

# The Buddha's Conception of Nirvāṇa

Svāmi Sadānanda Dāsa (written during the internment in India, 1939-1945)

© and annotations in square brackets and footnotes

Kid Samuelsson/Katrin Stamm 2011



Editors' note: The presented layout follows the original layout of the manuscript as closely as possible;  
diacritics were omitted due to the difficulty to apply them with capital letters;  
unreadable words are inserted as they appear in the manuscript.

## 1st great deed of the Buddha:

He freed us from the slavery of “OPINIONS”, “OBJECTIVE TRUTHS”, “THE ABSOLUTE”, “METAPHYSICS”, also “THE PHILOSOPHY OF NIRVANA”

by a) pointing out that the “PHILOSOPHY” IS THE SUBJECTIVE EXPRESSION OF MAN’S CHARACTER. “What Philosophy I have depends on my character”, the phenomenal mental structure through which “Desire” tries to target certain objects, subtle or gross, to which ~~the~~ ignorance values are ascribed.

INTELLECT, AS THEY ARE ONLY THE LAMP SHOWING THE PATH  
REASON TOWARDS THE FULFILLMENT OF DESIRE,  
DETHRONED DESIRE WHICH ARISES FROM THE EXPERIENCE  
(ACTUAL OR SUPPOSED)  
OF AGREEABLE, DISAGREEABLE AND NEUTRAL  
SENSATIONS  
(ACTS LEADING TO ESTABLISH THE CONTACT WITH THOSE  
OBJECTS)  
TO WHICH VALUES ARE WRONGLY ASCRIBED.

ACCORDING TO THE PATICCASAMUPPADA<sup>1</sup>:  
IGNORANCE, DESIRE, ACT, SENSATION  
CONDITION EACH OTHER.

b) explaining that the GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF ALL PHENOMENAL AND EVEN NOUMENAL<sup>2</sup> RELATIONS IS TRISHNA<sup>3</sup>; SUBTLE SPHERES, IDEAS, ABSOLUTES, BEING PROJECTIONS OF DESIRE, USING INTELLECT TO “INVENT” CONCEPTIONS OF THE ABSOLUTE IF IT COULD NOT GET FINAL SATISFACTION IN THE GROSS WORLD.

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<sup>1</sup> The teaching of “dependent origination”.

<sup>2</sup> noumenon = what can be known without the senses; phenomenon = what can be known through the senses.

<sup>3</sup> Desire, thirst (lit).

EVERY PHAINOMENON AND NOUMENON IS WITHIN THE REALM OF THE 6 kinds of Consciousness, arising from contact of organ, sense of organ, medium, sense-object, in case of the mind the mental organ, mentality, sense-organs and ideas.

## **2nd great deed:**

THE WORLD is as “the WHOLE” WHAT IS THE CONTENTS OF THE 6 KINDS of CONSCIOUSNESS.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever may be the character of the “individual”, the compound of the 5 upadana khandhas – and according to it the contents are varying – 3 characteristics [ti-lakkhana-s/tri-lakshana-s] are to be found qualifying it: ANITYA, ANATMA [ANATTA], DUKKHA.<sup>5</sup>

THE ANITYA CHARACTER is gradually admitted (changeability).

But a few words as to anatma [anatta] and dukkha.

ATMA is not to be found within the 6-fold phenomenal and noumenal consciousness NOW SUPPOSED TO EXIST OR BELIEVED INTO IS ALSO ONLY A FACTOR IN THE 6-CONSCIOUSNESS, BEYOND IT NOTHING IS REALISED; A NON SPIRITUAL MEANS, i.e. activity in any gross or subtle forms, can not lead to [a] spiritual end.

TO SAY IT EXISTS IS AS WRONG AS TO SUPPOSE IT DOES NOT EXIST.

4 other opinions:

1. by the ATMA I realise the Non-ATMA
2. by the NON-ATMA I realise the Non-ATMA
3. BY THE ATMA I REALISE THE ATMA,
4. THIS ATMA IS ETERNAL, UNCHANGEABLE, ETERNALLY BEING IN ITSELF.

