



Arahant-Bhikkhunīs, Wat Songdhammakalyani, Thailand, Photo CG

Where Does the Path Lead to?
The Presentation of the Arahant
as the Goal of the Buddha's teachings
in the Pāḷi Canon

”He who fathoms the low as well as the high in the world,
who is not moved by anything in the world,
who is peaceful and calm, who is unpressed and without longing,
he has transcended birth and old age, I say.”
Sn 1048

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Preliminary Remarks

Only sources from the Pāli Canon were used for this account of the arahant. The stories in the commentaries, which often describe the life contexts and earlier lives of the people mentioned in the Pāli Canon, are not taken into account here.

Quotations and Pāli words are written in italics.
The 6th Council edition has been used.

Reference is only made here to the Pāli Canon of the Theravāda tradition because it has formed the development of practice in Theravāda Buddhism for 2500 years.

1. Introduction

When working with the Buddha's teachings, one should also consider the goal of these teachings. Many people have an idea of an ideal human being based on their life experiences, strive for their individualised ideal and think that this should also be the goal of a teaching that strives for spiritual development, such as the Buddha's teaching. In a country where there are no examples to emulate or people who exemplify the result of a long purification process and who are confirmed by a self-awakened Buddha, as we had it in ancient India during the lifetime of the Buddha Gotama, it is easy for confused ideas to arise, ideas that do not correspond to the goal.

In MN 29, the Buddha clearly explained the goal of his teaching:

"So this holy life, bhikkhus, does not have gain, honour, and renown for its benefit, or the attainment of virtue for its benefit, or the attainment of concentration for its benefit, or knowledge and vision for its benefit. But it is this unshakeable deliverance of mind that is the goal of this holy life, its heartwood, and its end."

The unshakeable deliverance of mind is the attainment of arahantship. Knowledge and vision is a description of streamentry, the first stage of awakening. The Buddha said here that it is also not a matter of stopping there.

In MN 118 the Buddha said:

"In this Saṅgha of bhikkhus there are bhikkhus who are arahants, with decayed influxes, ..."

SN 22. 76

"To whatever extent, bhikkhus, there are abodes of beings, even up to the pinnacle of existence, these are the foremost in the world, these are the best, that is, the arahants."

The following is an attempt to present the realization of the Buddha's teachings as we can find them in a human being, according to the ancient scriptures of the Pāli Canon. Since the Pāli Canon presents the arahant in many different aspects and also describes many different people who have achieved this goal, this article does not claim to be complete.

The highest goal according to the early Buddhist scriptures of the Pāli Canon is the attainment of arahantship. Beings can realise this goal individually in their own mind. This goal is the highest of the four stages of awakening, which are attained one after the other. A being who has attained this goal is completely free from mental defilements and there is therefore no further rebirth for this being. If one strives to be free from mental defilements, it is necessary to consider this path to arahantship and the goal, because other goals are associated with mental defilements and lead to new suffering.

Today, in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, which is based on the Pāli Canon, we still have the path to the arahant in direct lineage from the Buddha Gotama. There were arahants through the Buddha Gotama during his lifetime and they still exist today through the transmission of the teachings of awakened ones from one generation to the next. At the time of the Buddha Gotama there were many arahants in India. During the lifetime of a self-awakened Buddha, many beings are born who have developed the mind in a wholesome way over many lifetimes and can therefore quickly attain the goal of the teachings. This potential becomes weaker and weaker in later generations after the lifetime of a Buddha.

Nowadays the Buddha's teachings are often distorted by focussing on worldly goals, fame and honour and other non-goal-oriented things, so that there are fewer and fewer arahants. This goal for one's practice is also becoming more and more lost to beings. The delusion is strong and beings use elements of the Buddha's teachings for the relief of worldly life without realising that this is an attitude based on attachment. Attachment was pointed out by the Buddha as an obstacle and a mental defilement, as it prevents the attainment of the goal of the Buddha's teachings and creates new suffering.

One tries to improve worldly conditions with Buddhist practices. These can be beneficial actions if they are combined with the right motivation. However, they are often associated with an unreal understanding of the four noble truths. They can, if not associated with aversion and other unwholesome mental factors such as arrogance, lead to birth in pleasant realms. But they do not fundamentally illuminate existence, as the Buddha repeatedly recommended for the realization of his teaching.

In SN 56. 42 we find the following:

“Those recluses and brahmins, bhikkhu, who do not understand as it really is:

‘This is suffering’;

‘This is the origin of suffering’;

‘This is the cessation of suffering’;

‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering’

- they delight in volitional formations (saṅkhārā) that lead to birth; they delight in volitional formations that lead to aging; they delight in volitional formations that lead to death; they delight in volitional formations that lead to sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair.

Delighting in such volitional formations, they construct volitional formations that lead to birth; they construct volitional formations that lead to aging; they construct volitional formations that lead to death; they construct volitional formations that lead to sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair.

Having constructed such volitional formations, they tumble down the precipice of birth; they tumble down the precipice of aging; they tumble down the precipice of death; they tumble down the precipice of sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. They are not freed from birth, from aging, from death, from sorrow, from lamentation, from pain, from displeasure, from despair; they are not freed from suffering, I say.”

Formations (*saṅkhārā*) arise again and again. In order to overcome formations and the desire for them, *vipassanā* must be practised. The wrong view of the good person with the attitude of wanting to create it through the Buddha’s teachings is unwholesome and therefore leads to *dukkha*, because all unwholesome things result in *dukkha*. This is what the Buddha taught. Only through direct seeing from a concentrated, purified state of mind in *vipassanā* meditation suffering can be finally overcome. Studying the scriptures and intellectual contemplation does not cut off the essential factor of suffering that lies in creating a person.

In this article, I will work out with which spiritual attributes and behaviour the arahant is described in the Pāḷi Canon and which are the essential practices to achieve this goal. The entire Pāḷi Canon actually deals with this goal of the Buddha’s teachings and we find countless passages in the Pāḷi Canon that point to this goal and are intended to lead to it. Instructions are given at all stages of mental development to attain this goal in the near or distant future. It is the task of the Pāḷi Canon with its three parts to make this goal possible.

In the Pāḷi Canon we find three types of beings who have attained the goal of *Nibbāna*.

According to the Pāḷi Canon, the entire Buddhist doctrine is only about attaining the single goal of *Nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* is the end of all mental defilements and thus the end of the cycle of existences, because existence only comes about through mental defilements. *Nibbāna* is also called deathlessness. Without mental defilements there is neither birth nor death. Any birth, any becoming of a being, no matter in which realm of existence, only comes about through craving (*lobha*). Craving (*lobha*) is an unwholesome state of mind. Since all mental defilements have been finally cut off in the arahant, and thus craving for any existence can no longer arise, rebirth no longer occurs. The Buddha taught this path out of compassion for beings, as any kind of existence is always associated with suffering (*dukkha*).

The three types of beings are:

1. The fully self-awakened Buddha, as we have him in this world cycle as the Buddha Gotama, who lived in India about 2600 years ago and to whose teachings the Pāḷi Canon goes back. There is such a self-awakened Buddha who knows the teaching and can teach it only once in a world cycle. In the Pāḷi Canon we find descriptions of self-awakened Buddhas from previous world cycles.
2. A paccekabuddha who has attained awakening through his own endeavours but cannot pass on the teachings on awakening. This being is rarely mentioned in the Pāḷi Canon.
3. The awakened one as a disciple of a self-awakened Buddha. We find this being mentioned very often in the Pāḷi Canon. The entire Pāḷi Canon consists of teachings with the aim of attaining awakening in this way and entering the final *Nibbāna* after life, where there is neither birth nor death.

All three beings are arahants.

The arahant as a disciple can also teach and lead other beings to arahantship. But the teaching cannot be found by him.

In MN 108¹ the brahmin Gopaka Moggallāna asked the venerable Ānanda the following:

"Master Ananda, is there any single bhikkhu who possesses in each and every way all those qualities that were possessed by Master Gotama, accomplished and fully awakened?"

The venerable Ānanda answered:

"There is no single bhikkhu, brahmin, who possesses in each and every way all those qualities that were possessed by the Blessed One, accomplished and fully awakened. For the Blessed One was the arouser of the unarisen path, the producer of the unproduced path, the declarer of the undeclared path; he was the knower of the path, the finder of the path, the one skilled in the path. But his disciples now abide following that path and become possessed of it afterwards."

In this description, only the arahant is described as a disciple. The abilities of a self-awakened Buddha who is the first to teach in a world cycle go far beyond this. Since the Buddha, with his extensive knowledge, could see that not all the abilities he could acquire over many lifetimes were necessary for the ultimate liberation from *dukkha*, he taught the path to arahantship out of compassion for beings. This was the goal he wished beings to achieve during his lifetime in India. We find this disciplined path described in many ways in the Pāḷi Canon. In old commentaries, we find accounts of bhikkhus, who later practised this path and attained the goal, in an explanatory manner, compared to the often brief instructions in the Pāḷi Canon.

In the West, the ideal of the arahant as the goal of the Buddha's teachings has not yet arrived.

Neither is the path taught there, nor is there any interest in it, nor are there the material prerequisites to walk this path.

Often there is an idea of a being and how that being should be, which is aspired to, either as an arahant as a disciple or as a self-awakened Buddha. In this view lies a big obstacle with unpleasant results. The whole Buddhist path to liberation is about realising that there is no being, but only the five groups of existence (*khandha*) created by craving. Since they have arisen through craving as defilement, they are associated with suffering. Only correct *vipassanā* meditation can lead to this realization and thus to the attainment of arahantship or Buddhahood. Any desire for the good, perfect person misses the goal and leads to new suffering. The point is to overcome the five aggregates of clinging through direct seeing and knowledge and not to create new ones according to one's individual desire.²

We do not find any teachings in the Pāḷi Canon that lead to Buddhahood. However, the Buddha with his special qualities is the highest ideal and worthy of worship. According to the Pāḷi Canon, the Buddha taught neither the ordained nor the non-ordained to become like the Buddha. There is a clear distinction between him as the supreme teacher with special abilities and the disciples with

¹ See also SN 22. 58

² For the wish regarding the five aggregates, see SN 22. 82.

differently developed abilities. However, it is generally said of disciples that they cannot attain all the abilities of a Buddha.³ For these reasons, only the disciple as arahant is dealt with in this article.

The Buddha's intention was to help beings to become free from the burden of birth and death as fast as possible. It was not his aim to train beings who would remain in the cycle of existence until all beings were liberated. As long as there are arahants, the teachings on liberation can be passed on by them during their lifetime.

At the time of the Buddha Gotama in India, the goal of overcoming birth and death was a widespread religious goal. Through spiritual exercises, people were able to see existence as suffering. The Buddha Gotama so had a great base and spiritual potential for his teachings. In today's Western societies with a strongly materialistic mindset, spiritual striving for liberation is hard to find. People try to turn the Buddha's teaching, which according to the Pāḷi Canon clearly has a completely different goal, into a therapy to relieve the problems of ego-building and material thinking without seeing its cause and eliminating the cause. The Buddha's teaching degenerates into a therapy between consolation and hope. Even ordination is used in many cases for ego-building and material security.

*"Hence the wise one, the world-knower,
who has reached the world's end
and lived the spiritual life,
having known the world's end, at peace,
does not desire this world or another." AN 4. 45*

3 Cf. Paṭisambhidāmagga, KN, Kap. I. 4. 5. § 208,

2. Arahant Word Explanation

The word arahant can be interpreted in various ways.

There is the verb *arahati*, which means 'worthy' or 'to be worthy'. The noun *arahant* is derived from this. An *arahant* is therefore a worthy person, a being worthy of worship.

This term already existed in pre-Buddhist times in India for honourable people, also in a secular sense. As a noun, the word arahant is the root form. The nominative case, as we find it in the Pāḷi scriptures, is *araham*, the genitive and dative case are *arahanto*. The word *arahat*, which is often used in Western languages, is Sanskrit. In English translations we often find the word saint. The following text does not use a translation.

In the Pāḷi scriptures, the word *araham* is used in connection with the teaching of a Buddha, for someone who has attained perfection in overcoming mental defilements and therefore will not be born again. For this reason, this being is worthy of veneration.

Other interpretations of the term *arahant* are given by the commentator Buddhagosa.

- He derives the word from *ārakā* with the meaning 'far from something', 'far away from something'. It is interpreted to mean that the *arahant* is far from passions.
- Another interpretation relates to the words *ari* - enemy and *hata* - slain, killed. The *arahant* has killed the spiritual defilements in the sense of enemies.
- Another explanation is the derivation of the word *arahant* from the word *ara* - wheel spoke and *hata* - slain, killed. In this sense, an *arahant* is someone who has smashed the spokes of the wheel of existence.
- Another derivation of the word *arahant* comes from the word *raho* meaning secrecy or concealment in the negative, i.e. *araho*. The *arahant* does not act secretly and does not hide anything.

An abstraction of the word *arahant* is the Pāḷi word *arahatta*, which is used in the context of becoming an *arahant* and can be translated into English as arahantship.

3. What Has to be Practised in order to Achieve Arahantship

All the instructions in the Pāḷi Canon have the ultimate goal of attaining arahantship.

But not everyone to whom the instructions are given can attain arahantship in this life.

The Buddha could see exactly what an individual still lacks in order to achieve this goal. That is why the instructions are very different and have different emphasis. They are also sometimes very short, sometimes detailed.

They are sometimes given to individuals, sometimes to a large or small group of people, to ordained and non-ordained followers, to women and men.

In the following essential aspects of the practice necessary to achieve the goal of arahantship are presented.

Perfections (*pāramī*)

In general, the attainment of arahantship requires the realization of the perfections (*pāramī*) to a great extent. The perfections for arahantship cannot be perfected in one lifetime. It is a process that extends over many lifetimes. The perfections include the three fields: Giving (*dāna*), ethics (*sīla*) and developing wisdom through meditation (*bhāvanā*). Giving and ethics are essential prerequisites for developing wisdom through meditation. Therefore, it is very important to practice on these two levels again and again if one wants to reach the highest goal of the Buddha's teachings. When these two practices, giving and ethics, have been perfected to a certain degree, the opportunity for developing wisdom in *vipassanā* meditation arises. Wisdom in the Buddhist sense arises through *vipassanā* meditation.

Four Paths of Awakening

The attainment of arahantship is the attainment of the fourth path of awakening. One must have attained the three preceding paths and their fruits. The path of arahantship is the highest. The three preceding paths are

path of streamentry - *sotāpattimagga*,
 path of once-returning - *sakadāgāmīmagga*,
 path of nonreturning - *anāgāmīmagga*.

We often find this enumeration in the Pāḷi Canon in connection with the enumeration of the members of the Saṅgha.⁴ Four pairs of beings or eight individuals are mentioned there. In the *suttā*, a distinction is made between attainment of the path and attainment of the fruit, hence the reference to eight individuals. According to the *Abhidhamma*, the experience of the fruit follows directly after the path. However, this is very short. In the *suttā*, the experience of the fruit (*phala*) refers to a longer-lasting fruit experience. This often requires further purification of the mind and a corresponding lifestyle.

The previous paths and fruits must have been practised in order to achieve arahantship. There can be much or little time between the individual paths. It depends on the practitioner's abilities. The Buddha attained all four paths in one night. However, there can also be several lifetimes between the paths, for example a maximum of seven lifetimes between streamentry and once-returning. For each path as well as for each fruit, the object of consciousness is *Nibbāna*, which means the absence of any conditioned object. The experience and consciousness that experiences *Nibbāna* becomes more subtle with each path and each path requires deeper concentration and thus preliminary purification of the mind. Arahant-fruit is the pinnacle of attainments and requires appropriate development of faculties and ethics. The arahant is described as the refined one (*sukhumālo*) among renouncers of the world.⁵

4 See for example MN 7

5 See AN 4. 88

The whole programme of practice is found in several *suttā*⁶, also given to householders, in which the Buddha explains the whole path with the conclusion:

"When he knows and sees thus, his mind is liberated from the influx of sensual desire, from the influx of becoming, and from the influx of ignorance. When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: 'Liberated.' He understands: 'Birth is finished, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more state of existence.'"

In these *suttā*, the Buddha first explains,

- how someone listens to the *dhmma* expounded by him, a self-awakened Buddha.
- He develops confidence and
- the listener leaves the dusty householder life and takes ordination.
- Then the Buddha explains a higher ethic, which includes
- humbleness towards the necessities of life,
- as well as restraint at the sense doors.
- He practises mindfulness (*sati*) during all activities, in all postures.
- He overcomes the hindrances.
- He practises four *jhānā*,
- thereby his concentrated mind becomes
 - bright,
 - free from lust,
 - free from the subtlest defilements,
 - soft,
 - wieldy,
 - stable and
 - unshakeable.
- He directs this consciousness towards the knowledge of previous births and can thus go far back into the past.
- Then he focusses his consciousness on the death and reappearance of other beings.
- Then he directs the consciousness to the four noble truths and
- to the influxes. He examines their causes, their cessation and the path that leads to their cessation.

We find this sequence again and again in the *suttā*, it contains a complex, systematic practice programme which includes stability in concentration meditation (*samatha*) as well as in insight meditation (*vipassanā*).

We also find this training programme in MN 39. After the Buddha has explained it, he describes an arahant with the standard description already mentioned:

"When he knows and sees thus, his mind is liberated from the influx of sensual desire, from the influx of becoming, and from the influx of ignorance. When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: 'Liberated.' He understands: 'Birth is finished, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more state of existence.'"

⁶ Cf. f. ex.: DN 2, MN 27, MN 39, MN 94, MN 107 u. a..

At this point, the Buddha gives a figurative comparison to this realization:

"Just as if there were a lake in a mountain recess, clear, limpid, and undisturbed, so that a man with good sight standing on the bank could see shells, gravel, and pebbles, and also shoals of fish swimming about and resting, he might think: 'There is this lake, clear, limpid, and undisturbed, and there are these shells, gravel, and pebbles, and also these shoals of fish swimming about and resting.' So too, a bhikkhu understands as it actually is: >This is dukkha.< He understands as it actually is: >This is the cause of dukkha.< He understands as it actually is: >This is the cessation of dukkha.< He understands as it actually is: >This is the path leading to the cessation of dukkha.< He understands as it actually is: >These are the influxes.< He understands as it actually is: >This is the cause of the influxes,< He understands as it actually is: >This is the cessation of the influxes.< He understands as it actually is: >This is the path leading to the cessation of the influxes.<"

"Bhikkhus, a bhikkhu such as this is called a recluse, a brahmin, one who has been washed, one who has attained to knowledge, a holy scholar, a noble one, an arahant."

"And how is a bhikkhu a recluse? He has quieted down evil unwholesome states that defile, bring renewal of being, give trouble, ripen in suffering, and lead to future birth, ageing, and death. That is how a bhikkhu is a recluse."

"And how is a bhikkhu a brahmin? He has expelled evil unwholesome states that defile ... and lead to future birth, ageing, and death. That is how a bhikkhu is a brahmin."

The removal of unwholesome things is then described in the same terms, as washed off, as recognised, as flowing away, as far removed from him. It becomes clear here that in an arahant's mind no more unwholesome things appear and that birth with its consequences can no longer occur.

Seven stages of purification

On another level, the steps leading to arahantship are presented in MN 24 The Seven Carriages - Rathavinātasuttaṃ. The bhikkhu Puṇṇa explains the steps a disciple must pass through to the venerable Sāriputta. The steps must be passed through without exception. They are compared to a king who wants to reach a destination with several carriages. Due to the limited power of the horses, he has to change carriages several times on the way. If he skips a town to change carriages, he will not be able to reach the next town. So it is with the seven stages of purification mentioned in this sutta. They are as follows:

1. *sīlavisuddhi* - purification of ethics,
2. *cittavisuddhi* - purification of consciousness (includes concentration meditation),
3. *diṭṭhivisuddhi* - purification of view,
4. *kaṅkhāvitaraṇāvisuddhi* - purification through the overcoming of doubt,
5. *maggāmaggañāṇadassanavisuddhi* - purification through the knowledge and vision of path and non-path,
6. *paṭipadāñāṇadassanavisuddhi* - purification through knowing and seeing the path of practice,
7. *ñāṇadassanavisuddhi* - purification through knowledge and vision.

It is then summarised as follows:

"So too, friend, purification of virtue is for the sake of reaching purification of mind; purification of mind is for the sake of reaching purification of view; purification of view is for the sake of reaching purification by overcoming doubt; purification by overcoming doubt is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path; purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision of the way; purification by knowledge and vision of the way is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision; purification by knowledge and vision is for the sake of reaching final Nibbāna without clinging. It is for the sake of final Nibbāna without clinging that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One."

3 steps of training

The Buddhist practice always includes three steps of practice, which we also find in the noble eightfold path:

- Ethics,
- concentration and
- wisdom.

The noble eightfold path has the goal of achieving arahantship. It is a summary of the entire practice. It is explained in many ways in the Pāḷi Canon.

