reached the end of rebirth. The sotāpanna will be reborn, but not more than seven times; thus, eventually there will be an end to rebirth for him. If we do not develop vipassanā, the number of rebirths will be endless. It was out of compassion that the Buddha spoke about the dangers of rebirth; he certainly wanted to encourage people to develop right understanding for the right results.

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