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<sup>4</sup> The Sutta Pitaka explains that the “Whole” or “All” = sabba consists of the six vijñāna-s or consciousnesses (5 sense-consciousness + mind-consciousness).

<sup>5</sup> Not eternal, no ātmā, subjected to suffering (dukkha (Pāli) = duḥkha (Sanskrit)).

To say it is, is as wrong as to say it is not, because nothing really spiritual, i.e. aprakrit can be described or realised by the prakrit, i.e. TRUTH CAN NEVER BE AN OBJECT OF REALISATION.

DUKKHA, non-pessimistic, non-sentimental conception!

it means: to be united with what is disliked

not to obtain what one desires (the eternal if we desire it!)

### **3rd great deed:**

Neither positive nor negative accent given to the Samsara, neither enjoyment nor renunciation advocated, as renunciation is understood as the temporary postponement of enjoyment as such for the purpose of a supposed higher enjoyment or realisation on an unobstructed plane.

Simply a method suggested to eliminate desire by trying to understand the suchness i.e. 3-lakshana-character of things incl. ideas, whose understanding depends on our character and our conduct – therefore ethics have their place there.

### **4th great deed:**

He did not deny the reality of the trans-phenomenal and trans-noumenal, therefore AGNOSTICISM, ATHEISM, ANTITHEISM [are] wrongly ascribed to him by those who could not understand the impossibility of tracing the “Spirit” within the 6-consciousness-world or who try to define the TRUTH AS THE SUMTOTAL OF ALL POSSIBLE NEGATIONS of THE PRESENT phenomenal or noumenal world.

I would like to call Buddha’s philosophy the RELIGION κατ' ἐξοχήν [par excellence], because it is free from all anthropomorph or anthropopathic conceptions of GOD or NIRVANA, THE ONLY RELIGION WHICH REALLY KEEPS THE ABSOLUTE AS THE “BEYOND” OF ALL RELATIONS, COORDINATES, DIMENSIONS.

WHAT HAS A HETU [cause] – AND OUR BELIEF IN THE ABSOLUTE OR NOT DEPENDS ON OUR CHARACTER – THE BUDDHA CLAIMED TO HAVE EXPLAINED, BUT NOT WHAT IS “A-HETUKA”[without cause], being beyond the 6-fold consciousness – the “Whole” for us.

MAHAVAGGA I, 23, 1-5:

“YE DHARMA HETU PRABHAVA,  
TESHAM HETUM TATHAGATA UVACA,  
[HETUM TESHAM TATHAGATAH HYAVADAT]  
TESHAM CA YO NIRODHA-  
EVAM VADI MAHASHRAMANAH”<sup>6</sup>

ये धर्मा हेतु प्रभवा  
हेतुं तेषां तथागतः ह्यवदत्  
तेषां च यो निरोध  
एवं वादी महाश्रमणः

**5<sup>th</sup> great deed:**

a unique method:

As DESIRE expressed in the process at the end of which the object of our investigation is completely under our control, i.e. the complete prey of the desire, degrades our own self and all so-called objects, i.e. the contents of our consciousness, distorts reality or better suchness of things by relating them to us,  
and as [to] the other process, to consider the objects as subjects and relate ourselves to them as worshipper or servants as advocated in the Bhakticult and in later forms of Mahayana Buddhism (e.g. Shantideva's

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<sup>6</sup> The so-called „credo“ of Buddhism. **A Standard Translation** Of those things that arise from a cause/ The Tathāgata has told the cause/ And also/ what their cessation is:/ This is the doctrine of the Great Recluse. – **Alternative Translation:** Of those/ experiences that arise from a cause/ The Tathāgata has said, "this is their cause,/ And this is their cessation"/ Thus the Great Śramaṇa teaches. – <http://www.visiblemantra.org/dharma-hetuprabhava.html> [retrieved 30.10.11]

Bodhicaryavatara<sup>7</sup>) is only the opposite means to the same end. – i.e. realisation or enjoyment either supposing the eternal duality of observer and observed or believing in their final identity of the last Reality.