It is essential to practise these three steps of practice again and again with the right motivation, namely the attainment of ultimate liberation, in order to perfect them. In this way, unwholesome kamma present in the stream of consciousness is suppressed to a large extent and cannot take effect. In regard to kamma, in the sense of the result of actions, the Buddha said the following:

"If, bhikkhus, one were to say thus: 'A person experiences kamma in precisely the same way that he created it,' in such a case there could be no living of the spiritual life and no opportunity would be seen for completely making an end of suffering. But if one were to say thus: 'When a person creates kamma that is to be experienced in a particular way, he experiences its result precisely in that way', in such a case the living of the spiritual life is possible and an opportunity is seen for completely making an end of suffering." AN 3.100

Ethics is the prerequisite for concentration, which can be developed through *samatha* meditation. Concentration is the prerequisite for wisdom, which must be developed in *vipassanā* meditation.

We find very different descriptions in the Pāḷi Canon of how arahantship was achieved. There were people who attained streamentry upon hearing the *dhamma* and then very quickly attained arahantship. But there were also people who practised systematically for a long time in order to attain arahantship. What is essential is that the faculty of wisdom must be developed to such an extent that the four noble truths are directly understood. This spiritual development process may have already taken place in previous lives and in this life it is possible to understand on a previously developed potential. This is how the Buddha himself experienced the truth. If one wants to achieve one of the four paths, systematic practice is essential. Simply waiting for it to happen will not lead to the goal. In the lifetime of a self-awakened Buddha, beings are born who have great potential to attain awakening. Only through strong wholesome kamma one is born in the lifetime of a Buddha. The potential to awaken decreases the longer a Buddha's lifetime has passed. That is why it is even more important nowadays to develop the path systematically. This means that *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation must be practised systematically in order to develop wisdom. The question of whether *samatha* meditation is necessary at all in order to achieve a path is being discussed again and again nowadays. This also depends on how strongly the wisdom faculty has already been developed in a stream of consciousness and whether there is the ability to go quickly into deep concentration in that stream of consciousness. Both can have been strongly developed in former lives. It may not have been cultivated further in the first years of this life because unwholesome kamma became effective, so that in the beginning of that life the way to meditation did not open.

In many suttā, especially in the Collection of Middle Length Discourses, we find descriptions of the entire path. These descriptions always contain four *jhānā*.

In Dhammapada verse 372, the Buddha said:

*"Without wisdom there is no jhāna,
without jhāna there is no wisdom,
He who has jhāna and wisdom,
is close to Nibbāna."*

Ethics (*sīla*)

The Buddha introduced a strict code of conduct. This too is only intended to help people to achieve the highest goal of his teachings through tamed behaviour. It contains rules regarding all aspects of life, as what material things one may possess and use. These rules allow very little. It contains rules of behaviour that the bhikkhu or bhikkhunī must follow for himself or herself, that he or she must follow towards others in the community and also rules that he or she must follow towards the non-ordained population.

However, it is clear from studying the Pāḷi Canon that these rules of behaviour are not absolutely necessary to achieve the highest goal. They are meant to make the path to the goal possible for undisciplined people. These rules of conduct were not given as a package by the Buddha, but gradually. As soon as unfavourable or conflict-causing behaviour became apparent, he issued a rule.

The Buddha only began to develop this code of behaviour twenty years after the beginning of his teaching period. At that time, there were already countless arahants, some of them attained arahantship very quickly.

This means that the eight basic precepts, known as the 8 *uposatha-sīla*, and a secluded life are sufficient to achieve the goal of arahantship. It also means that successful formal meditation does not require a shaven head and robe, but a frugal lifestyle that is not centred on sensual pleasures, renouncing clinging relationships such as partnership and family. And even if arahantship has been achieved, it is about the content of the lifestyle and the continuation of the practice and not about the outward appearance and the observance of rules that are sometimes inappropriate for today's world.

In MN 71, a discourse given to the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta, this one asked the Buddha the following:

"When this was said, the wanderer Vacchagotta asked the Blessed One:

'Master Gotama, is there any householder who, without abandoning the fetter of householdership, on the dissolution of the body has made an end of suffering?'

'Vaccha, there is no householder who, without abandoning the fetter of householdership, on the dissolution of the body has made an end of suffering.'"

The Buddha is not saying here that full ordination must be taken in order to attain arahantship and to die as an arahant. He does not say that bhikkhu or bhikkhunī ordination is a prerequisite, but that the fetter of the householder life must be abandoned. The Pāḷi Canon does not explicitly mention which fetters constitute the householder life.

There are 10 fetters (*saṃyojana*)⁷ that are gradually cut off with the attainment of the four paths:

1. personality belief (*sakkāya-ditthi*),
2. doubt (*vicchikiccā*),
3. attachment to rules and rites (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*),
4. lust for sense objects (*kāmarāga*),
5. illwill (*vyāpāda*),
6. desire for fine materiality (*rūpa-rāga*),
7. desire for the immateriality (*arūpa-rāga*),
8. conceit (*māna*),
9. restlessness (*uddhacca*),
10. ignorance (*avijjā*).

An arahant has already cut off all of these by attaining the arahant path. Therefore, a householder's life characterised by the enjoyment of sense objects, accumulation of wealth, family, sexual intercourse, is not possible anyway for one who has attained arahantship. Since the arahant has overcome all kinds of conceit and craving, he no longer accumulates material goods, a characteristic of the householder life and an expression of identification as 'mine' with external things.

⁷ See AN 9. 67, 70

In MN 99 the Buddha said:

"I praise the right way of practice on the part either of a householder or one gone forth; for whether it be a householder or one gone forth, one who has entered on the right way of practice, by reason of his right way of practice, is accomplishing the true way, the dhamma that is wholesome."

For several centuries it was not possible for women to take bhikkhunī ordination. However, there were women who attained arahantship by living according to the eight precepts.

With a way of life that is characterised by living in the company of the unawakened, being busy with worldly things such as trade, business and accumulating wealth, it is not possible to attain arahantship, nor can an arahant live like this. However, formal ordination is not necessary to attain arahantship or to live as an arahant. Life must be characterised by restraint at the sense doors, celibacy and seclusion.

There were several women in Thailand in the last century who have achieved arahantship by observing the 8 Sīla rules. They have been recognised as arahants and have lived as arahants.



Khun Mae Bunruean (1895 - 1964) is very well known. She is said to have attained arahantship as a non-ordained woman. She is highly revered in Thailand. Khun Mae Bunruean is said to have achieved high attainments in meditation. As we can see in the picture, she had shaved her head but was wearing lay clothing.

*"He who is adorned but walks in the right way,
peaceful, tamed, fortified, living holy,
has given up harming all beings,
this one is a brāhmin⁸,
this one is a world-renouncer, this one is a bhikkhu."* Dhṛ 142

In AN 3. 71 the Buddha explains how a noble disciple imitates the arahants on a Buddhist holiday with regard to their ethics. Only the eight rules that an arahant observes throughout his life are mentioned there:

1. *"As long as they live the arahants abandon and abstain from the destruction of life; with the rod and weapon laid aside, conscientious and kindly, they dwell with compassion for all living beings."*

2. *"As long as they live the arahants abandon and abstain from taking what is not given; they take only what is given, waiting for the given, not stealing, they dwell as the purified."*

3. *"As long as they live the arahants abandon sexual activity and observe celibacy, living apart, abstaining from sexual intercourse, the common person's practice."*

⁸ Pali Text Society Pali – English Dictionary, edited by T. W. Rhys Davids, Bristol 2015, p. 443 "In the Buddhist terminology also used for a man leading a pure, sinless & ascetic life, often even syn. with arahant." Vgl. MN 39

4. *"As long as they live the arahants abandon and abstain from false speech; they speak truth, adhere to truth; they are trustworthy and reliable, no deceivers of the world."*
5. *"As long as they live the arahants abandon and abstain from liquor, wine, and intoxicants, the basis for heedlessness."*
6. *"As long as they live the arahants eat once a day, abstaining from eating at night and from food outside the proper time."*
7. *"As long as they live the arahants abstain from dancing, singing, instrumental music, and unsuitable shows, and from adorning and beautifying themselves by wearing garlands and applying scents, cosmetics and unguents."*
8. *"As long as they live the arahants abandon and abstain from the use of high and luxurious beds; they lie down on a low resting place, either a small bed or a straw mat."*

In AN 3. 87, as in many places, the Buddha emphasised that one who has attained arahantship must be perfect in the three trainings: Ethics (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). However, regarding the training rules he said:

"Another bhikkhu fulfills virtuous behaviour, concentration, and wisdom. He falls into offences in regard to the lesser and minor training rules (khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni) but he also rises up from it. For what reason? Because I have not said that he is incapable of this. But in regard to those training rules that are fundamental to the spiritual life, in conformity with the spiritual life, his behaviour is constant and steadfast. Having undertaken the training rules, he trains in them. And he attains and abides in the liberation of mind, which is liberation by wisdom, after the decay of the influxes, after having realised direct knowledge by himself while seeing things."

In MN 73 the question of who has attained arahantship is taken up again by the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta⁹.

The wandering ascetic Vacchagotta asked the Buddha:

"Is there any bhikkhu other than Master Gotama, a disciple of Master Gotama, who, after the decay of the influxes, has attained and abides in the liberation of mind that is liberation through wisdom which is without influxes, after having realised direct knowledge by himself while seeing things?"

"There are not only one hundred, Vaccha, or two or three or four or five hundred, but far more bhikkhus, my disciples, who after the decay of the influxes enter upon and abide in the deliverance of mind that is deliverance through wisdom which is without influxes, after having realised direct knowledge by themselves while seeing things."

"Is there any bhikkhunī other than the bhikkhus and Master Gotama, a disciple of Master Gotama, who, after the decay of the influxes, has attained and abides in the liberation of mind that is liberation through wisdom which is without influxes, after having realised direct knowledge by herself while seeing things?"

"There are not only one hundred ... or five hundred, but far more bhikkhunīs, my disciples, who after the decay of the influxes enter upon and abide in the deliverance of mind that is deliverance through wisdom which is without influxes, after having realised direct knowledge by themselves while seeing things."

The question of whether devotees (*upāsaka/upāsikā*) have also attained final liberation is not asked. The wandering ascetic Vacchagotta then asked whether devotees who are clothed in white and lead a celibate life have attained the third path, nonreturning.

The wandering ascetic Vacchagotta accepts ordination from the Buddha after a four-month waiting time. Just two weeks after his ordination, he attains nonreturning. He again receives teachings from the Buddha and soon attains arahantship. In addition, the Buddha says of him that he has attained the threefold knowledge and great supernatural power (*mahiddhi*). As a wandering ascetic, Vacchagotta discussed philosophical questions with the Buddha. After he had attained nonreturn-

9 See above MN 71

ing, the Buddha again instructed him to practise *samatha* and *vipassanā*. He then attained the threefold knowledge and arahantship.

With the Vinaya, the ideal behaviour was to be attained so that the Buddha's disciples could enter into the liberation of mind at any time as desired, because this attainment is dependent on behaviour, as stated in MN 41:

"If, householders, one who observes conduct in accordance with the dhamma, righteous conduct, should wish: 'Oh, that by realising for myself with direct knowledge while seeing things I might enter upon and abide in the deliverance of mind that is deliverance by wisdom that are without influxes after the decay of the influxes!' it is possible that, by realising for himself with direct knowledge while seeing things he will enter upon and abide in the deliverance of mind that is deliverance by wisdom that are without influxes after the decay of the influxes. Why is that? Because he observes conduct in accordance with the dhamma, righteous conduct."

Samatha-vipassanā

In MN 52, the venerable Ānanda, at the request of the householder Dasama, explains eleven paths that lead to arahantship.

"Here, householder, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by initial and sustained application, with joy and happiness born of seclusion. He considers this and understands it thus: 'This first jhāna is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' Standing upon that, he attains the decay of the influxes. ...

This is one thing proclaimed by the Blessed One who knows and sees, accomplished and fully awakened, wherein if a bhikkhu abides diligent, ardent, and resolute, his unliberated mind comes to be liberated, his not broken down influxes come to break down, and he attains the supreme security from bondage that he had not attained before."

The other ten paths are the other three *jhānā*, the four Brahmavihārā (kind benevolence, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity), the attainment of the base of infinite space, the attainment of the base of infinite consciousness and the attainment of the base of nothingness. These attainments are also observed as impermanent. This can lead to the decay of the influxes. Thus the practice of concentration states is described here as absorptions and the *vipassanā* meditation based on the achieved concentration, in which the factors involved in body and mind are analysed as impermanent and conditionally arisen. This means that arahantship can be attained starting from any *jhāna*.

In MN 64 the Buddha also explains the attainment of the decay of the influxes on the basis of seven attainments. The seven attainments are the four finematerial *jhānā* and the first three immaterial attainments. However, he explains *vipassanā* meditation more in detail:

"Whatever exists therein of feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness, he sees those states

- *as impermanent,*
- *as dukkha,*
- *as a disease,*
- *as a tumour,*
- *as a thorn,*
- *as a calamity,*
- *as an affliction,*
- *as alien,*
- *as disintegrating,*
- *as void,*
- *as not self.*

He turns his mind away from those states and directs it towards the deathless element thus: 'This is the peaceful, this is the sublime, that is, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all attachments, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna.' Standing upon that, he attains the decay of the influxes."¹⁰

The steps of *vipassanā* meditation up to arahantship are described in more detail in several suttā of the Khandhasaṃyutta, as well as of the Saḷāyatanaṃyutta in Saṃyuttanikāya. *Vipassanā* meditation involves analysing compact phenomena into their individual components and recognising the things found out in this way as impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless. This requires stable, good concentration.

It is said for example in SN 22. 12., 13., 14:

"Bhikkhus, form is impermanent, unsatisfactory, selfless.

Feeling, perception, volitional formations, consciousness is impermanent, unsatisfactory, selfless. Seeing thus, bhikkhus, the instructed noble disciple becomes disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with volitional formations, disenchanted with consciousness. Being disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion he is liberated. When he is liberated there comes the knowledge:

'Liberated.'

He understands:

'Finished is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more state of existence.'"

We find the same instructions regarding the six internal and external sense bases in the Saḷāyatanaṃyutta. For example, in SN 35. 28 we find the Buddha's instructions concerning the six internal and external sense bases (eye - form, ear - sound, ...), concerning the corresponding consciousness (eye-consciousness ...), concerning the corresponding contact (*phassa*), the corresponding feeling. He describes these things as burning. They burn with the fire of lust, aversion, ignorance, with the fire of birth, aging, death, with the fire of worry, lamentation, physical pain, mental discomfort, despair. Based on this detailed and vivid description, one thousand bhikkhus attained arahantship during the discourse.

Also in SN 35. 75 we find the story of a certain bhikkhu who very quickly attained arahantship, namely during a teaching by the Buddha to him on the six sense bases, the corresponding consciousness, contact and feeling, and their impermanent, unsatisfactory, selfless nature.

In SN 22. 15. and other suttā the process of insight regarding selflessness is described in more detail:

"What is selfless should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom:

'This is not mine,

this I am not,

this is not my self.'

, Seeing thus ... He understands ... there is no more state of being.'"

And then, with continued practice, one sees that the cause of the five groups of existence is also impermanent, unsatisfactory, selfless:

"Form (feeling, perception, formations, consciousness), bhikkhus, is selfless. The cause and condition for the arising of consciousness is also selfless. As form has originated from what is selfless, how could it be self?" SN 22. 20

¹⁰ See below AN 9. 36

There are different groups of the things in body and mind.

- The shortest are the five groups of existence/aggregates (*khandha*).
- The practice with the six internal and six external sense bases is more in detail.
- Furthermore there is the same type of practice as presented here regarding *vipassanā* meditation with the faculties. This is described, for example, in SN 35. 154. This can also lead to arahantship. The corresponding things in body and mind should be analysed in the three times past, future and present. (cf. SN 35. 186 to 227)

In SN 35. 153 the Buddha explains that arahantship can be attained by another method than by trust,
by inclination,
by hearsay,
by reflection,
by a view that is accepted through conviction,
namely by examining the 6 sense bases and clearly and mindfully recognising lust, aversion and delusion in relation to the objects when these unwholesome states of mind arise. And also through clear, mindful knowing when these mental states do not arise. This is wisdom. It requires a good and clear awareness of one's own state of mind and analysing one's own thoughts without deluding oneself.

In SN 35. 91, the Buddha explains how one can attain arahantship through the right contemplation of the groups of existence (*khandha*), sense bases and elements. One should not have concepts and one should not see individual things as 'I' or 'mine'. By analysing the individual groups that make up existence, the idea of a person is already taken away. In the sutta, the sequence of realization is described in such a way that by not forming ideas about things in body and mind and by not regarding them as 'mine', one does not become attached to them. If one is not attached to things, one does not become agitated. If one is not agitated, one can attain *Nibbāna* up to the goal of arahantship and there will be no new birth.

Samatha achievements

It is often discussed whether *jhāna* attainments are necessary for the attainment of arahantship. As has already been explained on the basis of the entire path, which we find repeatedly in the suttā, the four fine-material *jhānā* are always listed in this sequence. In the described sutta MN 52 and MN 64 and several other suttā, the three immaterial attainments of the realms of infinite space, infinite consciousness and nothingness are also listed. Attaining the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception is only sometimes listed. After attaining the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, the perception is so subtle that individual mental factors can not be differentiated anymore. However, the arising and passing away of groups can be observed in a very subtle way. Therefore, this attainment is not suitable at all stages of the insight process.

In AN 9. 36 Jhāna Sutta - Jhānasuttaṃ the Buddha explains that starting from any *jhāna*, *vipassanā* can be practised and the influxes can decay.

"On the basis of the first jhāna, bhikkhus, I teach the decay of the influxes; also on the basis of the second, third, and fourth jhāna I teach the decay of the influxes. Also on account of the base of infinite space, the base of infinite consciousness, the base of nothingness, the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, the cessation of perception and feeling, I teach the decay of the influxes.

I have said, bhikkhus, that I teach the decay of the influxes on the base of the first jhāna. But with regard to what did I say this?

Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu enters the first jhāna. Whatever there is of form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness, all these things he observes as impermanent and unsatisfactory,

as a disease, as a sore, as a thorn, as a misfortune, as suffering, as alien, as something that dissolves, as empty, as not-self.

He turns his mind away from these states and thus directs it to the deathless element: 'This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all activities, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna'.

On this basis he attains the decay of the influxes.¹¹

The question of whether higher *jhānā* were practised before the first *jhāna* for greater concentration and purification of the mind remains unanswered here. In many suttā, the four fine-material *jhānā* are a standard requirement.

In AN 3. 75 Abhaya, a Licchavi, asks the venerable Ānanda what path the Buddha taught for overcoming suffering. Ānanda then explains three steps of purification:

Ethics based on vinaya rules,
four *jhānā*,

When the bhikkhu is perfect in ethics and concentration, he attains the decay of the influxes and can then dwell in the influx-free liberation of mind, which is liberation through wisdom.

The attainment of supernatural worldly powers (*lokiyā abhiññā*), such as magical powers, divine ear, reading the minds of others, divine eye, recollection of previous lives, is possible both with the four finematerial *jhānā* (cf. DN 2) and with the four immaterial attainments. But these worldly supernatural powers are not necessary for arahantship and do not necessarily arise with the attainment of arahantship. We find statements on this in SN 12. 70. In this sutta, the bhikkhu Susīma, who came from another religious group, asked a number of bhikkhus who proclaimed the attainment of arahantship whether they had attained worldly supernatural powers and the immaterial attainments. They replied that they had not attained these. They said they were liberated by wisdom (*paññāvimuttā*). However, nowhere in this sutta did they say that they had not attained the four finematerial *jhānā*. Susīma was astonished. He went to the Buddha and told him about the conversation with the bhikkhus. The Buddha explained to him that first comes insight into the states of things (*dhammatthitiñāna*) and then the attainment of *Nibbāna*. The Buddha explained this statement to Susīma in the form of question and answer about the impermanence, the unsatisfactoriness and the selflessness of the five groups of existence, as well as their conditional arising.

Interaction of *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation

In AN 4. 170, the venerable Ānanda explains four paths which had been followed by those who have attained arahantship. His explanations refer to the interaction of *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation.

"Friends, whatever bhikkhu or bhikkhuni has declared the attainment of arahantship in my presence has done so by these four paths, by one or another one among them. What four? .

(1) Here, a bhikkhu develops insight (*vipassanā*) preceded by concentration (*samatha*).

As he is developing insight preceded by concentration, the path (*magga*) is generated.

He pursues this path; develops it, and cultivates it.¹²

As he is pursuing, developing, and cultivating this path, the fetters (*saṃyojana*) are abandoned and the underlying tendencies (*anusayā*) are uprooted.

(2) Again, a bhikkhu develops concentration preceded by insight.

As he is developing concentration preceded by insight, the path is generated.

He pursues this path, develops it, and cultivates it.

11 See above MN 64

12 A distinction has to be made between two types of path (*magga*): the path of awakening as the arahant path and the noble eightfold path of the arahant. The path of awakening can only be experienced once, but the eightfold path at the respective level of the corresponding path of awakening can and should be practised again and again. The noble eightfold path is practised on a different level for each of the four awakening paths, so it is not the same for the stream-enterer as for the arahant.

As he is pursuing, developing, and cultivating this path, the fetters are abandoned and the underlying tendencies are uprooted.

(3) Again, a bhikkhu develops concentration and insight in conjunction.

As he is developing concentration and insight in conjunction, the path is generated.

He pursues this path, develops it, and cultivates it. As he is pursuing, developing, and cultivating this path, the fetters are abandoned and the underlying tendencies are uprooted.

(4) Again, a bhikkhu's mind is seized by restlessness about the dhamma. But there comes an occasion when his mind becomes internally steady, composed, unified, and concentrated.

Then the path is generated in him.

He pursues this path, develops it, and cultivates it. As he is pursuing, developing, and cultivating this path, the fetters are abandoned and the underlying tendencies are uprooted.”

In Paṭisambhidāmagga¹³ these four ways of combining *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation are explained in more detail.

With the first type, one first develops concentration and then insight. Concentration (*samādhi*) is first generally described as overcoming the hindrances, as well as four *jhānā*, four immaterial bases, ten kasīṇa, with which four *jhānā* are possible, ten contemplations, with which both access concentration and *jhānā* concentration are possible, ten corpse contemplations, with which the first *jhānā* is possible, 32 contemplations concerning the in-and-out breath, with which four *jhānā* are possible (cf. 1. 32 § 80, 81). Thus concentration can be developed both with access concentration and with full concentration with the four finematerial *jhānā* or with the immaterial attainments. Then *vipassanā* is practised with all the factors that are involved by practising each of the *samatha* objects. *Vipassanā* is described as seeing things as impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless.

It is described then that in this manner the path (*magga*) will be developed. The word path (*magga*) can have different meanings, such as the path of streamentry and the three further stages of awakening, the noble eightfold path or the *vipassanā* path as the stages of insight. As can be seen from the explanation, the noble eightfold path is meant here. If this path is well developed by repeated practice, the awakening path occurs as streamentry, once-returning, nonreturning or arahantship.

It is then described which fetters and latent tendencies are finally overcome with the individual stages of awakening.

In the second type of practice, *vipassanā* meditation is first practised by seeing things as impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless, and through these contemplations, concentration arises. *Samatha* meditation reaches its peak at the moment of awakening, as the description says, because then one-pointedness of consciousness and non-distraction arise. It should be noted here, however, that access to *vipassanā*, the seeing of things as impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless, cannot be practised without *samatha*. There must therefore be some kind of concentration meditation that leads to *vipassanā*. In this case, this seems to be access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*), because the culmination of concentration, the overcoming of hindrances and the attainment of one-pointedness of consciousness and non-distraction, is only achieved at the awakening path moment. In order to see the impermanence, the unsatisfactoriness, the selflessness of things, the mind first has to be purified of the hindrances through concentration. This concentration can also be achieved through changing objects and momentary concentration according to the *satipaṭṭhāna* method, which is very common nowadays. Direct access to *vipassanā* can also be present with continuous practice for one of the higher paths after streamentry has been achieved. If one has systematically developed concentration with *samatha* before streamentry, the special development of concentration is not necessary for the higher paths when there is uninterrupted practice after streamentry, so that the previously achieved level of concentration and the associated purification of mind can be maintained through pure *vipassanā* meditation.

The object, which are the five groups of existence (*khandha*) is at the awakening pathmoment abandoned, what means that the mind no longer takes the previously analysed objects as its ob-

13 Cf. Paṭisambhidāmagga, KN, Yuganaddhavagga, Yuganaddhakatthā

ject, but abandons them and takes *Nibbāna*, the end of body and mind, as its object. The path and fruit moments are absorptions into the object *Nibbāna*. This full concentration (*appana samādhi*) follows successful *vipassanā* meditation, which is why here the sequence of steps of practice is first referred to as *vipassanā* and then as *samatha*.

In contrast to the first type, the *vipassanā* meditation in this second type is instructed in much more detail. For the practice with preceding *samatha* meditation, *vipassanā* is practised only with the factors included therein, because it is said: "*When one realises the things that have arisen there (tatta) ...*"

In the third type, where concentration and insight meditation are developed together as a pair, this paired practice is only described as simultaneous. Only the path moment is described here under different aspects. At the path moment, which lasts only one moment, *samatha* and *vipassanā* reach their culmination simultaneously. This sequence can happen if the practice is not abandoned after reaching one path and the higher paths arise in very quick succession.

In developing systematic *vipassanā* meditation, practising in pairs means first practising a *jhāna* and then practising *vipassanā* with the factors involved in body and mind, progressing from one attainment to the next. However, this type of practice is not explained in this section. This change from *jhāna* to *vipassanā* after each attainment is a prerequisite for achieving the highest attainment mentioned in the Pāḷi Canon, the cessation of perception and feeling. It is therefore a fundamental technique to practise *samatha* and *vipassanā* in this paired manner systematically. If one wants to attain the two higher paths with its special fruits of the *dhmma*, this method is indispensable.

The fourth type deals only with the subtle mental defilements during *vipassanā* meditation. These are pleasant mental factors that occur during *vipassanā* meditation when the *vipassanā* knowledge is not yet mature, but is still tender at the beginning. They are defilements because the mind is attached to them due to their pleasant nature and does not continue with the contemplation of the three universal characteristics. When these defilements are overcome, the eightfold path can be developed, the four paths can be attained and the fetters and latent tendencies can be successively and finally cut off. It is therefore specifically described here how concentration and *vipassanā* knowledge already attained can be pursued. The so-called *vipassanā* impurities listed here actually only occur before the first path of streamentry.

To summarise, *vipassanā* meditation is not possible without preparatory concentration, it can be full concentration with *jhāna* attainments or access concentration or the development of concentration with the *satipaṭṭhāna* method. The purification of mind and thus also the calming of the mind is a necessary prerequisite for being able to see the three universal characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness. From path to path up to arahantship, ever greater concentration and thus purification of the mind is necessary in order to see ever more subtle structures in body and mind and to abandon attachment to any existence without remainder.

The practice of the first five bhikkhus

In his second discourse SN 22. 59¹⁴ The Characteristics of the Non-Self - Anattalakkhaṇasuttaṃ the Buddha explained the *vipassanā* practice in detail to his first disciples.

At the end of the sutta it is said:

"And while this discourse was being spoken, the consciousness (citta) of the bhikkhus of the group of five was liberated from the influxes by non-clinging."

We also find this sutta in the Vinaya Pitaka, Mahāvagga I. 6, where it is said at the end of the sutta: "*At that time there were six saints in the world.*" The first disciples of the Buddha, who were the bhikkhus of the group of five, and the Buddha himself are these six saints (arahants).

14 In MN 22 The Simile of the Snake the same practice is instructed.

The Buddha asked the bhikkhus about the five groups of existence as follows:

”*Bhikkhus, what do you think? Is form (feeling, perception, formations, consciousness) permanent or impermanent?*”

’Impermanent, venerable sir.’

’Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?’

’Suffering venerable sir.’

’Is that which is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change suitable to be regarded in this way: >This is mine, this I am, this is my self<?’

’No, venerable sir.’

’Therefore, bhikkhus, any kind of form (feeling, perception, formations, consciousness)

- whether past, future or present,*
- whether internally or externally,*
- coarse or subtle,*
- inferior or superior,*
- far or near,*

all form should be seen with correct wisdom as it really is:

>This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.<”

He then continues:

”Seeing thus, an instructed noble disciple becomes disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with formations, disenchanted with consciousness. When he is disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate, dispassionate he becomes liberated. When he is liberated, he has the knowledge:

>Liberated.<

He understands:

*>Finished is birth, the holy life has been lived,
what had to be done has been done,
there is no more state of existence.<”*

Vipassanā practice is thus thoroughly instructed here with regard to the five aggregates and in eleven ways. When practised in this manner, the highest goal of the Buddha’s teachings according to the Pāḷi Canon is to attain arahantship.

The same practice instruction regarding the five aggregates and their three universal characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and selflessness (*anatta*) can be found in many suttā, such as SN 22. 12 to 14, with the same result, in the same words as described here, namely the attainment of arahantship. Correct *vipassanā* meditation is therefore an indispensable prerequisite for the attainment of arahantship. It depends on the person’s ability how long and how intensively *vipassanā* has to be practised in order to attain the goal.

Further instructions

In SN 14. 37 the Buddha emphasises that the elements in *vipassanā* meditation must be understood in order to achieve arahantship:

“But, bhikkhus, those recluses and brahmins who understand as they really are the origin and the passing away, the gratification, the danger, and the escape in the case of these four elements: these I consider to be recluses among recluses and brahmins among brahmins, and these venerable ones, by realizing it for themselves with direct knowledge, through seeing the dhamma enter and dwell in the goal of recluseship and the goal of brahminhood.”

In many other places, the Buddha gives individual instructions that are either long and detailed or short, depending on the listener.¹⁵

¹⁵ Other short, individual instructions for practice according to the five aggregates, which quickly lead to arahantship, can be found in SN 22. 63 (topic: attachment), SN 22. 64 (topic: conceit), SN 22. 65 (topic: rejoice),

To summarise, it can also be said that only through correct *vipassanā* meditation arahantship can be achieved. The duration of the practice depends on the understanding of the individual and this in turn depends on the *pāramī* already accumulated.

The widespread assumption of uninstructed beings that one can put an end to suffering by creating the perfect person or finding the true self or by intellectually acquiring knowledge is in no way to be found in the Pāli Canon.

In AN 4. 175 the venerable Sāriputta answered the venerable Upavāṇa's questions about this clearly. The bhikkhu Upavāṇa asked Sāriputta whether one could put an end to suffering through knowledge (*vijjā*). Sāriputta answered in the negative. He further asked whether one could then put an end to suffering through behaviour (*carāṇenantakaro*). Sāriputta also answered this question in the negative. Sāriputta explained that neither by knowledge nor by behaviour alone does one give up attachment. And without abandoning attachment, one cannot put an end to suffering. Only those who have perfect behaviour and see things as they are can put an end to suffering. Those who do not have perfect behaviour cannot see things as they are. Only with a focussed mind one can see things as they are in *vipassanā* meditation, namely as impermanent (*anicca*), as unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) and without a self (*anatta*).

Dependant Origination – Paṭiccasamuppāda

In SN 12. 13 the Buddha explains that conditioned origination has to be understood:

“But, bhikkhus, those recluses and brahmins

who understand aging-and-death, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation; who understand birth ... volitional formations, their origin, their cessation, and the way leading to their cessation:

these I consider to be recluses among recluses and brahmins among brahmins,

and these venerable ones, by realizing it for themselves with direct knowledge, through seeing the dhamma enter and dwell in the goal of recluseship and the goal of brahminhood.”

The practice of dependant origination belongs to the purification stage Kaṅkhāvitaraṇavisuddhi - purification through the overcoming of doubt - mentioned in MN 24. We see in the Pāli Canon, using the example of the venerable Channa¹⁶, that *vipassanā* meditation cannot lead to the goal without the practice of dependant origination, since even with the seeing of things as impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless, an attachment to an I can still remain if the causes of things are not seen and understood directly.

Vipassanā based on the six groups of six

Detailed instructions on *vipassanā* meditation and parts of dependant origination can also be found in MN 148 The Six Groups of Six - Chachakkasuttaṃ. Through this teaching of the Buddha, sixty bhikkhus were able to attain the goal of the teaching, as it is said at the end of the sutta:

“Now while this discourse was being spoken, the consciousness of sixty bhikkhus was liberated from the influxes through non-attachment.”

In this discourse, the Buddha explains the steps of *vipassanā* meditation in the following way:

“The six internal sensebases should be understood.

The six external sensebases should be understood.

The six classes of consciousness should be understood.

The six classes of contact should be understood.

The six classes of feeling should be understood.

The six classes of craving should be understood.”

SN 22. 66, 67, 68, 69, 71, 72 (topic: overcoming desire by contemplating impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, selflessness),

SN 22. 70 (topic: overcoming the desire for that which leads to defilement)

¹⁶ Cf. SN 22. 90

Understanding implies that an analysis of the six sense bases with the corresponding consciousness, the corresponding contact, the corresponding feeling, with the corresponding reaction as craving should be practised. One needs therefore the ability to precisely find these phenomena in body and mind. Likewise, the Buddha instructs to examine the conditionalities, namely dependant on eye and form consciousness conditionally (*paṭicca*) arises, how contact arises conditionally through the meeting of eye, form and eye consciousness. Further, the arising of feeling should be seen as conditioned by contact (*phassapaccayā vedanā*). And then the important step of conditioned arising that leads to new suffering (*dukkha*) should be analysed, namely how craving arises through feeling (*vedanāpaccayā taṇhā*). At this stage, the individual components are analysed and their conditioned arising is seen. Then one should find out that these individual components cannot be assigned to a self, because they arise and pass away. The arising and passing away of the individual components must therefore be observed in order to come to the realization that these individual components are not a self or a compact person.

The method is centred by the Buddha on practice, because each individual part is enumerated by the Buddha and with each individual part the whole process is described to find out that it cannot be a self. The listening bhikkhus can therefore check the statement during the discourse with practice instructions through their *vipassanā* meditation. Of course, this requires very good concentration.

Again with all the individual components, the Buddha then explains how the wrong view of a person (*sakkāyasamudayagāminī*) arises with these individual components. When one identifies with them as: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self' and does not analyse them, the view of a compact person arises.

He then explains the path that leads to the cessation of personality. One regards all the individual parts under investigation as: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self'. This view comes about as a result of the previous detailed examination with the result that all components are impermanent.

The Buddha then explains how latent tendencies are strengthened:

"When one is touched by a pleasant feeling, if one delights in it, welcomes it, and remains holding to it, then the underlying tendency to lust lies within one. When one is touched by a painful feeling, if one sorrows, grieves and laments, weeps beating one's breast and becomes distraught, then the underlying tendency to aversion lies within one. When one is touched by a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, if one does not understand as it actually is the origination, the disappearance, the gratification, the disadvantage, and the escape in regard to that feeling, then the underlying tendency to ignorance lies within one. Bhikkhus, that one shall here and now make an end of suffering without abandoning the underlying tendency to lust for pleasant feeling, without abolishing the underlying tendency to aversion towards painful feeling, without extirpating the underlying tendency to ignorance in regard to neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, without abandoning ignorance and arousing true knowledge this is impossible."

However, if one overcomes the latent tendencies in regard to feelings, ignorance can be overcome and knowledge arises through seeing things.

Finally, the Buddha mentions the further stages of the insight process:

When the learned noble disciple sees things this way, he becomes disenchanted with them.

When he is disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate.

When he is dispassionate, he becomes liberated.

"When he is liberated, he has the knowledge:

>Liberated.<

He understands:

*>Finished is birth, the holy life has been lived,
what had to be done has been done,
there is no more state of existence.<"*

Since the Buddha speaks of the noble disciple (*ariyasāvako*), the listeners are beings who have already had at least streamentry.

Requisites of awakening (*bodhipakkhiya*)

In addition to the individual steps of three trainings, as described in the noble eightfold path, it is important to develop certain mental qualities. The Buddha taught these in groups with different emphasis. There are a total of 37 qualities that are referred to as requisites of awakening (*bodhipakkhiya*).¹⁷ These include:

- 4 foundations of mindfulness - 4 *satipaṭṭhāna*
- 4 right efforts - 4 *sammappadhānā*
- 4 four bases for spiritual power - 4 *iddhipādā*
- 5 faculties - 5 *indriyāni*
- 5 powers - 5 *balāni*
- 7 factors of awakening - 7 *bojjhaṅgā*
- noble 8-fold path - *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*

The Buddha explained that one need not ask oneself how much of the influxes has already decayed and how much has yet to decay. If one practises *vipassanā* with devotion and develops these 37 things, eventually arahantship will be attained. If practised correctly, the influxes decay like a ship's rope that is exposed to water for a long time and rots and decays. There is a chapter in the Saṃyuttanikāya for each of these 37 requisites that lead to awakening. In each chapter there is a story of bhikkhus who attained arahantship through the practice of one of these groups.

It is said there repeatedly:

"He understands:

*>Finished is birth, the holy life has been lived,
what had to be done has been done,
there is no more state of existence.<*"

Regarding the five faculties, there is a series of suttā in the Indriyasamṃyutta where the Buddha says the following about developing the five faculties:

"Bhikkhus, one who has completed and fulfilled these five faculties is an arahant. If they are weaker than that, one is a non-returner; if they are weaker than that, one is a once-returner; if they are still weaker, one is a stream-enterer; if they are weaker than that, one is a dhamma-follower; if they are still weaker, one is a faith-follower."

"Thus, bhikkhus, due to a difference in faculties there is a difference in fruits; due to a difference in fruits there is a difference among persons."

"Thus, bhikkhus, one who activates them fully succeeds fully; one who activates them partly succeeds partly. The five faculties are not without fruits, I say, bhikkhus." SN 48. 12 to 14

These statements about the five faculties can also be applied to the other groups of requisites of awakening (*bodhipakkhiya dhamma*).

The five faculties in regard to arahantship are described in SN 48. 178:

"Bhikkhus, there are these five higher fetters. What five? Lust for finematerial form (rūpa-rāga), lust for the formless (arūpa-rāga), conceit (māna), restlessness (uddhacca), ignorance (avijjā). These are the five higher fetters. The five spiritual faculties are to be developed for direct knowledge of these five higher fetters, for the full understanding of them, for the utter decay of them, for the abandoning of them.

*What five? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu develops the faculty of faith ... the faculty of wisdom, which has as its final goal the removal of lust, the removal of aversion, the removal of delusion."*¹⁸

¹⁷ We find all 37 listed in MN 77 The Greater Discourse to Sakuludāyin - Mahāsakuludāyisuttaṃ.

¹⁸ We find the words in SN 50. 54, SN 50. 108 regarding the five powers, in SN 49. 54 regarding the four right endeavours.

Regarding the four bases for spiritual power (*iddhipādā*) it is said in SN 51. 7:

“Bhikkhus, whatever bhikkhus in the past, by the decay of the influxes through seeing the dhamma, entered and dwelt in the liberation of mind without influxes, the liberation by wisdom, realizing it for themselves with direct knowledge, all did so because they had developed and cultivated the four bases for spiritual power.” [also regarding future, present]

Seven factors of awakening

In MN 146, the venerable Nandaka explains to the bhikkhunīs, among other things, the seven awakening factors. Their development leads to full awakening:

“Sisters, there are these seven factors of awakening. Through their development and frequent practice, a bhikkhu can realise direct knowledge through seeing the things and enter and abide in the liberation of mind, the liberation by wisdom that is free from influxes with the decay of the influxes. What are the seven? Sisters, here a bhikkhu develops the awakening factor of mindfulness, which is supported by seclusion, dispassion and cessation and ripens in relinquishment. He develops the awakening factor of analysing things, which is supported by seclusion, dispassion, and cessation ... He develops the awakening factor of energy, ... He develops the awakening factor of joy, ... He develops the awakening factor of tranquility, ... He develops the awakening factor of concentration, ... He develops the awakening factor of equanimity, ... These are the seven factors of awakening. Through their development and frequent practice, a bhikkhu can realise direct knowledge through seeing the things ...”

Before explaining the factors of awakening, the bhikkhu Nandaka had taught the bhikkhunīs in the form of questions and answers the impermanence of the sense bases and the corresponding kinds of consciousness, as well as the conditionality of feelings and their impermanence. The bhikkhunīs went to the Buddha after the discourse. After they had left, the Buddha addressed the bhikkhus, saying,

“... their intention has been fulfilled. Bhikkhus, even the least advanced of those five hundred bhikkhunīs is a stream-enterer, ...”

One could deduce from this that some also achieved arahantschaft during the lecture.

In the Saṃyuttanikāya there is an entire chapter (SN 46) describing how the factors of awakening lead to the relinquishment, to the breakup, to the end of thirst/desire (*taṇhā*) and to awakening.

The wish and the achievement of arahantship

SN 22. 101 deals with the question of whether the wish (*icchā*) is necessary to attain arahantship. Here the Buddha gave the example of a hen incubating eggs. If she does not incubate the eggs persistently, no chicks will hatch. Even if she thinks: ‘Oh, may chicks hatch’, her wish will not be fulfilled without constant sitting on the eggs. But if she persistently sits on the eggs and broods, chicks will hatch from the eggs whether she wants them to or not. The Buddha used this vivid example to explain that it is the same with the attainment of arahantship: Only persistent practice (*bhāvanā*) leads to success. And success is not dependent on a wish: whether one wishes it or not, the attainment of arahantship comes about through persistent, correct practice.

This sutta describes in more detail what needs to be developed during *vipassanā* meditation. There are 37 factors known as requisites that lead to awakening (*bodhipakkhiya dhamma*), which we find enumerated in several suttā by the Buddha.

As for the wish alone to attain arahantship, the Buddha said the following in SN 22. 101:

*“Bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu does not dwell devoted to development, even though such a wish as this might arise in him: ‘Oh, that my mind might be liberated from the influxes by non-clinging!’, yet his mind is not liberated from the influxes by non-clinging. For what reason? It should be said: because of non-development (*abhāvitattā*). Because of non-development of what? Because of non-*

development of the four foundations of mindfulness ... of the four right kinds of striving ... of the four bases of spiritual power ... of the five spiritual faculties ... of the five powers ... of the seven factors of awakening ... of the noble eightfold path."