THE 3<sup>rd</sup> method has been advocated: TRANSFER YOURSELF IN THE POSITION OF THE THINGS OBSERVED, eliminate desire, not by supressing artificially, but introspecting into their passing, by nature, without ascribing any value to them.

### 6<sup>th</sup> great deed:

THE REALITY OF THIS WORLD IS NOT DENIED, to use a formula which Buddha himself of course would have disliked as transgression of our limitations:

“THE EMPTY SHAPE OF TRANSITORY WORLD IS NOTHING BUT THE SHAPE OF TRUTH,”

which can never be realised so long as I strive after anything except annihilation of desire, i.e. e.g. Mukti:

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<sup>7</sup> “Śāntideva (ca. 800 BC) was the name given to an Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist philosopher-monk, known as the author of two texts, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*. These works both express the ideal of the bodhisattva – the ideal person of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The term Mahāyāna, literally “Great Vehicle,” came into use to mean the idea of attempting to become a bodhisattva (and eventually a buddha) oneself, rather than merely following the teachings set out by Siddhārtha Gautama (considered the original Buddha). This was the earliest usage of the term *mahāyāna* in Sanskrit, although even by Śāntideva’s time, understandings of what becoming a bodhisattva involved had undergone many changes; the Mahāyāna had come to be understood as a separate school rather than as a vocation (see Nattier, Jan. 2003. *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path According to the Inquiry of Ugra (Ugraparipṛcchā)*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press. Harrison, Paul. 1987. Who Gets to Ride in the Great Vehicle? Self-Image and Identity Among Followers of the Early Mahāyāna. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 10 (2): 67-89.). Both of Śāntideva’s texts explore the bodhisattva ideal as an ethical one, in that they prescribe how a person should properly live, and provide reasons for living in that way. Śāntideva’s close attention to ethics makes him relatively unusual among Indian philosophers, for whom metaphysics (or theoretical philosophy more generally) was more typically the primary concern. Śāntideva’s ethical thought is widely known, cited and loved among Tibetan Buddhists, and is increasingly coming to the attention of Western thinkers. Śāntideva’s metaphysics is of interest primarily because of its close connection to his ethics. – <http://www.iep.utm.edu/santideva/> [retrieved 30.10.11]

JOKO has expressed it perfectly:

“I DO NOT SEEK THE TRUTH,  
I DO NOT DESTROY THE ERROR,  
BECAUSE I KNOW BOTH ARE NOTHING  
BOTH ARE NO FORMS.  
THE UNFORMED IS NEVERTHELESS NOT NOTHING,  
BUT ALSO NO NOT-NOTHING.”

SHUNYATA<sup>8</sup> means:

- 1) the suchness of things is void of atma (not that things do not exist)
- 2) if DESIRE IS COMPLETELY ANNIHILATED – DUKKHA ENDS – AND THAT WHICH IS BEYOND ALL AFFIRMATIONS AND NEGATIONS – NIRVANA REMAINS. TO ASK “WHO ATTAINS NIRVANA” is as unwise as “Who SUFFERS”.

Visuddhimagga XVI.:

“Misery only does exist, [but] none [who are] miserable,  
no doer is there, naught save the deed is found.  
Nirvana is, but not the man who seeks it,  
the path exists, but not the traveller on it.”

NIRVANA is that which remains if SAMSARA i.e. Dukkha i.e. Trishna ends, it cannot be said to be or not to be, both are expressions within the 6-fold consciousness; the realm of Desire. Nobody can “understand” if, if “he” understands, **he** is “no more”, you cannot trace him anywhere as he does not exist even any more for himself.