Development is a synonym for meditation. When asked what should be developed, the Buddha said that the already mentioned 37 requisites for awakening should be developed. He also said in this sutta that the decay of the influxes happens only for one who sees and knows, who sees the five aggregates as such, and for one who sees and knows their arising and passing away.

So longing for liberation or wishing is in no way sufficient, but correct practice is essential.

Here it sounds as if one can attain arahantship without having the wish, if one does the practice continuously in the right way. In SN 51. 15, however, the venerable Ānanda said:

"In the same way, Brāhmaṇe, it is when a bhikkhu has become an arahant, one with decayed influxes, an accomplished one who has done what should be done, has laid down the burden, has attained the supreme goal, whose fetters of existence have completely disintegrated, and who is liberated through final knowledge. He previously had the wish (chanda) to attain arahantship. When he has attained arahantship, this corresponding wish subsides."

Also in AN 10. 71 the Buddha said:¹⁹

"Should a bhikkhu wish:

'May I myself realise direct knowledge and the seeing of things and enter into and abide in the liberation of the mind, the liberation through wisdom

which is free of influxes with the decaying of the influxes',

then he should perfect ethics,

he should devote himself internally to the concentration of mind,

not neglect jhāna [practice],

be accompanied by insight (vipassanā)

and practise in empty houses."

Mindfulness of in- and out-breath

Mindfulness of in-breath and out-breath is a method that includes both *samatha* meditation up to the attainment of the fourth *jhāna* and *vipassanā* meditation.²⁰

In SN 54. 4, all 32 steps, as also found in MN 118, are listed from (1) *"When the in-breath is long, he understands: 'I breathe in long',"* to (32) *"Contemplating relinquishment, I will breathe out', thus he practises"*.

Then it is said:

"When mindfulness of in-breath and out-breath has been developed and practised frequently in this way, there is great fruit, great benefit. When mindfulness of in-breath and out-breath is thus developed and practised frequently, one of two fruits can be expected. Either final knowledge through seeing things or, if there is still a remnant of attachment, nonreturning."

Supporting conditions

We often find in the Pāli Canon the standard description of how a bhikkhu dwelled: *"Dwelling alone and withdrawn, heedful, with diligence, with determination, he achieved arahantship."*

In order to develop the noble eightfold path, it is emphasised again and again that a good friend is essential and helpful:

"One thing, bhikkhus, is a great support for the arising of the noble eightfold path. What one thing? Good friendship."

¹⁹ See also MN 6

²⁰ Cf. MN 118

A bhikkhu who cultivates good friendship, bhikkhus, can be expected to develop and frequently practise the noble eightfold path. And how? Here the bhikkhu develops right view supported by seclusion, dispassion, cessation, focussing on letting go, ... right concentration," SN 45. 63

"Here a bhikkhu develops right view focussed on the final goal of removing of lust, aversion and delusion ..." SN 45. 70

"The deathless, the deathless (Nibbāna), Lord, they say. What then, Lord, is the deathless and what is the path that leads to the deathless?"

'That which is disintegration of lust, disintegration of aversion, disintegration of delusion, bhikkhu, is called the deathless. Now the noble eightfold path, bhikkhu, is the path leading to the deathless, namely right view, ...'"SN 45. 7

With or without a teacher

In AN 5. 26 Five Foundations for Liberation - *Vimuttāyatana-suttaṃ* the Buddha addresses the question of whether or not one needs a teacher. Here he shows five paths of liberation from the influxes that can be taken with or without a teacher, but with knowledge of the *dhamma*, in order to attain arahantship.

The bhikkhu should practise with heedfulness (*appamattassa*), diligently (*ātāpino*) and abide resolutely, then the unliberated consciousness will be liberated, the not completely disintegrated influxes will completely disintegrate, the unattained supreme safety from being fettered will be attained. Heedful practice is a summary of the steps of practice that have already been outlined from many individual instructions. Diligent practice encompasses the three trainings of practice as ethics, concentration and wisdom. Ethics should be unbroken and practised with at least the 8 precepts, concentration should reach at least the four *jhānā*, wisdom should include *vipassanā* meditation with the the five aggregates, the 6 internal and external bases or the eighteen faculties. The three characteristics of existence - impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness - should be clearly recognised. By practising these three steps, the 37 requisites of awakening should be consciously developed and strengthened again and again. Diligent means practising without interruption. Resolutely means that the practice determines one's life and that one has made a clear decision for the goal.

The five basics are then:

1. The master or someone established in the holy life explains the teaching. And as the teaching is explained, so one experiences the meaning and the teaching. Enthusiasm arises; through enthusiasm joy arises; through joy calmness arises; then one feels happiness; when one is happy, the consciousness can concentrate. Thus the consciousness can become liberated from all fetters while the teaching is explained by a competent teacher.
2. One has heard and learnt the doctrine and explains it to others in detail. While presenting the teaching in detail to others, one understands the meaning and the teaching. This creates enthusiasm; ...
3. One recites and repeats the teaching in detail, just as one has heard and learnt it. In this way one experiences the meaning and the teaching. This creates enthusiasm; ...
4. One directs ones mind to the teaching again and again, reflects on it again and again, contemplates it with ones mind again and again, just as one has heard and learnt the teaching. In this way one experiences the meaning and the teaching. This creates enthusiasm; ...

This step involves good knowledge of the *dhamma*, previously acquired through listening, and persistent, uninterrupted practice. We often find this type of practice in the *suttā*. A bhikkhu has heard a *dhamma* lecture from the Buddha and then withdraws and practices heedfully, diligently and resolutely and attains arahantship after a short time.

5. One has grasped a certain sign of concentration well, observed it well, absorbed into it well, imbued it with wisdom. One thus experiences the meaning and the teaching. Enthusiasm arises; ...

Regardless of the caste

In MN 40, the Buddha said that the attainment of arahantship in his community is independent of caste. This was not the case with other religions in India at the time of Buddha Gotama.

"Bhikkhus, someone from a noble family has gone forth from home into homelessness. And he attains and dwells in the liberation of mind, which is liberation through wisdom, after the decay of the influxes, having realised direct knowledge by seeing things for himself. Through the decay of the influxes he is an ascetic.

*Someone from a brahmin family ...
Someone from a merchant family ...
Someone from a working-class family ..."*

Relinquishing attachment and liberation

In SN 12. 31 the Buddha explains the correlation between abandoning attachment and liberation in a conversation with the venerable Sāriputta:

*"And how, venerable sir, has one comprehended the dhamma?
Venerable sir, one sees as it really is with correct wisdom: 'This has come to be.' Having seen as it really is with correct wisdom: 'This has come to be,' through disenchantment towards what has come to be, through its fading away and cessation, one is liberated by nonclinging.
One sees as it really is with correct wisdom: 'Becoming occurs with that as nutriment.' Having seen as it really is with correct wisdom: 'Becoming occurs with that as nutriment,' through disenchantment towards becoming through nutriment, through its fading away and cessation, one is liberated by nonclinging.
One sees as it really is with correct wisdom: 'With the cessation of that nutriment, what has come to be is [also] subject to cessation.' Having seen as it really is with correct wisdom: 'With the cessation of that nutriment, what has come to be is [also] subject to cessation,' through disenchantment towards what is subject to cessation, through its fading away and cessation, one is liberated by nonclinging. It is in such a way that one has comprehended the dhamma."*

Someone who agrees with the teachings is equivalent to someone who has attained arahantship.

Overcoming latent tendencies (*anusaya*)

In SN 22. 35 and 36 there is an account of two certain bhikkhus who approached the Buddha and asked for a short teaching. The Buddha said the following:

*"Bhikkhu, if one has an underlying tendency (*anuseti*)²¹ towards something, then one is reckoned in terms of it. If one does not have an underlying tendency towards something, then one is not reckoned in terms of it." SN 22. 35*

"Bhikkhu, if one has an underlying tendency towards something, then one is measured in accordance with it; if one is measured in accordance with something, then one is reckoned in terms of it. If one does not have an underlying tendency towards something, then one is not measured in accordance with it; if one is not measured in accordance with something, then one is not reckoned in terms of it." SN 22. 36

*"Understood, Blessed One! Understood, Fortunate One!
'In what way, bhikkhu, do you understand in detail the meaning of what was stated by me in brief?'
'If, venerable sir, one has an underlying tendency towards form, then one is measured in accor-*

21 The word *anusaya*, to be translated as latent tendency or inclination, comes from the verb *anuseti*, which literally means 'to lay down'. It therefore refers to tendencies in the stream of consciousness that lead to inclinations through repetition and can reappear as a habitual reaction when the occasion arises. The Buddha named seven *anusaya* (latent tendencies): Lust for sense objects (*kāmarāga*), reluctance (*paṭigha*), wrong view (*diṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), conceit (*māna*), lust for becoming (*bhavarāga*), ignorance (*avijjā*).

dance with it; if one is measured in accordance with it, then one is reckoned in terms of it. If one has an underlying tendency towards feeling . . . towards perception . . . towards volitional formations . . . towards consciousness, then one is measured in accordance with it; if one is measured in accordance with it, then one is reckoned in terms of it.

If, venerable sir, one does not have an underlying tendency towards form, then one is not measured in accordance with it; if one is not measured in accordance with it, then one is not reckoned in terms of it. If one does not have an underlying tendency towards feeling . . . towards perception . . . towards volitional formations . . . towards consciousness, then one is not measured in accordance with it; if one is not measured in accordance with it, then one is not reckoned in terms of it.”

The meaning is, that an underlying tendency determines thinking and acting.

It is then further reported that this bhikkhu dwelled alone and secluded, heedful, diligent, resolute, and attained arahantship. It is evident here that the five aggregates must be understood as such and that attachment to them must be overcome. Attachment cannot be overcome by intellectual reflection, but only by directly seeing impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, selflessness in meditation. This practice is described as alone, secluded, dwelling with heedfulness, diligence and determination.

From non-returner to arahant

In SN 22. 89 we find the story of the bhikkhu Khemaka. He was very ill and a group of bhikkhus sent one of them to him to enquire about his condition. Khemaka was not well, he was in pain. In this sutta the difference between a non-returner and an arahant becomes clear. It also points out the practice that still has to be practised consistently by a non-returner in order to overcome the last remnant of the view of an I and thus to achieve arahantship.

The bhikkhu Khemaka said:

“These five aggregates subject to clinging have been spoken of by the Blessed One; ... Among these five aggregates subject to clinging, I do not regard anything as self or as belonging to a self.”

Thereupon the other bhikkhus assumed that the bhikkhu Khemaka was an arahant. But the bhikkhu Khemaka replied:

“I do not regard anything among these five aggregates subject to clinging as self or as belonging to a self, yet I am not an arahant, one with disintegrated influxes. Friends, [the notion] ‘I am’ has not yet vanished in me in relation to these five aggregates subject to clinging, but I do not regard [anything among them] as ‘This I am.’”

We see here that in this bhikkhu the wrong view of a self in regard to the five groups had been overcome. In the course of the conversation he said that he was a non-returner. But he can still detect some residual identification with the five groups of existence. This identification as wrong thinking is only overcome through the final overcoming of ignorance and conceit with the attainment of arahantship. Good mindfulness and frequent investigation are required to find out these differences.

The conversation with the bhikkhus then continued. The bhikkhu Khemaka, leaning on a stick, went to the group of bhikkhus to continue the discussion directly with them. An interesting discussion ensued, illustrating the difference between the views of a non-returner and an arahant and clarifying the practice for the final step, the attainment of arahantship. The bhikkhu Khemaka again explained to the bhikkhus that, based on his practice, he does not see a self in any of the five groups, but that the thought ‘I’ still arose in relation to them as a group. It is only when the bhikkhu continues to practise and sees the arising and passing away of the individual groups that the last, small remnant of conceit with an ‘I’ view is overcome and arahantship is attained. The bhikkhu Khemaka gave examples for each of his explanations. Finally, the bhikkhu Khemaka himself and another sixty bhikkhus attained arahantship through this differentiated teaching. The path to arahantship is thus very clearly described in many places in the Pāḷi Canon.

The venerable Sāriputta is asked what is difficult in the *dhamma* and the discipline. He replies that going into homelessness is difficult. When one has done that, it is difficult to have higher joy.

When one has higher joy, it is difficult to practise according to the *dhamma*. When one practises according to the *dhamma*, it is difficult to become an arahant. When asked whether it takes a long time to become an arahant when practising according to the *dhamma*, the venerable Sāriputta replies: *"It doesn't take long, friend."* SN 38. 16

What arahantship is, the venerable Sāriputta answered very briefly: it is the disintegration of lust, aversion and delusion. SN 38. 2

He also answers very briefly what the path to it is: it is the noble eightfold path. SN 38. 2

Various factors that should be developed

In a conversation with Prince Bodhi, the Buddha himself said that if someone possessed five qualities and met a Buddha and was trained by him, then if he would be instructed in the evening, he could attain the goal the following morning; if he would be instructed in the morning, he could attain the goal in the evening. The five qualities are:

- strong confidence in the Buddha as the fully self-awakened one,
- he is free from disease and infirmity and has good digestion.
- He is honest and sincere, and he presents himself to the teacher and his companions in the holy life as he really is;
- he is energetic in overcoming unwholesome states of mind and in adopting wholesome states of mind, he is steady, he unfolds his endeavour with firmness and perseverance in developing wholesome states of mind;
- he possesses wisdom concerning arising and passing away, which is noble and penetrating and leads to the complete disintegration of *dukkha*. MN 85

"Bhikkhus, there are these five lower fetters. Which five? Personality view, doubt, attachment to rules and rites, desire for sense objects, aversion. The noble eightfold path ... should be developed to understand these five lower fetters directly, to understand them fully, to remove them, to overcome them." SN 45. 179

"Bhikkhus, there are these five higher fetters. Which five? Lust for form, lust for the formless, conceit, restlessness, ignorance. The noble eightfold path ... should be developed in order to understand these five higher fetters directly, to understand them fully, to remove them, to overcome them." SN 45. 180

According to the noble eightfold path as defined in DN 22, the eighth factor, right concentration, includes the four finematerial *jhānā*. This is also stated in SN 53. 54:

"Bhikkhus, there are these five higher fetters. Which five? ... The four jhānā must be developed for the direct knowledge of these five higher fetters, for the full understanding of them, for the complete disintegration of them, for the overcoming of them. Which four? ..."

In the Sotapāttisaṃyutta, the Buddha mentions the same four things for attaining the fruit of arahantship as for attaining the fruit of streamentry. These are basic things that are conducive to being able to practise according to the *dhamma*:

- Association with good people,
- listening to the right teachings,
- wise attention,
- practice of the *dhamma* according to the *dhamma*.

In AN 4. 71 - 72 further means are described that lead to the disintegration of the influxes:

Here a bhikkhu has

- ethical behaviour,
- has learned a lot,

- has powerful energy,
- possesses wisdom.
- He cultivates thoughts of renunciation, of non-illwill, of non-cruelty,
- he has right view.

The training programme for achieving arahantship is comprehensive. In the Pāḷi Canon we repeatedly find things that need to be developed or overcome, which the Buddha emphasised on. The instructions are different and diverse and have different significance because they are aimed at individuals in whom the Buddha saw certain shortcomings.

What has to be overcome in order to achieve arahantship was described by the Buddha for example in AN 6. 66:

- Dullness and drowsiness (*thinam, middham*),
- Restlessness (*uddhaccaṃ*),
- Remorse (*kukkucca*),
- lack of confidence (*assaddhiyaṃ*),
- negligence (*pamādam*).

"Whoever is able to overcome these six things will realise arahantship."

Another six things to overcome in order to attain arahantship were pointed out by the Buddha in AN 6. 76:

"Bhikkhus, without having abandoned six things, one is incapable of realizing arahantship. What six?"

1. *Conceit,*
2. *inferiority complex,*
3. *arrogance,*
4. *self-overestimation,*
5. *obstinacy and*
6. *self-abasement.*

Whoever has overcome these six things is capable of realising arahantship."

We see here that a broad examination of one's own thought patterns in relation to oneself and also in dealing with other beings is important.

"A bhikkhu endowed with six qualities, bhikkhus, dwells very happily and pleasantly while seeing things, and he is intent on the disintegration of the influxes."

What are these six qualities?"

1. *Here the bhikkhu delights in the teaching,*
2. *delights in the development [of the mind],*
3. *delights in abandoning,*
4. *delights in seclusion,*
5. *delights in benevolence,*
6. *the joy of non-proliferation [of thoughts]."* AN 6. 78

In AN 6. 83 the Buddha mentions another important quality for the attainment of arahantship: one is not attached to the body and to life.

Other qualities mentioned in this context are:

Confidence,
sense of shame,
moral fear,
the application of energy and wisdom.

In AN 10. 11 the Buddha mentions five qualities that a person must have in order to attain arahantship:

1. Trust, the trust refers to the Buddha as a fully awakened one,
2. health, free from illness, balanced digestion, neither too cold nor too hot,
3. honesty and openness. As it is, one shows oneself to the master or the companions in the holy life.
4. One is energised, strong and stable in order to overcome the unwholesome things and to develop the wholesome things.
5. One is wise; endowed with the wisdom that understands arising and passing away, the noble wisdom, the penetrating wisdom that leads to the complete disintegration of suffering.

In this sutta the Buddha says about suitable accommodation:

- not too far and not too near (to the place of the almsround), favourable for going and coming,
- during the day it is not very busy and at night it is free of noise,
- little trouble from horseflies and mosquitoes, wind, heat of the sun and creepy-crawlies,
- robe, almsfood, accommodation and medicine can be obtained without effort.
- In this dwelling live elderly bhikkhus who have learnt much, are familiar with the teachings, know the teachings, the precepts and the listings (*abhidhamma*). One can go to them from time to time and question them, ask them for explanations: and those venerable ones explain what is incomprehensible and resolve doubts on some dubious points.

When the five qualities mentioned have been developed and the dwelling fulfils the points mentioned, the bhikkhu shall attain the disintegration of the influxes after a short time. One may wonder why not all those who think they are practising according to the *dhmma* achieve arahantship. The accountant Ganaka Moggallana also asked the Buddha this question. The Buddha replied:

"Brāhmin, when they have been instructed and taught by me in this way, some of my disciples attain Nibbāna, the supreme goal, and some do not." MN 107

When asked why some do not reach the goal, the Buddha gave an example. A person wants to go to Rājagaha. He asks Ganaka Moggallana for the way. He explains the way exactly. However, the person takes the wrong path at a crossroads. He does not arrive in Rājagaha. It is the same with the instructions given by the Buddha, some follow them, some go the wrong way.

Arahantship cannot be achieved through aversion to life, nor through the desire to become a special being. These motivations are very common and, due to their unwholesome nature, lead past the goal and also lead to early abandonment of the practice during life because it is an unwholesome motivation. A wholesome motivation is the wish to understand life and the willingness to patiently examine it with the means taught by the Buddha. Liberation then lies in seeing things as they really are and letting go all imaginations of a being.

Achieving Arahantship at the time of death

It is also very important to know the *dhmma* and be familiar with the correct practice so that one can practise at the hour of death. In AN 6. 56 the Buddha explains how arahantship can occur at the moment of death.

He speaks of six benefits of hearing the *dhmma* at the right time and analysing its meaning. The first three relate to the attainment of nonreturning.

The fourth to sixth benefit refers to someone who has already attained nonreturning and meets the Buddha or a disciple of the Buddha at the time of death. He hears the teaching from the Buddha. After hearing the teaching, the five higher fetters are overcome. Even if he does not meet the Buddha or a disciple, arahantship can occur if the dying person directs the mind to the *dhmma* he has heard and learnt, directs the mind again and again to the teaching, reflects on it again and again, contemplates it again and again with the mind. For this liberating practice, a very clear, non-narcotised and non-attached mind is important.

Four paths of progress

The Buddha also explained the path to arahantship in terms of progress. Progress can be arduous or effortless. Thus in AN 4. 161 In Brief - Saṃkhittasuttaṃ four paths leading to arahantship are shown. These are:

- The painful path with slow direct knowledge,
- the painful path with quick direct knowledge,
- the pleasant path with slow direct knowledge,
- the pleasant path with fast direct knowledge.

These four paths are described in more detail in the following suttā.²²

1. The painful path with slow direct knowledge:

a) Someone naturally indulges in strong lust, strong aversion and strong delusion. As a result, he often experiences physical suffering and mental discomfort. The five faculties of confidence, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom are only weakly developed in him. As they are weak, he is slow to achieve the conditions for the disintegration of the influxes.

b) Someone practises the contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body, the repulsiveness of food, perceiving non-delight in the entire world, contemplating impermanence in all conditioned phenomena and the perception of death, but he is well established internally. He dwells with the five powers of the practitioner²³ as support. The five faculties are only weakly developed in him.

2. The painful way with quick direct knowledge:

a) Someone is inclined to strong lust ... The five faculties are excellently developed in him. Since they are excellent, he quickly achieves the conditions for the disintegration of the influxes.

b) Someone practises the contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body, ... The five faculties are excellently developed in him. ...

3. The pleasant way with slow direct knowledge:

a) Someone does not naturally indulge in strong lust, strong aversion and strong delusion. As a result, he experiences no physical suffering and no mental discomfort. The five faculties are only weakly developed in him. Because they are weak, he is slow to attain the conditions for the disintegration of the influxes.

b) Someone practises the first *jhāna*, the second, the third, the fourth *jhāna*. He dwells with the practitioner's five powers as support. The five faculties are only weakly developed in him. ...

4. The pleasant way with fast direct knowledge:

a) Someone does not naturally indulge in strong lust, ... The five faculties are excellently developed in him. ...

b) Someone practises the first *jhāna*, the second, the third, the fourth *jhāna*. He dwells with the five powers of the practitioner as support. The five faculties are excellently developed in him. ...

(The Devatā:)

*"Those of great wealth and property,
Even khattiyas who rule the country,
Look at each other with greedy eyes,
Insatiable in sensual pleasures.*

*Among these who have become so avid,
Flowing along in the stream of existence,
Who here have abandoned craving?
Who in the world are no longer avid?"*

²² Cf. AN 4. 162 In Detail - Vitthārasuttaṃ, AN 4.163 Unattractiveness - Asubhasuttaṃ

²³ Confidence, shame, moral fear, energy and wisdom.

(The Exalted One:)

*"Having left their homes and gone forth,
Having left their dear sons and cattle,
Having left behind lust and hatred,
Having expunged ignorance
The arahants with the influxes disintegrated
Are those in the world no longer avid."*

4. What an Arahant has Achieved

The essential characteristic that we find throughout the description of arahantship is the disintegration of the influxes (*āśava*). We can say disintegration because they disintegrate through the process of insight (*vipassanā*) and are not fought or destroyed. They are finally cut off by the path moment, the experience of *Nibbāna*.

“He understands thus: ‘There is this, there is the inferior, there is the superior, and beyond there is an escape from this whole field of perception.’

When he knows and sees thus, his mind is liberated from the influx of sensual desire, from the influx of becoming, and from the influx of ignorance.

When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: ‘Liberated.’

He understands:

‘Finished is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more state of existence.’

Bhikkhus, this bhikkhu is called one bathed in the inner bath.” MN 7

In this standard description, as we find it in many suttā, the following becomes clear:

All realms of existence were examined, and thus all types of consciousness: the arahant’s own (‘this’), which is the sense-sphere consciousness, unwholesome consciousness (inferior) or the lower realms of existence, sublime consciousness (sublime) or the subtle Brahma realms. The experience of a way out of all realms of existence, which is *Nibbāna* (there is a way out of all perception) has been experienced.

Consciousness is freed from the influxes (*āśavā*), which are the influx of sense pleasures, the influx of becoming and the influx of ignorance.

Through reviewing knowledge one can see that there are no more mental defilements (‘liberated’). One can see in one’s own stream of consciousness through the ability to analyse consciousness in the future, as the Buddha instructs in his second lecture²⁴, that there is no new becoming after this life. For this, of course, one must have practised enough to be able to recognise clearly becoming in all realms of existence.

In the last sentence, the Buddha expresses that this bhikkhu has undergone an inner mental purification process. The purification process involves overcoming all mental defilements. The statement ‘destroyed is birth’ can only come about by overcoming craving (*taṇhā*) according to dependant origination.

For example in SN 12. 44 it is said:

“... With contact as condition, feeling [comes to be]; with feeling as condition, craving. But with the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving comes cessation of clinging; with the cessation of clinging, cessation of becoming; with the cessation of becoming, cessation of birth; with the cessation of birth, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair cease. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering. This, bhikkhus, is the passing away of the world.”

If one considers the dependant origination from its beginning, craving is also not without a cause, but has ignorance as its fundamental cause. Ignorance is the fundamental cause of existence and the condition for craving to arise at all. The arahant has completely overcome ignorance as the cause of all suffering.

24 Cf. Anattalakkhanasutta - The Characteristics of Selflessness, SN 22.59

An arahant has overcome further birth. At the time of the Buddha in India, this was also a widespread goal of other religious endeavours. The burden of constantly arising and changing through pleasant and unpleasant forms of existence was understood. Today, in Western Buddhist circles, this desire does not exist at all, either because one does not believe in further existences other than the present one, or because hope is such a strong force that one thinks things can only get better. This ignores an important fact taught by the Buddha. Any craving (*lobha* or *taṇhā*) for becoming, which is the background of all hopeful or yearning thoughts and active endeavour, is unwholesome and it leads to suffering. The motivation to become a better person or to strive for a better form of existence is based on craving and is therefore unwholesome and inevitably leads to suffering (*dukkha*) according to the law of cause and effect. The motivation for Buddhist practice should therefore be scrutinised again and again.

Since the behaviour and thinking of ordinary people are strongly influenced by the thirst or craving for external sense objects and their own person, it becomes clear here that an arahant is a completely different person. For a person whose existence is no longer characterised by craving, living together and being together with householders is no longer possible, because the life of a householder is characterised by craving and enjoyment. The enjoyment of sense objects is often based on a false view that they make us happy and that their enjoyment is the meaning of life. For the arahant, therefore, only the life of a world renouncer is possible, which was the ordination in Buddha's time.

In SN 12. 32 the standard description

*"One understands: 'Birth is finished,
the holy life has been lived,
what should be done has been done,
there is no more state of existence,'"*

which we find in many suttā, is explained in more detail by the venerable Sāriputta in conversation with the Buddha.

Another bhikkhu named Kaḷāra had asked Sāriputta whether he had found ease in this teaching and discipline. Sāriputta replied that he had no uncertainty or doubt about this teaching. The bhikkhu Kaḷāra then went to the Buddha and told him that the venerable Sāriputta had declared to him that he had attained arahantship with the above-mentioned standard description. The Buddha then sent for Sāriputta. During the conversation it became clear that Sāriputta had not used these words. We then find a more detailed explanation of these words. It is said there: *"If you were asked thus, Sāriputta: 'On the base of what knowledge, revered Sāriputta, and what seeing, have you declared the attainment of supreme realization:*

*>I have understood: Birth is finished,
the holy life has been lived,
what should be done has been done,
there is no more state of existence. <*

If you were asked like this, Sāriputta, what would you answer?"

"If they were to ask me this, venerable sir, I would answer thus: 'With the destruction of the source from which birth originates, I have understood: 'When [the cause] is destroyed, [the effect] is destroyed.' Having understood this, I understand: 'Birth is finished, the holy life has been lived, what should be done has been done, there is no more state of existence.'

Being asked thus, venerable sir, I would answer in such a way."

"But, Sāriputta, if they were to ask you: 'But, friend Sāriputta, what is the source of birth, what is its origin, from what is it born and produced?' being asked thus, how would you answer?"

"If I were asked like this, Lord, I would answer like this: 'Birth, friend, has becoming as its source, becoming as its origin, it is born and produced from becoming' ..."

In the same way, the dependant origination is explained by Sāriputta according to the Buddha's questions concerning further factors:

Becoming has attachment as its cause,
attachment has craving as its cause,
craving has feeling as its cause.

Then the Buddha asked further:

"But, Sariputta, if they were to ask you: 'Friend Sariputta, how have you known, how have you seen, that delight in feelings no longer remains present in you?' - being asked thus, how would you answer?"

"If they were to ask me this, venerable sir, I would answer thus: 'Friends, there are these three feelings. What three?"

Pleasant feeling (sukhā vedanā), painful feeling (dukkhā vedanā), neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling (adukkhamasukhā vedanā).

These three feelings, friends, are impermanent; whatever is impermanent is suffering.

When this was understood, delight in feelings no longer remained present in me.'

Being asked thus, venerable sir, I would answer in such a way."

"Good, good, Sariputta! This is another method of explaining in brief that same point: 'Whatever is felt is included within suffering.' But, Sariputta, if they were to ask you: 'Friend Sariputta, through what kind of deliverance have you declared final knowledge thus: 'I understand: Finished is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more state of existence.' -being asked thus, how would you answer?"

"If they were to ask me this, venerable sir, I would answer thus: 'Friends, through an internal deliverance, through the disintegration of all clinging, I dwell mindfully in such a way that the influxes do not flow within me and I do not despise myself.²⁵' Being asked thus, venerable sir, I would answer in such a way."

"Good, good, Sariputta! This is another method of explaining in brief that same point: 'I have no perplexity in regard to the influxes spoken of by the Ascetic; I do not doubt that they have been abandoned by me.'"

"This is what the Blessed One said. Having said this, the well-gone (sugato) rose from his seat and entered his dwelling."

Sāriputta then explained to the other bhikkhus that he hesitated at first because he had not fully understood the intention of the question the Buddha was asking him.

He then finally said:

"If the Blessed One were to question me about this matter with various terms and with various methods for a whole day, for a whole day I would be able to answer him with various terms and with various methods. If he were to question me about this matter with various terms and with various methods for a whole night, for a day and night, for two days and nights, for three, four, five, six, or seven days and nights - for seven days and nights I would be able to answer him with various terms and with various methods."

The Buddha confirmed Sāriputta's statement and added that Sāriputta had fully penetrated and understood the elements of the teaching (*dhammadhātu*).

The Buddha uses various images to show what an arahant is liberated from. The images express that it is a liberation from a great burden or danger. The images also show that these things can be overwhelming, difficult to overcome and can also cause great suffering.

25 By 'I do not despise myself.' is meant here that he attentively examines his own factors in body and mind. The word *attānaṃ* is used here in conventional language.

The arahant has:

- crossed the floods (*ogha*),
- the fetters (*saṃyojana*) thrown off,
- the yokes (*yoga*) removed,
- the influxes (*āsava*) and
- the latent tendencies (*anusaya*) overcome.

The influxes and latent tendencies show more the psychological aspect of mental impurities as habits of the not liberated mind.

All groups are mental defilements that hinder liberation from suffering. The Buddha categorised the mental defilements in many different ways to show their different aspects. Each group shows a certain aspect of the unawakened mind that becomes active at the appropriate time.

Hemavata asks:

*"Who crosses the tide, who crosses the ocean here?
Who is not sinking, who is not sinking into the depths?"*

The Exalted One replies:

*"He who is endowed with ethics everywhere,
who possesses wisdom
and is well concentrated;
those who turn their mind inwards and are mindful,
they cross the tide that is difficult to cross." Sn 175 – 176*

In SN 35. 238 the Buddha said:

*"Crossed over, gone beyond, the brahmin stands on high ground':
this is a designation for the arahant."*

In AN 4. 5 we find a more detailed explanation:

*"And what is the one who has crossed over and gone beyond, the brahmin who stands on high ground?
Here, with the decay of the influxes,
some person has realised for himself with direct knowledge,
through seeing things, the influx-free liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom,
and having entered upon it, he dwells in it.
This is called the person who has crossed over and gone beyond, the brahmin who stands on high ground."*

Four floods (*ogha*) that the arahant has crossed are:

- the flood of sense objects (*kāmogho*),
- the flood of becoming (*bhavogho*),
- the flood of [wrong] view (*ditthogho*),
- the flood of ignorance (*avijogho*).

Ten fetters (*saṃyojana*) that the arahant has cast off, from which he has freed himself:

- Personality belief (*sakkāya-ditthi*),
- doubt (*vicchikiccā*),
- adherence to rules and rites (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*),
- pleasure in sense objects (*kāmarāga*),

- ill-will (*vyāpāda*),
- desire for finematerial existence (*rūpa-rāga*),
- desire for the immaterial (*arūpa-rāga*),
- conceit (*māna*),
- restlessness (*uddhacca*),
- ignorance (*avijjā*).

Four yokes or bindings (*yoga*) that the arahant has removed, from which he has detached himself:

- the yoke of sense objects (*kāmayogo*),
- the yoke of becoming (*bhavayogo*),
- the yoke of [wrong] view (*diṭṭhiyogo*),
- the yoke of ignorance (*avijjāyogo*).

Four influxes (*āsava*) that the arahant has overcome, which can no longer flow:

- the influx of sense objects (*kāmāsavo*),
- the influx of becoming (*bhavāsavo*),
- the influx of [false] view (*diṭṭhāsavo*),
- the influx of ignorance (*avijjāsavo*).²⁶

Influxes are habits that are repeated over many lifetimes and therefore flow into the unawakened mind again and again, thereby influencing thoughts, reactions and actions.

Seven latent tendencies (*anusaya*)²⁷, which can no longer become active in the arahant:

- pleasure in sense objects (*kāmarāga*),
- reluctance (*paṭigha*),
- [wrong] view (*diṭṭhi*),
- doubt (*vicikicchā*),
- conceit (*māna*),
- desire for becoming (*bhavarāga*),
- ignorance (*avijjā*).

Latent tendencies are tendencies of the mind that are reinforced through repetition and that determine behaviour. Through mindfulness (*sati*), these tendencies can be recognised and replaced by wholesome tendencies, paving the way to arahantship. Overcoming these tendencies requires both intensive *vipassanā* meditation and constant mindful examination of one's own thoughts, actions and reactions. They are only completely overcome successively through the four paths of awakening, as their base is cut off.

In SN 22. 4 we find another standard description of the arahant explained by the venerable Mahākaccāna.

It is said there as a description of the arahant:

*"Those world renunciators and brahmins,
who are liberated by complete disintegration of craving (taṇhā),
those who have completely ceased,
who are completely safe (khema) from bondage,
who live the holy life perfectly,
who have reached their destination completely,
They are the highest among gods and men."*

²⁶ We usually only find three influxes in the suttā. The influx of wrong view is usually missing. In Paṭisambhidāmagga - The Path of Analytical Discrimination, we find four influxes, e.g. in chapter 1. 55 *Āsavakkhayañāṇaniddeso*.

²⁷ Cf. AN 7. 11

The venerable Mahākaccāna explained:

"Householder, through the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishment of desire, lust, delight, craving, engagement and clinging, mental standpoints, adherences, and underlying tendencies towards the form element, the mind is said to be well liberated. Through the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishment of desire, lust, delight, craving, engagement and clinging, mental standpoints, adherences, and underlying tendencies towards the feeling element . . . the perception element . . . the volitional formations element . . . the consciousness element, the mind is said to be well liberated."

An important attribute of an arahant is safety (*khema*), which we find in this description. The arahant is secure because it is his last existence and because he seeks and desires nothing more. The search for security determines the life of unawakened beings. They seek security in material wealth, partnerships and families. According to the Buddha's teachings, this search for security leads to suffering (*dukkha*) because it is linked to attachment.

The standard description *'birth is finished, the holy life has been lived, what should be done has been done, there is no more state of existence'* could easily lead a person uninstructed in the *dhmma* to think that a being is destroyed. We also find a sutta on this chain of thoughts in the *Samyuttanikāya*. There the bhikkhu Yamaka held the view:

"As I understand the dhmma taught by the Blessed One, it is like this: The bhikkhu with disintegrated influxes is annihilated and perishes with the breakup of the body and does not exist after death." SN 22. 85

Some bhikkhus tried to dissuade him from this view and told him that he was misrepresenting the Blessed One. But the bhikkhu Yamaka stubbornly continued to hold this wrong view. The bhikkhus asked the venerable Sāriputta to talk to the bhikkhu Yamaka. The venerable Sāriputta explained to him in a question-and-answer dialogue the impermanence, the unsatisfactoriness and the selflessness of the five individual groups of existence. The bhikkhu Yamaka was able to answer correctly that body, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness are impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless. He also agreed with the resulting knowledge *'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self'*. Sāriputta went on to explain to him that if one practises in this way, one becomes disenchanted and dispassionate towards the aggregates and thus liberated. The entire process of *vipassanā* meditation is discussed here in brief. Sāriputta discusses the same with the bhikkhu Yamaka concerning the Exalted One. At that time the bhikkhu Yamaka attained streamentry, his view was corrected so that he saw the five aggregates as impermanent and unsatisfactory, without a being in them. Sāriputta then explained to him in further detail the difference between the wrong view of the uninstructed worldling and the right view of the *dhmma* practitioner. The bhikkhu Yamaka was grateful for Sāriputta's benevolent and compassionate teaching. Finally, during the conversation, the bhikkhu Yamaka attained arahantship.

Decay of the influxes (*āsavā*)

The main characteristic of an arahant, which can be found in all descriptions of an arahant in the Pāḷi Canon, is the disintegration of the influxes (*āsavā*). Influxes are the unwholesome tendencies of the mind. These are present until arahantship is achieved. These tendencies can become active again and again and lead to corresponding consciousness as long as they are not fundamentally disintegrated. They also lead to rebirth again and again. In most suttā, three types of influxes are mentioned, namely the influx of sense objects (*kāmāsava*), that of becoming (*bhavāsava*) and that of ignorance (*avijjāsava*). In some places in the Pāḷi Canon, a fourth one is mentioned, namely the influx of wrong view (*ditthāsava*). Due to the countless existences we have gone through, the influxes are strong underlying flows that become active again and again due to a lack of insight and thus intensify.

They are the unskillful habits of the unawakened mind. They are created and reinforced by mental impurities. The mental impurities are the active mental processes, the influxes are the latent currents that repeatedly produce the mental impurities. The more mental impurities occur in the stream of consciousness through carelessness, the stronger the influxes become. They manifest themselves in the fact that, for example, habitual, unchecked desire becomes stronger and stronger and more and more uncontrolled. This intensification is then called the influx of sense objects. Since they contain the fundamental desires of the unawakened being, especially with the influx of becoming and ignorance, they can only be finally overcome through a profound understanding of the impermanence, the unsatisfactoriness and the selflessness of all phenomena in *vipassanā* meditation. In order to be able to see the three universal characteristics of all phenomena, the influxes must be calmed, because their activity prevents seeing things as they are. The influxes are calmed through *samatha* meditation. In SN 12. 23 the Buddha mentions the realization of each group of the five aggregates (*khandha*) and the understanding of their arising and passing away as a prerequisite for the disintegration of the influxes. The individual steps leading up to the disintegration of the influxes are described in detail in SN 12. 23. In MN 36, the influxes were described by the Buddha in more detail:

"I call one deluded, Aggivessana, who has not overcome the influxes that defile, bring new becoming, cause trouble, result in suffering, and lead to future birth, aging, and death; for by not overcoming the influxes one is deluded. I call one unconfused, Aggivessana, who has overcome the influxes that defile, bring new becoming, cause trouble, result in suffering, and lead to future birth, aging, and death; for because of the overcoming of the influxes one is unconfused."

The disintegration of these influxes is the central concern of the entire Buddhist path of liberation up to arahantship.

Through the path of streamentry, the influx of wrong view is dissolved;
through the path of nonreturning, the influx of sense objects is dissolved,
through the path of arahantship, the influx of becoming and that of ignorance is dissolved.

In MN 2, the means that lead to the decay of the influxes (*āsavā*) are described in more detail. It is said at the end:

"When for a bhikkhu, bhikkhus, the influxes,

- that should be overcome by seeing have been overcome by seeing,*
- when the influxes that should be overcome by control have been overcome by control,*
- when the influxes that should be overcome by use have been overcome by use,*
- when the influxes that should be overcome by endurance have been overcome by endurance,*
- when the influxes that should be overcome by avoidance have been overcome by avoidance,*
- when the influxes that should be overcome by removal have been overcome by removal,*
- when the influxes that should be overcome by unfolding have been overcome by unfolding -*

then this bhikkhu is said to be one who dwells restrained with restraint from all influxes. He has cut off desire, thrown off the fetters, and with the clear understanding of conceit he has put an end to dukkha."

Here a complex practice of overcoming the influxes that encompasses all parts of life is described. The result of this comprehensive practice is the achievement of arahantship.

In MN 54 the Buddha describes the bhikkhu in whom the influxes have been disintegrated as one in whom the cutting off of busyness in the Noble One's discipline has been fully attained in all respects.

Emptiness

In MN 121, after the standard description of the attainment and practice of the arahant, the attained emptiness is described in more detail.

“He understands thus: ‘Whatever disturbances there may be that depend on the influx of sense objects, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there may be that depend on the influx of becoming, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there may be that depend on the influx of ignorance, those are not present here.’

Only this degree of disturbance is present, namely that connected with the six sense bases conditioned by this body and by life. He understands: ‘This field of perception is empty of the influx of sense objects; this field of perception is empty of the influx of becoming; this field of perception is empty of the influx of ignorance. And there is only this non-emptiness, namely that connected with the six sense bases conditioned by this body and by life.’

Thus he regards it as empty of what is not there, but what remains there he understands thus: ‘This is tranquilised (santa)’. Thus, Ānanda, this too is his real, undistorted, purified entry into emptiness, perfect and unsurpassable.”

Fruit of asceticism

In many other discourses it is explained that the arahant has understood the four noble truths and the influxes.

For example, the Buddha describes this knowledge in DN 2 The Discourse on the Fruit of Asceticism - Sāmaññaphalasuttaṃ to King Ajātasattu of Magadha.