THEREFORE THE PATH TOWARDS ELIMINATION OF DESIRE, LEADING NOBODY TO THE BEYOND, THE NIRVANA, is not purification of the chitta, because there is no “soul”, no mirror on which dust can collect.

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<sup>8</sup> Dissertation of Svāmi Sadānanda Dāsa: „Das Prajñā-Paramita-Hṛdāya-Sūtra und seine Bedeutung für die Entwicklung der Śūnyatā-Spekulation“ (1932). Cp. Appendix.

THERE IS NO SO-CALLED positive “PURPOSE”; where there is purpose, a direct object must be given, consciously or subconsciously, there is 6-consciousness-realm. Simply end of desire as such, a phenomenal and a material end, trishna having its hetu and therefore the possibility of eliminating that hetu.

### 7<sup>th</sup> great deed:

No “Beyond” or higher plane is postulated, Nirvana therefore is not to be described as the opposite to Samsara, it is rather beyond all opposites, i.e. the “ontological *ens ey tins* [ens ey tins?] of the Shunyam” is to be found here, a philosopher would say. OR to draw a conclusion which the later school of Buddhism drew: Samsara and Nirvana are different aspects of the same thing, according to our attitude (thirst or no-thirst) it is realised in two different ways<sup>9</sup>, that *means* [means?] – though in the beginning Reality as such was realised as Samsara, and at the end, after elimination of thirst, it is realised as Nirvana, Dukkha as Bliss, and the symbolic value of all its characters, empirical Shunyata hinting at the ontological Shunyata – valued and life as such gets the higher meaning as self-expression of the Buddha-nature, which though latent, is nevertheless not realised as patent so long as I am guided by desire.

Neither the world is explained away for the purpose of establishing the only and exclusive monistic existence of the ‘Absolute’ nor the calamities of a ‘theodicee’ arise: how the kindness of God is to be harmonized with the dukkha-character of the creation, why God could allow the soul to deviate, how, even in illusion, Non-Brahma can cast a veil over Brahma.

The NIRVANA is no annihilation – what could be annihilated? On the conscious plane there is only shunyam, non-atma, only the “state” after elimination of desire.

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<sup>9</sup> Cp. Husserl’s phenomenological reduction. Elimination of all prejudices (epoché/„Einklammerung”) is the presupposition for the world to show itself as it is (as phenomenon). He also introduced the concept of latency/patency (Latenz/Patenz).



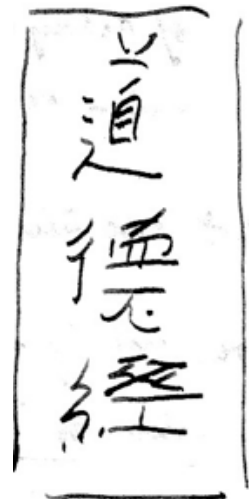
That even the highest conception of the Absolute is only the extreme opposite to the Non-Absolute is hinted at in the same later Upanishads when far beyond the nirguna-aspect of “light” the VIBHATAM, ADVAITAM, ACINTYAM, ALINGAM, SVAPRAKASHAM, ANANDAGHANAM SHUNYAM is postulated. And that which is Shunya also of the attribute Shunya that we have to suppose to be Buddha’s *Mitravan* [Mitravan?]

## LAST

THE SPIRIT WHICH ONE CAN UTTER –  
IS NOT THE ETERNAL SPIRIT,  
THE NAME YOU CAN CALL –  
IS NOT THE ETERNAL NAME.  
WITHOUT NAME –  
BEYOND CONCEPTION IS THE ORIGIN OF HEAVEN AND SKY  
NAMED –  
IT BECOMES THE MOTHER OF ALL BEINGS.

THEREFORE –  
ONLY HE WHO IS FREE FROM OBJECTS  
GRASPS SPIRITUALITY,  
HE WHO STRIVES AFTER OBJECTS,  
CATCHES HOLD OF HE COVER ONLY.

ONE ARE BOTH IN THEIR ORIGIN, YET  
DIFFERENT IN APPEARANCE.  
A SECRECY IS THIS UNION, REALLY  
A SECRECY OF ALL SECRECIES  
THE GATE TO ALL SPIRITUALITY. (1)<sup>10</sup>



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<sup>10</sup> Lao Tzu, Tao te ching, chap.1.

## 8<sup>th</sup> deed:

### FREEDOM FROM SHASTRA OR SCRIPTURE

There is no possibility to communicate Divinity to man, not even through aural conception as the logos or the Shabdabrahman of the Vedas. Mantras do not exist originally in Buddha's philosophy. Therefore also the impossibility to appreciate the Vedas and any conception of God or the denial of the possibility of his self-expression or self-revelation through the word.

Whatever we come across – it must get object of one of the 6 kinds of consciousness: if it is really spiritually, then it can never [be?] appreciated as such and all self-revelation of God is therefore completely useless.

But possible is an introspection in the psychological apparatus of man which is one of its fundamental structure wherever man lives, whatever may be his character, sukriti etc.

Here lies the the universality of the Buddha's principles:

FREEDOM FROM THIRST –

BUT NO SPECULATIVE DEFINITION OF THE FOR WHAT,  
WHICH WILL BE SELF-EFFULGENT  
AS SOON AS THIRST ceases to cast the maya veil over Reality.

## APPENDIX (by the editors)

### Shunyata in buddhist philosophy

**Nagarjuna** (c.150—c.250)

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/nagarjun/> [retrieved 30.10.11]

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP); a peer-reviewed academic resource

Often referred to as “the second Buddha” by Tibetan and East Asian Mahayana (Great Vehicle) traditions of Buddhism, Nagarjuna offered sharp criticisms of Brahminical and Buddhist substantialist philosophy, theory of knowledge, and approaches to practice. Nagarjuna’s philosophy represents something of a watershed not only in the history of Indian philosophy but in the history of philosophy as a whole, as it calls into questions certain philosophical assumptions so easily resorted to in our attempt to understand the world. Among these assumptions are the existence of stable substances, the linear and one-directional movement of causation, the atomic individuality of persons, the belief in a fixed identity or selfhood, and the strict separations between good and bad conduct and the blessed and fettered life. All such assumptions are called into fundamental question by Nagarjuna’s unique perspective which is grounded in the insight of emptiness (sunyata), a concept which does not mean “non-existence” or “nihility” (abhava), but rather the lack of autonomous existence (nihsvabhava). Denial of autonomy according to Nagarjuna does not leave us with a sense of metaphysical or existential privation, a loss of some hoped-for independence and freedom, but instead offers us a sense of liberation through demonstrating the interconnectedness of all things, including human beings and the manner in which human life unfolds in the natural and social worlds. Nagarjuna’s central concept of the “emptiness (sunyata) of all things (dharma),” which pointed to the incessantly changing and so never fixed nature of all phenomena, served as much as the terminological prop of subsequent Buddhist philosophical thinking as the vexation of opposed Vedic systems. The concept had fundamental implications for Indian philosophical models of causation, substance ontology, epistemology, conceptualizations of language, ethics and theories of world-liberating salvation, and proved seminal even for Buddhist philosophies in India, Tibet, China and Japan very different from Nagarjuna’s own. Indeed it would not be an

overstatement to say that Nagarjuna's innovative concept of emptiness, though it was hermeneutically appropriated in many different ways by subsequent philosophers in both South and East Asia, was to profoundly influence the character of Buddhist thought.

## The Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra

### The Heart Sutra in Sanskrit and English

Translated from the Sanskrit by Edward Conze

*Om namo Bhagavatyai Arya-Prajnaparamitayai!*

Homage to the Perfection of Wisdom, the Lovely, the Holy!

*Arya-Avalokitesvaro bodhisattvo gambhiram  
prajnaparamitacaryam caramano vyavalokayati sma:  
panca-skandhas tams ca svabhavasunyan pasyati sma.*

Avalokita, The Holy Lord and Bodhisattva,  
was moving in the deep course of the Wisdom which has gone beyond.  
He looked down from on high, He beheld but five heaps,  
and he saw that in their own-being they were empty.