“The bhikkhu with consciousness thus concentrated, which is

- *bright,*
- *clear,*
- *free from lust,*
- *free from the subtlest impurities,*
- *soft,*
- *wieldy,*
- *stable and*
- *unshakeable*

directs and turns the consciousness to the knowledge of the disintegration of the influxes.

He understands as it is: ‘This is suffering (dukkha)’.

He understands as it is: ‘This is the cause of suffering’.

He understands as it is: ‘This is the cessation of suffering’.

He understands as it is: ‘This is the path leading to the cessation of suffering’.

He understands as it is: ‘These are the influxes (āsavā)’.

He understands as it is: ‘This is the cause of the influxes’.

He understands as it is: ‘This is the cessation of the influxes’.

He understands as it is: ‘This is the path leading to the cessation of the influxes.’

If he understands and sees it that way, consciousness is liberated from the influx of sense objects, consciousness is liberated from the influx of becoming, consciousness is liberated from the influx of ignorance.

When it is liberated, there is the knowledge:

‘Liberated.’ He understands: ‘Birth is finished,

the holy life has been lived,

what should be done has been done.

There is no more state of existence.’

...

This, great king, is a visible fruit of asceticism, more excellent, more sublime than the previous ones. Among these visible fruits of asceticism, there is no other visible fruit that is higher or more exalted.”

At the beginning of the quotation, the state of mind that the practitioner has attained through the four *jhānā* is described here. Then the four noble truths are understood with this state of mind, as well as the mental defilements, here referred to as influxes. Then the reviewing takes place, in which it is seen that all the influxes have been disintegrated and no longer appear in the stream of consciousness. Then it is also seen that there is no birth after this life.

We find in several suttā, such as in MN 4, the same description from the Buddha himself as he describes his attainment of arahantship.

"For him who understands, bhikkhus, for him who sees, there is the decay of the influxes, I say, not for him who does not understand, not for him who does not see. And what, bhikkhus, should be understood, what should be seen for the decay of the influxes? 'This is unsatisfactory (dukkha), this is the cause of the unsatisfactory, this is the cessation of the unsatisfactory, this is the path leading to the cessation of the unsatisfactory' - for him who understands thus and who sees thus, there is the decay of the influxes.

Therefore, bhikkhus, this practice should be practised: 'This is unsatisfactory, this is the cause of the unsatisfactory, this is the cessation of the unsatisfactory, this is the path leading to the cessation of the unsatisfactory'."

MN 120: *"Again, bhikkhus, there possesses a bhikkhu*

- confidence,
- ethics,
- learning,
- generosity and
- wisdom.

He thinks: 'Oh, may I myself realise direct knowledge and the seeing of things and enter into and abide in the liberation of the mind, the liberation through wisdom which is free of influxes with the decaying of the influxes'.

Bhikkhus, this bhikkhu does not reappear anywhere and nowhere."

Dependant Origination

SN 12. 61 explains how the practitioner has arrived at the described goal of the disintegration of the influxes through the practice of dependant origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*):

"Seeing thus, bhikkhus, the instructed noble disciple becomes disenchanted towards form, disenchanted towards feeling, disenchanted towards perception, disenchanted towards volitional formations, disenchanted towards consciousness. Becoming disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion [his mind] is liberated.

When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: 'Liberated.'

He understands: 'Birth is finished, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more state of existence.'"

Dependant origination, which is presented in this sutta as a step of the insights leading to arahantship, is a detailed practice of the second noble truth. Craving as the cause of suffering (*dukkha*) is analysed in a broader context. Since craving is the cause of becoming, i.e. of existence, right and repeated practice leads to profound insight into existence, from which disenchantment and relinquishment based on insight follow. Only in this way can craving as a mental defilement, which leads to *dukkha* again and again, be finally overcome and new existence no longer arises. This is the decisive characteristic of an arahant, that through insight he is completely disenchanted towards that which is life and gives up all desire for it. This reaction to a detailed enquiry is not based on aversion, but on profound insight. There is therefore no longer any desire for a perfect being or a true self, which is often the motivation for uninstructed people to practise according to

the Buddha's teachings. Because by directly seeing the conditioned arising it becomes clear that such a wish would only lead to new suffering.

In SN 12. 71 to 81 the Buddha also clearly states that the understanding of dependant origination is a prerequisite for attaining the goal of the teaching:

"Bhikkhus, those world-renouncer or brahmins who do not understand aging-and-death, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation: these I do not consider to be world-renouncers among world-renouncers or brahmins among brahmins, and these venerable ones do not, by realising it for themselves with direct knowledge, while seeing things enter and dwell in the goal of world-renunciation or the goal of brahminhood.

But, bhikkhus, those world-renouncers and brahmins who understand aging-and-death, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation: these I consider to be world-renouncers among world-renouncers and brahmins among brahmins, and these venerable ones, by realising it for themselves with direct knowledge, while seeing things enter and dwell in the goal of world-renunciation and the goal of brahminhood."

An important link in the sequence of conditioned arising is feeling. The links that appear in the 12-factor sequence up to feeling are results. The reaction to a feeling creates new kamma, i.e. new results. In the case of unwholesome reactions with craving, aversion or delusion, new suffering (*dukkha*) is created. In SN 36. 3 the Buddha described how arahantship is achieved through the practice with feelings:

"When, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu has overcome the latent tendency to lust in regard to pleasant feeling, the latent tendency to resistance in regard to unpleasant feeling, the latent tendency to ignorance in regard to neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling, he is called, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu without latent tendencies who sees rightly, who has cut off craving, who has turned away the fetter, who has put an end to suffering (dukkha) through perfect understanding of conceit."

"Anyone who has thoroughly understood feelings, is when he has seen the dhamma, without influxes, standing firm in the dhamma. When the body breaks up the one with the highest knowledge does not recognise the one who has looked at it in this way."

Also in DN 15 The Great Discourse on Causes - Mahānidānasuttaṃ the Buddha said:

"When, Ānanda, a bhikkhu does not see feeling as his self, nor see his self as free from feeling, nor see his self thus: 'My self feels, my self has the nature to feel', if he does not see thus, then he is not attached to anything in the world. If he is not attached, he is not agitated. When he is not agitated, he himself attains final Nibbāna. He understands: 'Birth ...'"

It is therefore essential not to identify with the feelings. Through correct *vipassanā* meditation, the arahant sees all formations as impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless due to their impermanent nature and does not identify with feelings or with the other four groups of existence/aggregates.

The sutta SN 1. 50 is based on the story of an incident during a previous existence of the Buddha. It also forms the basis for the Ghatikāra Sutta MN 81. Ghatikāra was a potter who lived at the time of the Buddha Kassapa and was a faithful follower and devotee of this Buddha. His friend was a young brāhmin named Jotipāla. He arranged for him to listen to the Buddha Kassapa's discourse together with him. Jotipāla was so moved by it that he renounced the world and followed the Buddha Kassapa as a disciple. He received from him the prediction that he himself would one day become a Buddha. In MN 81 the Buddha also said at the end: *'I was then the brāhmin Jotipāla'*. In this sutta (SN 1. 50), Ghatikāra is a divine being who has been reborn in the deva world because

of his merits and comes to the Buddha to remind him of their former friendship and to tell him about other disciples who have realised the Buddha's teachings. The essential characteristics of the arahant are also listed here:

[The devata Ghatikara:]

*"Seven bhikkhus reborn in Aviha
have been fully liberated.
With the decay of lust and aversion,
they have crossed over attachment to the world."*

[The Blessed One:]

*"And who are those who crossed the swamp,
the realm of death so hard to cross?
Who, having left the human body,
have overcome the celestial bond?"*

...

*"By having understood your dhamma
they cut through the bondage of existence."*

These seven devas, as reported further in the sutta, attained arahantship as devas due to the teachings of the Buddha Gotama.

As we can see from the accounts, one must understand *dukkha* without developing aversion in order to reach the highest goal of the Buddha's teachings. To prevent aversion from arising, body and mind must first be deeply purified. The cause of *dukkha* must also be understood and abandoned. This process of ever deeper understanding of *dukkha* and its causes lasts over several lifetimes. So that no aversion arises in the experience of *dukkha*, *vipassanā* must be practised correctly. When contemplating the phenomena of body and mind and their causes in *vipassanā* meditation, the steps of disenchantment, dispassion, and liberation mentioned in SN 12. 61 occur. Thus we see that the arahant, through a profound process of realization, has a completely different handling of *dukkha* than the ordinary being.

In SN 2. 5 it is poetically described in a comparison what it means that the arahant has done what had to be done, as we find it described so often in the Pāḷi Canon:

(The Exalted One:)

*"For the brahmin²⁸ there is no task to be done.
For the brahmin has done what should be done.
While he has not gained a footing in the river,
a man will strain with all his limbs;
but a footing gained, standing on the ground,
he need not strain for he has gone beyond.*

*This is a simile for the brahmin, Damali,
for the one without influxes (khīṇāsava),
who is wise and meditates (jhāyino).*

*Having reached the end of birth and death,
he need not strain for he has gone beyond."*

We see here in this example of a river that the arahant can no longer be washed away by anything, like the ordinary person who still seeks fulfilment in sense objects and experiences disappointment again and again. The arahant has comprehended this and no longer has to exert himself to find happiness in a deluded form in sense objects, nor to find liberation: It is done what had to be done.

²⁸ *Brāhmana* (brahmin) is an expression for arahant.

The things to which the ordinary being is attached, may be things or people, are always 'washed away from under his feet' by their transient nature, so he never has security, since transient things offer no security. The arahant, on the other hand, stands firmly on the ground, for he no longer seeks anything. He has seen through all things with their transient and unsatisfactory nature.

View of the Arahant according to MN 1

A detailed description of the view attained by an arahant can be found in MN 1 The Root of All Things - Mūlapariyāyasuttaṃ. The view of the arahant is presented in comparison to a worldlying not instructed in the Buddha's teachings, to a trainee, some one who has already attained one or more paths and to a self-awakened Buddha.

The Buddha said the following about the arahant:

"Bhikkhus, a bhikkhu who is an arahant with disintegrated influxes, who has lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, destroyed the fetters of being, and is completely liberated through final knowledge,²⁹ directly knows earth as earth. Having directly known earth as earth, he does not conceive [himself as] earth, he does not conceive [himself] in earth, he does not conceive [himself apart] from earth, he does not conceive earth to be 'mine' he does not delight in earth. Why is that? Because he has fully understood it, I say."

In the same way, the arahant is described in relation to other objects, namely water, fire, air; beings, devas, Pajāpati³⁰, Brahma and other celestial beings; the four immaterial realms; what is seen, heard, sensed, experienced; unity and diversity; all; and *Nibbāna*. He has thoroughly understood all objects.

The same objects are enumerated. The arahant sees them in the way described above because lust has been overcome in him, because aversion has been overcome, because delusion has been overcome.

Objects are thoroughly understood when they are analysed into their individual components and not seen as compact things or beings, when their causes are seen, when the three universal characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness are understood.

When practised repeatedly in this way, attachment to both things and beings is completely overcome and new existence can no longer appear.

MN 113 also states:

"Moreover, by completely surmounting the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, a true person enters upon and abides in the cessation of perception and feeling. And his influxes are decayed by his seeing with wisdom. This bhikkhu does not conceive anything, he does not conceive in regard to anything, he does not conceive in any way."

MN 7 The Simile of the Cloth – Vatthasuttaṃ

The defilements of the mind are enumerated by the Buddha.

When a bhikkhu has recognised and overcome the defilements, he attains complete confidence in the Buddha as follows:

"The Exalted One is a fully self-awakened one, perfect in knowledge and behaviour, the well-gone, the knower of the world, the incomparable leader of people to be tamed, the teacher of devas and people, the Awakened One, the Exalted One."

He thus attains complete confidence in the *dhamma*:

"The dhamma has been well proclaimed by the Blessed One, it is visible, timeless, it is inviting, inspiring or guiding, and can be realised by the wise."

²⁹ This is the standard description that we find in many places in the Pāḷi Canon.

³⁰ Name of a Vedic god

He thus attains complete confidence in the Saṅgha:

"The community of the Blessed One's disciples is practising the good way, practising the straight way, practising the true way, practising the proper way, that is, the four pairs of persons, the eight types of individuals; this Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutation, the unsurpassed field of merit for the world."

With this standard description of the three jewels *Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha* we see the relationship of the arahant to these three jewels.

"Bhikkhus, when ignorance is abandoned and true knowledge has arisen in a bhikkhu, then with the fading away of ignorance and the arising of true knowledge he no longer clings to sensual pleasures, no longer clings to views, no longer clings to rules and rituals, no longer clings to a doctrine of self. When he does not cling, he is not agitated. When he is not agitated, he personally attains Nibbāna. He understands: 'Birth is finished, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more state of existence.'" MN 11

In MN 70 the basic characteristics of an arahant are described. The description makes it clear that this is the final destination, because it says that they have no more work to do:

"I do not say of those bhikkhus who are arahants with disintegrated influxes, who have lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, destroyed the fetters of being, and are completely liberated through final knowledge, that they still have work to do with diligence (appamāda). Why is that? They have done their work with diligence; they are no more capable of being negligent."

There are two types of liberation among the arahants who are fully liberated. They are described by the Buddha in MN 70 as follows:

"What kind of person is the one liberated-in-both-ways? Here some person contacts with the group³¹ and abides in those liberations that are peaceful and immaterial, transcending forms, and his influxes are decayed by his seeing with wisdom. This kind of person is called one liberated-in-both-ways. I do not say of such a bhikkhu that he still has work to do with diligence. Why is that? He has done his work with diligence; he is no more capable of being negligent."

"What kind of person is the one liberated-by-wisdom? Here some person does not contact with the group and abide in those liberations that are peaceful and immaterial, transcending forms, but his influxes are decayed by his seeing with wisdom. This kind of person is called one liberated-by-wisdom. I do not say of such a bhikkhu that he still has work to do with diligence. Why is that? He has done his work with diligence; he is no more capable of being negligent."

In these two people, both have achieved the disintegration of the influxes through seeing with wisdom. Seeing with wisdom is *vipassanā* meditation. The first person has also attained temporary

31 The word *kāya* means group, here it is the mental group of consciousness and mental factors, because the immaterial attainments cannot be touched with the body.

liberation through the immaterial attainments. This is a temporary liberation through *samatha* meditation.

For the second person, nothing is said about whether he has attained the finematerial absorptions (*jhānā*). The text only emphasises that he has not practised the immaterial realms.³²

This sutta, MN 70, then goes on to describe what the practice looks like to reach the goal of ultimate liberation:

"Bhikkhus, I do not say that final knowledge is achieved all at once.

On the contrary, final knowledge is achieved by gradual training, by gradual practice, by gradual progress.

And how does there come to be gradual training, gradual practice, gradual progress?

Here one who has confidence [in a teacher] visits him;

when he visits him, he pays respect to him;

when he pays respect to him,

he listens carefully; one who listens carefully

hears the dhamma; having heard the dhamma,

he memorises it;

he examines the meaning of the teachings he has memorised;

when he examines their meaning, he gains a reflective acceptance of those teachings;

when he has gained a reflective acceptance of those teachings, a wish springs up in him;

when a wish has sprung up, he applies his will;

having applied his will, he scrutinises;

having scrutinised, he strives;

resolutely striving, he realises with the [mental] group the ultimate truth

and sees it by penetrating it with wisdom."

Basically, the arahant practised and realised the noble eightfold path as the fourth noble truth. In several sutta the Buddha spoke of the tenfold path realised by the arahant, such as in MN 78, which is given to a householder, the carpenter Pañcakaṅga.

"Now, carpenter, when a man possesses what ten qualities do I describe him as accomplished in what is wholesome, perfected in what is wholesome, attained to the supreme attainment, a world-renouncer (samaṇa) invincible?

Here a bhikkhu possesses

1. *the right view of one beyond training,*
2. *the right thought of one beyond training,*
3. *the right speech of one beyond training,*
4. *the right action of one beyond training,*
5. *the right livelihood of one beyond training,*
6. *the right energy of one beyond training,*
7. *the right mindfulness of one beyond training,*
8. *the right concentration of one beyond training,*
9. *the right knowledge of one beyond training, and*
10. *the right deliverance of one beyond training.*

When a man possesses these ten qualities, I describe him as accomplished in what is wholesome, perfected in what is wholesome, attained to the supreme attainment, a world-renouncer invincible."

Verifying whether a Bhikkhu has attained Arahantship

In MN 112 The Sixfold Purity - Chabbisodhanasuttam, the Buddha gave the bhikkhus instructions on how to check whether a bhikkhu has really attained arahantship if he claims to have done so. Five questions are recommended by the Buddha that should be asked. What is striking here is that

³² Cf. on this topic also p. 55, the statements in AN 9. 44, 45. According to AN 9. 44, the one liberated by wisdom also attains the immaterial realms and the end of perception and feeling.

the title is called the sixfold purity, but only five points are asked.

"Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu makes a declaration of final knowledge thus:

*'I understand: Birth is finished,
the holy life has been lived,
what had to be done has been done,
there is no more state of existence.'*

That bhikkhu's words should neither be approved nor disapproved. Without approving or disapproving, a question should be put thus:

[Question:]

'Friend, there are four kinds of expression rightly proclaimed by the Blessed One who knows and sees, accomplished and fully awakened. What four?

[Answer:]

Telling the seen as it is seen; telling the heard as it is heard; telling the sensed as it is sensed; telling the cognized as it is cognized.

These, friend, are the four kinds of expression rightly proclaimed by the Blessed One who knows and sees, accomplished and fully awakened. How does the venerable one know, how does he see, regarding these four kinds of expression, so that through not clinging his mind is liberated from the influxes?"

The bhikkhu who has attained arahantship should answer as follows:

"Friends, regarding the seen I abide unattracted, unrepelled, independent, detached, free, dissociated, with a mind rid of barriers.

Regarding the heard ... Regarding the sensed ... Regarding the cognized I abide unattracted, unrepelled, independent, detached, free, dissociated, with a mind rid of barriers. It is by knowing thus, seeing thus, regarding these four kinds of expression, that through not clinging my mind is liberated from the influxes."

Furthermore, the bhikkhu should be questioned about the five aggregates.

The bhikkhu should answer:

"Friends, having known material form to be feeble, fading away, and comfortless, with the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishing of attraction and clinging regarding material form, of mental standpoints, adherences, and underlying tendencies regarding material form, I have understood that my mind is liberated.

Friends, having known feeling ... Having known perception ... Having known formations ... Having known consciousness to be feeble, ..."

Further, the bhikkhu who is said to have attained arahantship should be questioned about the six elements.

The bhikkhu should answer:

"Friends, I have treated the earth element as not self, with no self based on the earth element. And with the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishing of attraction and clinging based on the earth element, of mental standpoints, adherences, and underlying tendencies based on the earth element, I have understood that my mind is liberated.

Friends, I have treated the water element ... the fire element ... the air element ... the space element ... the consciousness element as not self, ..."

Further, the bhikkhu who is said to have attained arahantship should be asked about the six sense bases.

The bhikkhu should answer:

"Friends, with the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishing of desire, lust, delight, craving, attraction, and clinging, and of mental standpoints, adherences, and underlying tendencies regarding the eye, forms, eye-consciousness, and things cognizable [by the mind] through eye-consciousness, I have understood that my mind is liberated."

Similarly, the bhikkhu being asked should answer concerning the other five sense bases. Further, the bhikkhu should be asked:

"But, friend, how does the venerable one know, how does he see, so that in regard to this body with its consciousness and all external signs, I-making, mine-making, and the underlying tendency to conceit have been eradicated in him?"

The bhikkhu should answer:

The entire path from the dusty householder life to the bhikkhu and the sequence of right practice as found in many suttā is described here in response.

He has practised the four *jhānā* and, from the mind thus purified, understands the four noble truths, as well as the influxes, their origination, their cessation and the path leading to their cessation. Then follows the standard description of the knowledge of liberation. Here follows the addition to the initial question:

"It is by knowing thus, seeing thus, friends, that in regard to this body with its consciousness and all external signs, I-making, mine-making, and the underlying tendency to conceit have been eradicated in me."

SN 12. 16 states

"When a bhikkhu is liberated through non-attachment, disenchantment, dispassion, through the cessation of ignorance, he can be called a bhikkhu who has attained Nibbāna through seeing the dhamma."

Here again we find the essential steps of insight practice, such as disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, especially of ignorance, which lead to the goal of the Buddha's teachings. Without disenchantment and letting go of all formations, the noble goal of the Buddha's teaching, *Nibbāna*, cannot be achieved. In order to achieve this and then live with it, a lifestyle accordingly is necessary.

If these steps of insight meditation are not sufficient, the following steps, which the Buddha mentioned for example in SN 22. 57, should also be considered:

"Here, bhikkhus,

1. *the bhikkhu understands matter,*
2. *he understands the origin of matter,*
3. *he understands the cessation of matter,*
4. *the path leading to the cessation of matter;*
5. *he understands the gratification of matter,*
6. *the disadvantage of matter,*
7. *he understands the escape out of matter."*

The same applies to the other four aggregates.

After understanding (*pajānāti*) the five aggregates in these seven steps, they are to be understood/known directly (*abhiññāya*), that is, with strong concentration.