*Iha Sariputra rupam sunyata sunyataiva rupam,  
rupan na prithak sunyata sunyataya na prithag rupam,  
yad rupam sa sunyata ya sunyata tad rupam;  
evam eva vedana-samjna-samskara-vijnanam.*

Here, Sariputra, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness;  
whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form, the same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses and consciousness.

*Iha Sariputra sarva-dharmah sunyata-laksana, anutpanna aniruddha, amala aviamala,  
anuna aparipurnah.*

Here, Sariputra, all dharmas are marked with emptiness; they are not produced or

stopped, not defiled or immaculate, not deficient or complete.

*Tasmac Chariputra sunyatayam na rupam  
na vedana na samjna na samskarah na vijñanam.  
Na caksuh-srotra-ghranajihva-kaya-manamsi.  
Na rupa-sabda-gandha-rasa-sprastavaya-dharmah.  
Na caksur-dhatur yavan na manovijnana-dhatuh.  
Na-avidya na-avidya-ksayo yavan na jara-maranam na jara-marana-ksayo.  
Na dukkha-samudaya-nirodha-marga. Na jñanam, na praptir na-apraptih.*

Therefore, Sariputra, in emptiness there is no form,  
nor feeling, nor perception, nor impulse, nor consciousness;  
No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind;  
No forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables or objects of mind;  
No sight-organ element, and so forth, until we come to:  
No mind-consciousness element;  
There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so forth, until we come to:  
there is no decay and death, no extinction of decay and death.  
There is no suffering, no origination, no stopping, no path.  
There is no cognition, no attainment and non-attainment.

*Tasmac Chariputra apraptitvad bodhisattvasya  
prajnaparamitam asritya viharaty acittavarana-h.  
Cittavarana-nastitvad atrastro  
viparyasa-atikranto nishtha-nirvana-praptah.*

Therefore, Sariputra, it is because of his non-attainmentness that a Bodhisattva,  
through having relied on the Perfection of Wisdom, dwells without thought-coverings.  
In the absence of thought-coverings he has not been made to tremble,  
he has overcome what can upset, and in the end he attains to Nirvana.

*Tryadhva-vyavasthitah sarva-buddhah prajnaparamitam-asritya-anuttaram  
samyaksambodhim abhisambuddhah.*

All those who appear as Buddhas in the three periods of time fully awake to the utmost,  
right and perfect Enlightenment because they have relied on the Perfection of Wisdom.

*Tasmaj jnatavyam: prajnaparamita maha-mantro maha-vidya-mantro "nuttara-*

*mantra" samasama-mantrah, sarva-dukkha-prasamanah, satyam amithyatvat.*

*Prajnaparamitayam ukto mantrah. Tadyatha:*

***Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhisvaha.***

*Iti prajnaparamita-hridayam samaptam.*

Therefore one should know the prajnaparamita as the great spell, the spell of great knowledge, the utmost spell, the unequalled spell, allayer of all suffering, in truth - for what could go wrong?

By the prajnaparamita has this spell been delivered. It runs like this:

**Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond, O what an awakening, all-hail!**

NOTE: All is as in Conze's translation, with one exception: "O Sariputra" is "Sariputra" here, as a matter of stylistic preference.; Conze, Edward. *Buddhist Scriptures*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959.

<http://oaks.nvg.org/heart-sutra.html> [retrieved 31.10.11]



Bodhisattvadevi (female bodhisattva) Prajnaparamita;

the buddhist goddess of transcendental wisdom, personified in a statue from 13th century Singhasari East Javanese art. The statue was discovered in Cungkup Putri ruins near Singhasari temple, Singhasari, East Java. – Photo taken by: Gunkarta Gunawan Kartapranata; Copyright: Creative Commons.