Those who understand so directly in these seven steps are practising in the direction of disenchantment, dispassion and the cessation of the five aggregates, they are practising well. Those who practise well stand firm in the *dhamma* and in the discipline.

One who has directly understood the above seven steps is liberated, well liberated, due to disenchantment, due to dispassion, due to cessation from the five aggregates through non-attachment. He who is well liberated is perfected. For him who is perfected, there is no more round of existence to be gone.

At the end of the sutta it says that these seven steps should be thoroughly examined in [another] three ways, namely with regard to the elements, with regard to the bases, with regard to dependant origination.

In conclusion, after this detailed description of *vipassanā* practice, the following is said:

"A bhikkhu who is skilful in these seven steps and investigates according to the threefold method is called perfected in this dhamma and this discipline, he is called a supreme person."

Thus, not only the practice of how arahantship can be achieved is described here, but also how an arahant should practise. All these steps are included in careful, diligent, resolute practice. In SN 22. 122 it is said that although the arahant has done what should be done because he has reached the highest goal of the teaching, it also says: *"... but these things, when developed and practised frequently, lead to a happy state of seeing the dhamma, to mindfulness and clear understanding."*

In SN 22. 106 the Buddha adds to the steps of understanding (*pajānāti*) listed here, which already includes a more comprehensive understanding, and the higher understanding (*abhiññā*), a further step of understanding, which is thorough understanding (*pariññā*). The Pāḷi word *jānāti* already means understanding. The prefix *pa-* expresses that understanding goes beyond simple comprehension. But it is still a relatively rough understanding. The next step of understanding happens through direct seeing or higher understanding (*abhiññā*). The prefix *abhi* means higher. The prefix *pari* in the third step means round-about. In this sutta SN 22. 106 the Buddha defined exactly what must be thoroughly understood, namely the five aggregates. He further defined what thorough understanding means, namely the disintegration of lust, the disintegration of aversion, the disintegration of ignorance. He then went on to name the person who has thoroughly understood: the arahant.

We find a description with images of what an arahant has attained in a conversation between the householder Citta and the bhikkhu Kāmabhū. The bhikkhu asks the householder about the meaning of the following verse:

*"With faultless wheel and a white awning,
the one-spoked chariot rolls.
See it coming, trouble-free,
the stream cut, without bondage."* SN 41.5

The householder Citta gives the following explanation:

Faultless is a term for ethics.

White awning is a term for liberation.

One spoke is a term for mindfulness.

It rolls is a term for going forward and returning.

Chariot is a term for the body, consisting of the four great elements, conceived by father and mother, developed by rice and gruel, with the nature of perishing, to being worn and rubbed away, to breaking apart and dispersal.

Lust is trouble; aversion is trouble; delusion is trouble. For a bhikkhu whose influxes have been disintegrated, these have been abandoned, cut off at the root, made like palm stumps, obliterated so that they are no more subject to future arising.

Therefore the bhikkhu without influxes is called 'trouble-free.' The 'one who is coming' is a designation for the arahant.

'The stream' is a designation for craving.

For a bhikkhu whose influxes are decayed, this has been abandoned, cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated so that it is no more subject to future arising. Therefore the bhikkhu whose influxes are decayed is called 'one with the stream cut.'

Lust is bondage; aversion is bondage; delusion is bondage. For a bhikkhu whose influxes are de-

cayed, these have been abandoned, cut off at the root, made like palm stumps, obliterated so that they are no more subject to future arising. Therefore the bhikkhu whose influxes are decayed, is called 'one no more in bondage.'

We see here that a householder has profound knowledge about an arahant's state of mind and gives profound explanations to a bhikkhu.

We find the same verse in Ud 7. 5 about the bhikkhu Baddhiyo, who was called ugly by the Buddha and who was dwarf in stature, who had also attained arahantship.³³

In AN 3. 88 the Buddha described an arahant as perfect in ethics, perfect in concentration and perfect in wisdom. Individuals who have attained the three preceding paths are not yet perfect in the two trainings of concentration and wisdom.

The Buddha explained how an arahant himself knows that he has attained arahantship:

"Again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu who is one beyond training understands the six faculties - the eye faculty, the ear faculty, the nose faculty, the tongue faculty, the body faculty, the mind faculty. He understands: 'These six faculties will cease completely and totally without remainder, and no other six faculties will arise anywhere in any way.' This too is a method by means of which a bhikkhu who is one beyond training, standing on the plane of one beyond training, understands: 'I am one beyond training.'" SN 48. 53

A reflection made by an arahant was presented by the Buddha in AN 7. 52 as follows:

*"And what, bhikkhus, is attainment of Nibbāna through nonclinging?
Here, a bhikkhu is practicing thus: 'It might not be,
and it might not be mine. It will not be; it will not be mine.
I am abandoning what exists, what has come to be.'
He obtains equanimity. He is not attached to existence; he is not attached to origination.
He sees with correct wisdom: 'There is a higher state that is peaceful,' and he has totally realised that state.
He has totally abandoned the underlying tendency to conceit;
he has totally abandoned the underlying tendency to lust for existence;
he has totally abandoned ignorance.
With the decay of the influxes, he has realized for himself with direct knowledge,
through seeing things, the liberation of mind free of influxes, that is liberation by wisdom, and having entered upon it, he dwells in it.
This is called attainment of Nibbāna through non-clinging."*

The reflection here refers to kamma as a result-creating action and the effect.

In AN 6. 49 the Buddha explains in more detail how the disintegration of conceit is expressed in the mind of the arahant:

*"... it does not occur to him:
(1) 'There is someone better than me,' or
(2) 'There is someone equal to me,' or
(3) 'There is someone inferior to me.'*

*...
They [do not rank themselves] as superior or inferior,
nor do they rank themselves as equal.
Finished is birth, the spiritual life has been lived;
they continue on, freed from fetters.*

33 Cf. SN 21. 6

In MN 138 the Buddha describes the consciousness of the arahant for whom there is no future birth as follows:

"Bhikkhus, a bhikkhu should examine things in such a way that his consciousness, while examining them, is not distracted and scattered externally, nor stuck internally, and by not clinging he does not become agitated. When his consciousness is not distracted and scattered externally, nor stuck internally either, by not clinging, not being agitated, then for him there is no arising of the origination of dukkha - of future birth, future aging, and death."

In the sutta this statement is explained by Mahā Kaccāna in such a way that consciousness is distracted and scattered externally when it follows sense objects, seeks satisfaction in them, binds itself to sense objects, is fettered by them.

Consciousness is stuck internally when it finds satisfaction in the pleasant states of *jhānā* and gets stuck, bound and shackled by it.

The arahant has investigated the external objects as well as the internal states of consciousness to such an extent that he knows that they are all impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless. He is therefore neither attached to external things nor to internal states. He identifies neither with external objects nor with his own states of consciousness.

Another description of the arahant's state of mind can be found in MN 149. Since the arahant knows through investigation what the sense objects are like and also the parts of the body and mind that experience them, namely impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless, he is not pleased with these things. The Buddha describes this state as follows:

"When one abides uninflamed by lust, unfettered, uninfatuated, contemplating the disadvantage, then the five aggregates affected by clinging are diminished for oneself in the future; and one's craving - which brings renewal of being, is accompanied by delight and lust, and delights in this or that - is abandoned. One's bodily and mental troubles are abandoned, one's bodily and mental torments are abandoned, one's bodily and mental fevers are abandoned, and one experiences bodily and mental happiness."

All arahants have attained liberation through wisdom (*paññāvimutti*). But not all have attained supernatural powers.³⁴ All have also attained the knowledge of the disintegration of the influxes, one of three knowledges. In the context of the practice of dependant origination, all should also have knowledge of previous lives, but not all have knowledge of the birth and death of other beings, the third of three knowledges. There are arahants who have six knowledges, but not all have them.

In AN 9. 44 and 45, two types of arahants are described in more detail according to their liberation. AN 9. 44 The one liberated by wisdom – Paññāvimuttasuttaṃ

"It is said, friend, 'liberated by wisdom, liberated by wisdom.'

In what way has the Blessed One spoken of one liberated by wisdom?"

(1) "Here, friend, secluded from sensual pleasures . . . a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the first jhāna . . . and he understands it with wisdom. To this extent the Blessed One has spoken of one liberated by wisdom with one method.

(2)–(4) Again, friend, with the subsiding of initial application and sustained application, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the second jhāna . . . the third jhāna . . . the fourth jhāna . . . and he understands it with wisdom. To this extent, too, the Blessed One has spoken of one liberated by wisdom with one method.

(5)–(8) Again, friend, with the complete surmounting of perceptions of forms, with the passing away of perceptions of sensory impingement, with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, [perceiving] 'space is infinite,' a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the base of infinite space ... the base of infinite consciousness ... the base of nothingness ... the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; and he understands it with wisdom. To this extent, too, the Blessed One has spoken of

34 Cf. SN 12. 70

one liberated by wisdom with one method.

(9) Again, friend, by completely surmounting the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the cessation of perception and feeling, and having seen with wisdom, the influxes have been completely disintegrated; and he understands it with wisdom. To this extent, friend, the Blessed One has spoken of one completely liberated by wisdom.”³⁵

AN 9. 45 The One Liberated in Both Respects – Ubhatobhāgavimuttasuttaṃ

“It is said, friend, ‘liberated in both respects, liberated in both respects.’ In what way has the Blessed One spoken of one liberated in both respects?”

(1) “Here, friend, secluded from sensual pleasures . . . a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the first jhāna. . . . He dwells having contacted that base with the [mental] group in whatever way [it is attained], and he understands it with wisdom. To this extent the Blessed One has spoken of one liberated in both respects with one method.

(2)–(4) Again, friend, with the subsiding of initial application and sustained application, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the second jhāna . . . the third jhāna . . . the fourth jhāna. . . . He dwells having contacted that base with the [mental] group in whatever way [it is attained], and he understands it with wisdom. To this extent, too, the Blessed One has spoken of one liberated in both respects with one method.

(5)–(8) Again, friend, with the complete surmounting of perceptions of forms, with the passing away of perceptions of sensory impingement, with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, [perceiving] ‘space is infinite,’ a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the base of infinite space . . . the base of infinite consciousness . . . the base of nothingness . . . the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. He dwells having contacted that base with the [mental] group in whatever way [it is attained], and he understands it with wisdom. To this extent, too, the Blessed One has spoken of one liberated in both respects with one method.

(9) Again, friend, by completely surmounting the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the cessation of perception and feeling, and having seen with wisdom, the influxes have been completely disintegrated. He dwells having contacted that base with the [mental] group in whatever way [it is attained], and he understands it with wisdom. To this extent, friend, the Blessed One has spoken of one completely liberated in both respects.”

We see here that ‘one liberated by wisdom’ has also attained the nine attainments, but has not developed them to the same extent as the ‘one liberated in both respects’. The ‘one liberated by wisdom’ has attained the nine attainments and understood them with *vipassanā* without having used them as a tool for liberation, like the ‘one liberated in both respects’.

In DN 12, the ‘one liberated by wisdom’ has also attained the immaterial realms. If he had not attained them, he would not be able to examine and understand them. In this sutta, the understanding of these is defined more precisely:

“... He has understood the arising, the passing away, the gratification, the disadvantage, the escape [of these realms] as it is.”

The ‘one liberated in both respects’ is also described in more detail in DN 12:

“... he attains the eight liberations (vimokkha) in forward order (anuloma), in reverse order (paṭiloma) and forward-reverse order (anulomapaṭiloma), he enters them, he emerges from them when, where and for how long he wishes.”

In Anguttara Nikaya 8. 28 Sāriputta, in conversation with the Buddha, listed the signs by which a person knows for himself that he has attained arahantship.

The Buddha asked Sāriputta how many powers a bhikkhu in whom the influxes have been disintegrated possesses, on the basis of which he can say that the influxes have been disintegrated in him.

³⁵ In MN 70, the one liberated by wisdom is described in a different way. He has not attained the immaterial realms.

Sāriputta then listed eight powers.

1. He has recognised the impermanence of all formations as it is with wisdom.
2. He has realised that the objects of the senses are like a pit full of glowing coals.
3. The consciousness of the influx-free bhikkhu tends to seclusion, he rejoices in renunciation, he has removed all things that could give rise to influxes.
4. He has developed the four foundations of mindfulness, well developed,
5. the four paths of power,
6. the five faculties,
7. the seven awakening factors,
8. he has developed the noble eightfold path, well developed.

In AN 10. 90 ten powers are enumerated that someone has who claims to have attained the decay of the influxes. The same eight points are mentioned, plus the four right endeavours and the five powers, thus all 37 requisites that lead to awakening (*bodhipakkhiya dhamma*) are enumerated.

5. The Presentation of the Attributes of the Arahant as an Ideal in the Pāḷi Canon

At the beginning of this topic, some remarks are made based on passages in the Pāḷi Canon that deal with the assessment of non-awakened beings with regard to others, here in the specific case with regard to the arahant.

In SN 3. 11 King Pasenadi of Kosala met the Buddha. While he was with the Buddha, seven Jaṭilā (long-haired ascetics), seven Nigaṇṭhā, seven naked ascetics, seven one-robed ascetics, seven wandering ascetics who had grown armpit hair, nails, and skin hair, passed by with their various monks' belongings not far from the Blessed One.

Then King Pasenadi rose from his seat, knelt down on the ground and, stretching out his joined hands in the direction where the ascetics were, he called his name three times: 'I am King Pasenadi of Kosala'.

He then turned back to the Exalted One and said:

"Those who have attained arahantship or the arahant path in the world, there are many of them."

The Buddha replied to this:

"Difficult to recognise, great king, is this for you who leads a householder life, enjoys sensual objects, lives with a crowd of children, enjoys sandalwood from Kasī, uses floral ornaments, perfumes and ointments, delights in gold and silver: 'These are arahants or these are those who have attained the path of arahantship.'³⁶

By living together, great king, their ethics are to be recognised, and that too only in a long time, not otherwise, and only by one who is attentive, not by one who is not attentive; by one who is wise, not by one who is unwise.

Through dealing with someone, great king, their purity is to be recognised, and that too only in a long time, not otherwise, and only by one who is attentive, not by one who is not attentive; by one who is wise, not by one who is unwise.

In difficulties, great king, their strength is to be recognised, and that too only in a long time, not otherwise, and only by one who is attentive, not by one who is not attentive; by one who is wise, not by one who is unwise.

In discussion, great king, their wisdom is to be recognised, and that too only in a long time, not otherwise, and only by one who is observant, not by one who is not observant; by one who is wise, not by one who is unwise."

Attributes of the arahant such as ethics, purity, strength and wisdom are mentioned here. These are not recognisable by a person who does not practise *vipassanā*, who lives in a family and indulges in ordinary life, such as doing business and enjoying sensual pleasures, as is clearly stated here. The common person cultivates a wrong view, the view of a being, he imagines an arahant according to his own way of life. He imagines a perfect being who accepts him unconditionally in all his misbehaviour, can solve all the problems of this world casually and is always beaming with a smile. The wrong view is only overcome with the stream-entry. But even for a stream-enterer it is difficult to recognise an arahant, firstly because ignorance has not yet been overcome and secondly because all arahants have their own individual characters, although they have overcome all mental defilements.

One should be careful when it comes to the judgement of ignorant people regarding a being that has attained arahantship. This is because misjudgements and the resulting misbehaviour towards an awakened human being can have serious consequences.

In AN 10. 89, for example, a monk is reported as speaking ill of Sāriputta and Moggallāna and accusing them of evil. Sāriputta and Moggallāna were the two chief disciples of the Buddha. They were arahants with special abilities. The monk Kokālika went to the Buddha and told him that Sāriputta and Moggallāna had evil desires. The Buddha tried to dissuade him from this view, but his attempt was in vain.

³⁶ In the same way the Buddha speaks to a householder in AN 6. 59.

Shortly after the bhikkhu Kokālika had left, his whole body became covered with bumps the size of mustard seeds. Then they became as big as mung beans, then like chickpeas, then like breast berry seeds, then like breast berries, then like myrobalan fruits, then like young crab apples, then like ripened crab apples. But when the bumps were as big as ripe crab apples, they burst open and pus and blood gushed out. He lay on banana leaves, like a fish that has swallowed poison. *"Then the independent brahmā Tudu approached the bhikkhu Kokālika, stood in the air, and said to him:*

'Place confidence in Sāriputta and Moggallāna, Kokālika.

Sāriputta and Moggallāna are well behaved.'

'Who are you, friend?'

'I am the independent brahmā Tudu.'

'Didn't the Blessed One declare you to be a non-returner, friend?'

Then why have you come back here?'

See how much wrong you have done.'

Then the independent brahmā Tudu addressed the bhikkhu Kokālika in verse:

*'When a person has taken birth
an axe is born inside his mouth
with which the fool cuts himself
by uttering wrongful speech.*

*He who praises one deserving blame
or blames one deserving praise
casts with his mouth an unlucky throw
by which he finds no happiness.*

*Slight is the unlucky throw at dice
that results in the loss of one's wealth,
[the loss] of all, oneself included;
much worse is this unlucky throw
of harboring hate against the holy ones.*

*For a hundred thousand
and thirty-six nirabbudas, plus five abbudas,
the slanderer of noble ones goes to hell,
having defamed them with evil speech and mind.'*

Then the bhikkhu Kokālika died on account of that illness, and because of his resentment against Sāriputta and Moggallāna, after death he was reborn in the red-lotus hell."

*"Whoever reviles the worthy teaching of the Noble Ones who live by dhamma,
that stupid one, depending on wicked views,
like the bamboo when it bears fruit, brings about his own destruction."* Dhp 164

For worldlings uneducated in the *dhamma*, an arahant is not easy to recognise. Thus we also find an incident in SN 16. 10 where this becomes clear. Mahākassapa is supposed to teach the bhikkhunīs in the presence of Ānanda. In the same Saṃyutta, in SN 16. 9, the Buddha names the nine attainments, as well as the supernatural powers up to the influx-free liberation, which he can attain and says after each attainment that Mahākassapa can also attain it like himself. But in SN 16. 10. the bhikkhunī Thullatissa says about Mahākassapa after he has given a discourse to the Bhikkhunīs how this bhikkhu could teach them in the presence of Ānanda the wise one. She compares this situation to a needle merchant trying to sell a needle to a needle maker. She values Ānanda more than Mahākassapa.

But even for the bhikkhus who practised themselves, an arahant was not easy to identify. We see this, for example, in SN 21. 4. The bhikkhus complained to the Buddha that a newly ordained bhikkhu, on returning from almsround, after the meal, would withdraw without taking part in anything, silent and inactive, that he did not take part in the work of the bhikkhus at the time of

robe-making. The Buddha asked the new bhikkhu to come to him and examined his mind. He then instructed the bhikkhus that this monk had attained the goal of the teaching and was dwelling in it.

*“Not by means of slack endeavour,
not by means of feeble effort,
is this Nibbāna
that is release from all suffering
to be achieved.*

*This young bhikkhu [by my side]
is a supreme being indeed:
He carries about his final body,
having conquered Māra and his mount.”*

Also in SN 21. 7. the Buddha said:

*“When the wise man is in the midst of fools
they do not know him if he does not speak,
but they know him when he speaks,
pointing out the deathless state.*

*He should speak and explain the dhamma,
he should raise high the seers’ banner.
Well-spoken words are the seers’ banner:
For the dhamma is the banner of seers.”*

We also repeatedly find passages in the Pāḷi Canon where a bhikkhu or several bhikkhus ask the Buddha where a bhikkhu has gone after death. There are several suttā in which the Buddha said that a certain bhikkhu had attained arahantship. So it was not known to the bhikkhus as companions during their lifetime that a person had attained arahantship. For example, Ānanda asked in SN 55. 8 where the bhikkhu Sāḷha had gone after death. The Buddha replied that this bhikkhu could dwell in the influx-free liberation of mind. Similarly, Ānanda asked the Buddha about the bhikkhu Asoka. The answer is the same. (SN 55. 9)

In MN 23 there is a brief comparison at the end showing how to behave respectfully towards an arahant:

*“The Naga serpent is a symbol for a bhikkhu whose influxes are broken up.
‘Leave the Naga serpent;
do not harm the Naga serpent;
honour the Naga serpent.’
This is the meaning.”*

In AN 6. 49 we find examples of two bhikkhus as they depict the attainment of arahantship. They do not speak of themselves or single themselves out.

The bhikkhu Khema went to the Buddha and said that an arahant no longer thinks:

*‘There is one who is better than me’ or
‘there is one who is equal to me’ or
‘there is one who is inferior to me’.*

The bhikkhu Sumana also went to the Buddha and said that an arahant no longer thinks:

*‘There is no one better than me’ or
‘there is no one equal to me’ or
‘there is no one inferior to me’.*

The Buddha said to the other bhikkhus:

"Bhikkhus, in this way sons of good family declare ultimate knowledge. They state the meaning but don't bring themselves into the picture. But there are some foolish people who make themselves ridiculous and claim to have ultimate knowledge through thinking. They will experience discomfort later."

*"They [do not rank themselves] as superior or inferior,
nor do they rank themselves as equal.
Finished is birth, the spiritual life has been lived;
so saints walk free of fetters."*

In Anguttara Nikaya 6. 55 we find the story about the bhikkhu Soṇa. He had great difficulty practising in the beginning. He wanted to reach the goal of the Buddha's teachings at all costs and tried very hard. But his endeavours were unsuccessful. He then considered returning to the householder life and earning merit there. The Buddha was able to recognise his thoughts and talked to him about how to apply energy. Soṇa had exerted himself too much and therefore could not see things as they are. The Buddha explained to him how to apply a balanced amount of energy. And soon afterwards he attained arahantship. He went to the Buddha to tell him about his success. He did not speak personally about himself, but explained the consciousness of an arahant as follows:

"He who, lord, is an arahant in whom the influxes have been disintegrated, who has attained perfection, who has done what has to be done, has laid aside the burden, has attained the supreme goal, whose bonds of existence have been completely disintegrated, and who is liberated by right knowledge, is inclined to six things:

*He tends to renunciation,
to seclusion,
to non-illwill,
to the decay of thirst,
to the disintegration of clinging
and to non-confusion."*

Soṇa explained that someone might suppose that a bhikkhu is inclined to renunciation because of faith, inclined to seclusion because of desire for gain, honour, and fame, inclined to non-illwill because of his devotion to ethics and precepts as the essentials. But he explained that an arahant is inclined to these things because of the decay of lust, the decay of aversion, the decay of delusion, because he is free from lust, aversion and delusion. And it is also because of the disintegration of lust, the disintegration of aversion, the disintegration of delusion, because he is free from lust, aversion, and delusion, that he tends to the disintegration of thirst, the disintegration of clinging, and to non-confusion.

Soṇa went on to say that even when strong sense objects come into his perception, they can no longer captivate his mind; his mind remains untouched, steadfast, unshakeable, and in everything he sees impermanence.

*"Just as a rock as one solid mass
is not shaken by a storm,
neither form nor sound,
nor smells, nor tastes, nor tangible objects,
nor desirable or undesirable,
can ever shake the mind of the unshakeable.
His mind is firm, liberated, and
he sees its vanishing."*

We can see from the example of the bhikkhu Soṇa how important it is not to give up the practice and not to follow doubts that may arise. It is of course due to a special merit when one meets a living self-awakened Buddha. But seeking out a person who has understood the teaching is also helpful in situations where uncertainties about the practice arise. In this case, we can see the strong potential of Soṇa that he was finally able to attain arahantship so quickly.

In the sutta The Simile of the Snake, MN 22, the arahant is described in detail with images as follows:

”Bhikkhus, this bhikkhu is called one whose shaft has been lifted, whose trench has been filled in, whose pillar has been uprooted, one who has no bar, a noble one whose banner is lowered, whose burden is lowered, who is unfettered.

And how is the bhikkhu one whose shaft has been lifted?

Here the bhikkhu has abandoned ignorance, has cut it off at the root, made it like a palm stump, done away with it, so that it is no longer subject to future arising. That is how the bhikkhu is one whose shaft has been lifted.

And how is the bhikkhu one whose trench has been filled in?

Here the bhikkhu has abandoned the round of births that brings renewed being, has cut it off at the root. ... so that it is no longer subject to future arising. That is how the bhikkhu is one whose trench has been filled in.

And how is the bhikkhu one whose pillar has been uprooted?

Here the bhikkhu has abandoned craving, has cut it off at the root. ... so that it is no longer subject to future arising. That is how the bhikkhu is one whose pillar has been uprooted.

And how is the bhikkhu one who has no bar?

Here the bhikkhu has abandoned the five lower fetters, has cut them off at the root. ... so that they are no longer subject to future arising. That is how the bhikkhu is one who has no bar.

And how is the bhikkhu a noble one whose banner is lowered, whose burden is lowered, who is unfettered?

Here a bhikkhu has abandoned the conceit ‘I am,’ has cut it off at the root. ... so that it is no longer subject to future arising. That is how the bhikkhu is a noble one whose banner is lowered, whose burden is lowered, who is unfettered.

Bhikkhus, when the gods with Indra, with Brahma and with Pajapati seek a bhikkhu who is thus liberated in mind, they do not find [anything of which they could say]: ‘The consciousness of one thus gone³⁷ is supported by this.’ Why is that? One thus gone, I say, is untraceable while seeing things.³⁸

In AN 5. 71 and 72 the methods leading to these attributes, the methods leading to liberation of the mind (*cetovimutti*) and to liberation through wisdom (*paññāvimutti*), are enumerated.

- Contemplation of non-beauty while dwelling in the body (*asubhānupassī kāye*),
- the perception of the repulsiveness of food (*āhāre paṭikūlasaññī*),
- the perception of unpleasantness in the entire world (*sabbaloke anabhiratasaññī*),
- the perception of impermanence in all formations (*sabbasaṅkhāresu aniccānupassī*),
- the perception of death (*maraṇasaññā*) is well established internally. AN 5. 71
- the perception of impermanence (*aniccasaññā*),
- the perception of the unsatisfactory in the impermanent (*anicce dukkhasaññā*),
- the perception of selflessness in the unsatisfactory (*dukkhe anattasaññā*),
- the perception of abandoning (*pahānasaññā*),
- the perception of dispassion (*virāgasaññā*). AN 5. 72

37 This is a term for an arahant in general and not specifically for the Buddha.

38 This statement means that there is no person who practises and that beings who have not attained arahantship cannot find the consciousness of arahantship.

"When craving has been overcome by a bhikkhu, cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, eliminated so that it is no longer subject to future arising, then that bhikkhu is an arahant with disintegrated influxes, one who has lived the holy life, has done what should be done, has laid down the burden, has attained the true goal, the fetters of becoming have been disintegrated, and he is fully liberated through final knowledge." MN 73

In MN 37 the ruler of the gods Sakka asks the Buddha:

*"Venerable sir, in brief, in what way is a bhikkhu liberated by the disintegration of craving
is one who has reached the final purpose,
the ultimate safety from being bound,
the ultimate holy life,
has reached the ultimate goal,
one who is the best among gods and men?"*

Here the Buddha describes an arahant as follows:

"Ruler of the gods, here a bhikkhu has heard that all things are not worthy of inclining to. When a bhikkhu has heard that all things are not worthy of inclining to, he understands all things directly (abhijānāti). When he has understood all things directly, he understands all things thoroughly (parijānāti); when he has understood all things thoroughly, he dwells in the contemplation of the impermanence of feeling; whatever feeling he may feel, whether pleasant or unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant; he dwells in the contemplation of dispassion, he dwells in the contemplation of cessation, he dwells in the contemplation of letting go. When he has thus contemplated, he clings to nothing in the world. When he is not attached, he is not agitated. When he is not agitated, he himself thus attains the ultimate Nibbāna.

He understands:

*'Birth is finished,
the holy life has been lived,
what had to be done has been done,
there is no more state of existence.'*"

In MN 51 the arahant is presented with the standard description, namely that he has understood the four noble truths as well as the influxes, that he knows he is liberated and that there is no further birth. This is again preceded by a detailed description of the path with confidence in the Buddha, homelessness, higher ethics, concentration and wisdom. Then the following characteristics of a person who has attained arahantship are described:

*"This, bhikkhus, is called the kind of person who does not torture himself nor pursue the practice of self-torture,
who does not torment others,
nor follows the practice of torturing others.
This person doesn't torment himself, he doesn't torment others, he sees things that way,
he is without hunger [desire],
he has stopped, cooled down,
he experiences happiness
and has thus become holy himself."³⁹*

In AN 4. 200 the Buddha describes in detail the view of the arahant who has overcome all kinds of clinging love (*pema*) and the resulting aversion to everything that opposes clinging love. The various views, which were also overcome with the overcoming of conceit (*māna*) as a fetter, are presented in detail. Attached love and its counterpart, aversion, are based on these views. We thus find here a good depiction of the thinking and inner psychological life of an arahant in contrast to the ordinary person, whose thinking is characterised by the wrong views listed here.

39 We find the same account of the arahant in MN 60, which is a lecture given to householders.

”At a time, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu, after the decay of the influxes, attains and abides in the liberation of mind that is liberation through wisdom, having realised direct knowledge by seeing things, at that time that love that arises through love is overcome, cut off at the root, made it like a palm stump, obliterated it so that it is no more subject to future arising; at that time that aversion that arises through love, that love that arises through aversion, and that aversion that arises through aversion is overcome, cut off at the root, made it like a palm stump, obliterated it so that it is no more subject to future arising.

This is called a bhikkhu who neither picks up nor pushes away, who does not fume, does not blaze, and does not ruminate.

And how, bhikkhus, does the bhikkhu not pick up?

Here, bhikkhus, the bhikkhu does not see matter as self, matter possessing a self, self as matter, the self in matter. [likewise with feeling, perception, formations, consciousness]. This is how a bhikkhu does not show off.

And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu not push away?

Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu does not insult one who insults him, does not scold one who scolds him, and whoever seeks to quarrel with him, he does not return this quarrel. It is in this way that a bhikkhu does not push away.

And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu not fume?

*If there is no ‘I am’, then there is no ‘I am thus’,
if there is no ‘I am like this’, there is no ‘I am different’,
if there is no ‘I am not lasting’, there is no ‘I am lasting’.*

*If there is no ‘may I be’, then there is no ‘may I be like this’,
if there is no ‘may I be like this’, there is no ‘may I be different’,
if there is no ‘may I also be’, there is no ‘may I also be like this’,
if there is no ‘may I also be like this’ there is no ‘may I also be different’,
if there is no ‘I shall be’, there is no ‘I shall be like this’,
if there is no ‘I shall be like this’, there is no ‘I shall be different’.*

Thus a bhikkhu does not fume.

And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu not blaze?

*If there is no ‘I am because of this’, there is no ‘I am thus because of this’,
if there is no ‘I am like this because of this’, there is no ‘I am different because of this’,
if there is no ‘I am not lasting because of this’, there is no ‘I am lasting because of this’.*

...

if there is no ‘I shall be like this because of this’, there is no ‘I shall be different because of this’.

Thus a bhikkhu does not blaze.

And how, bhikkhus, does the bhikkhu not consume himself?

Here, in a bhikkhu, arrogance has been overcome, cut off at the root, made it like a palm stump, obliterated it so that it is no more subject to future arising.

Thus, bhikkhus, the bhikkhu does not consume himself.”

In MN 76 the arahant is described by the venerable Ānanda in conversation with the wandering ascetic Sandaka using the standard description. Ānanda had previously described the entire path to the wandering ascetic, as we find it in many suttā. The wandering ascetic then asked Ānanda the following:

”But, Master Ānanda, if a bhikkhu is an arahant with disintegrated influxes, who has lived the holy life, has done what had to be done, has laid down the burden, has attained the supreme goal, whose bonds of existence have completely disintegrated, and who is liberated by right knowledge, could he enjoy sense objects?”

’Sandaka, when a bhikkhu is an arahant with disintegrated influxes, who has lived the holy life, has done what had to be done, has laid down the burden, has attained the supreme goal, whose fetters of existence have been completely disintegrated, and who is liberated by right knowledge, he is incapable of committing transgressions in five cases.

A bhikkhu whose influxes have been disintegrated is

1. *incapable of deliberately taking the life of a living being;*
2. *he is incapable of taking what has not been given, that is, of stealing;*
3. *he is incapable of indulging in sexual intercourse;*
4. *he is incapable of knowingly speaking the untruth;*
5. *he is incapable of enjoying sense objects by accumulating them, as he used to do when he was a householder.*

When a bhikkhu is an arahant with disintegrated influxes, who has lived the holy life, has done what had to be done, has laid down the burden, has attained the supreme goal, whose fetters of existence have been completely disintegrated, and who is liberated by right knowledge, he is incapable of committing transgressions in these five cases.'

'But, Master Ānanda, when a bhikkhu is an arahant, ... is his knowledge and seeing that his influxes have been disintegrated constantly and uninterruptedly present to him, whether he is walking around or standing, sleeping or awake?'

'As for this, Sandaka, I will give you a simile, for some wise people here understand the meaning of a statement by means of a simile. Suppose a man's hands and feet were chopped off. Would he continuously and uninterruptedly know 'My hands and feet are chopped off' whether he is walking or standing, sleeping or awake, or would he only know 'My hands and feet are chopped off' when he reflects on this fact?'

'Master Ānanda, the man would not continuously and uninterruptedly know 'My hands and feet are chopped off'; instead, he would only know 'My hands and feet are chopped off' when he reflects on this fact.'

'Likewise, Sandaka, when a bhikkhu is an arahant with disintegrated influxes, ... his knowing and seeing that his influxes have been disintegrated is not continuously and uninterruptedly present to him whether he is walking around or standing, sleeping or awake; instead, he knows 'My influxes have been disintegrated' only when he reflects on that fact.'

'How many have stepped out in this teaching and this discipline, Master Ānanda?'

'Sandaka, there are not just a hundred or two or three or four or five hundred, but many more who have stepped out in this teaching and this discipline.'

Then the wandering ascetic Sandaka addressed his own assembly: 'Go, my sirs, the holy life is to be lived under the monk Gotama. It is not easy for us now to give up gain, honour and fame.' In this way the wandering ascetic Sandaka advised his own assembly to lead the holy life under the Blessed One."

In Anguttara Nikaya 9 sutta 7 and 8, other factors are mentioned, in addition to the five listed in MN 76, of which an arahant is no longer capable:

- to take the wrong path of wishing,
- to take the wrong path of aversion,
- to take the wrong path of delusion,
- to take the wrong path of fear,
- he is incapable of rejecting the Buddha;
- he is incapable of rejecting the Dhamma;
- he is incapable of rejecting the Saṅgha;
- he is incapable of rejecting the training.

In MN 125, the bhikkhu whose influxes have been disintegrated is described in more detail in regard to his behaviour:

"That bhikkhu endures cold and heat, hunger and thirst, and contact with gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and creeping things; he endures maliciously spoken, unwelcome words and arisen

bodily feelings that are painful, sharp, harsh, piercing, unpleasant, distressing, and life-threatening. Free from all lust, aversion and delusion, purified from faults, he is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutations, he is an unsurpassable field of merit for the world.”

As far as bearing malicious words is concerned, we also see repeatedly in the suttā that the arahant does not intentionally expose himself to them, but withdraws, seeks seclusion and avoids company. This is especially also a protection out of compassion towards those who could insult him, because malicious speech towards an awakened person has particularly unpleasant consequences for the one who uses it.

In this sutta it is also said that a bhikkhu who is an arahant dies a tamed death, while a bhikkhu in whom the influxes have not yet been disintegrated dies an untamed death. Tamed can be interpreted here to mean that all desire for new existence has been overcome.

Although an arahant seeks seclusion, silence and solitude, he can also 'live alone' in society. This is how the Buddha describes someone who has overcome craving. In SN 35. 63 the bhikkhu Migajālo asked the Buddha what it means when he said: 'Living alone'. Summarised, the Buddha replied:

“Unfettered by the fetter of pleasure, Migajālo, a bhikkhu lives alone, it is said. Whether he dwells in the company of bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, followers and devotees, kings or royal ministers, with other pilgrims or their disciples: When he dwells thus, he dwells alone, it is said. And why? His partner, thirst (taṇhā), is overcome by him. Therefore, they say, he dwells alone.”

The bhikkhu Migajālo then received a teaching from the Buddha on how suffering arises from pleasure and enjoyment at the six sense doors. Soon afterwards, living alone, withdrawn and practising carefully and energetically, he attained arahantship.

In AN 6. 61 we learn how lack of seclusion becomes an obstacle to practice. There we are told of the bhikkhu Citta, the son of an elephant leader. He was able to attain all four *jhānā* and also concentration of mind without signs. But he loved socialising with bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, with followers, kings and royal ministers, teachers and disciples of other sects. And while he was in that company, unbound, unrestrained, given to chatting, lust assailed his mind. With his mind defiled by lust, he abandoned the practice and returned to the low life. This bhikkhu Citta is also reported to have behaved disrespectfully towards senior bhikkhus. When they spoke about the abhidhamma, he repeatedly interrupted them.

But after a short time he accepted the ordination again, practised in seclusion, diligently and carefully and attained arahantship after a short time.

Citta is also reported in DN 9. In this passage he is a householder and accepts ordination after a discussion with the Buddha about the self. It is also reported here that he attained arahantship after a short time. The commentary reports that he must have disrobed several times and ordained again.

The Buddha repeatedly emphasised how important seclusion is for achieving the highest goal:

“It is possible that a bhikkhu who does not delight in company, who is not delighted with company, who is not devoted to delight in company; who does not delight in a group, who is not delighted with a group, who is not devoted to delight in a group, will find delight in solitude when he is alone. It is possible that one who finds delight in solitude when he is alone will acquire the sign of the consciousness.

And when he has acquired the sign of consciousness, he will accomplish right view. This is possible.

And when he has accomplished right view, he will accomplish right concentration. This is possible.

And when he has accomplished right concentration, he will overcome the fetters. This is possible.

And when he has overcome the fetters, he will realise Nibbāna. This is possible.” AN 6. 68

In Theravāda Buddhist monasteries the recitation of the *dhamma* is a very common, popular practice. In SN 9. 10 a bhikkhu who must have attained arahantship says:

*"In the past I was fond of dhamma stanzas
so long as I had not achieved dispassion.
But from the time I achieved dispassion
[I dwell in what] the good men call
'The laying down by final knowledge
of whatever is seen, heard, or sensed.'"*

One could conclude from this that the arahant prefers silence and wants to dwell in the cessation of all formations undisturbed by words, even if they are words of the *dhamma*. He who has realised the *dhamma* to the point of arahantship no longer needs to hear it, it is firmly established in the stream of consciousness.

Another characteristic of the arahant is that he or she provides a great field of merit for others. This is what is said about the bhikkhunī Sikkā and Cīrā by a yakkha:

*"Much merit this very wise devotee has indeed brought about.
He gave food to the bhikkhunī Sikkā,
one freed from all knots." SN 10.10*

*"Much merit this very wise devotee has indeed brought about,
he gave a robe to the bhikkhunī Cīrā,
one freed from all bonds." SN 10.11*

We also find verses from the bhikkhunī Sikkā in the Therīgāthā:

*54. "What have I done in Rājagahā?
People only ever drank honey there.
They don't follow the Sikkā,
when she recites the Buddha's teachings.*

*55. It [the teaching] is without obstacle,
is precious, gives strength,
the very wise, I think, drink it,
like the traveller drinks rainwater in the desert.*

*56. Sikkā with the bright things,
free from lusts, concentrated,
she carries the last body,
Māra and his retinue are conquered."*

We also see here that even in the Buddha's time, people did not listen to the teaching as presented by an arahant.

In SN 11. 15 the king of the gods Sakka goes to the Buddha and asks him where there is a pleasant place. The Buddha replies:

*"Whether in a village or in the forest,
in a valley or on the plain,
wherever the arahants dwell,
it really is a pleasant place."*

We also find this verse in Dhammapada 98.

Arahants are peaceful and quiet, they do not destroy anything, they are not greedy, they do not attack anyone, they have overcome all unwholesome states of mind, therefore the places where they live are pleasant for others. However, they also offer no socialising or entertainment and are therefore boring and uninteresting for people seeking pleasure.

In verse Dhammapada 99, which follows this verse, it is said:

*"The forests are pleasant,
where the people do not enjoy themselves,
only those without pleasure
enjoy themselves there,
not those who seek sensual pleasures."*

We find a good summary of the characteristics of an arahant in verse format in SN 22. 76:

*"Arahants are really happy,
there is no thirst (taṇhā) in them;
The conceit 'I am' is completely cut off,
the web of delusion is broken.*

*They have achieved freedom from turbulence,
their awareness of it is undisturbed.
In the world these are the unpolluted,
they have become holy without influxes.*

*The five groups have been understood by them perfectly;
their field is the seven right things.⁴⁰
Praiseworthy good men,
sons at the breast of the Buddha.*

*They are equipped with seven jewels,⁴¹
trained in the threefold training.⁴²
Moving around as great heroes,
after they have overcome fear and anxiety.*

*They are equipped with ten factors⁴³
and are concentrated like large Nāgās.
They are the best in the world,
thirst (taṇhā) does not exist with them.*

*The knowledge of those no longer practising has arisen:
This is the last [life] that came into being.
They are not dependent on others
for the essence of holy life.*

*Comparisons⁴⁴ cannot shake them.
They are freed from further becoming.
They have reached the territory of the tamed,
they are the victors in the world.*

*Above, across and below,
there is no enjoyment in them.
They boldly sound the lion roar:
The Awakened are unsurpassable in the world."*

40 Confidence, moral shame, fear of wrongdoing, learning, energy, mindfulness and wisdom. Cf. DN 33

41 Seven awakening factors

42 Higher ethics (*adhisīlasikkhā*), higher consciousness (concentration) (*adhicittasikkhā*), higher wisdom (*adhipaññāsikkhā*).

43 The eight factors of the noble eightfold path and right knowledge and right liberation.

44 This refers to the three modes of conceit.

The Buddha gave this summary about arahants after he had explained to the bhikkhus the impermanence, the unsatisfactoriness and the selflessness of the five groups of existence and the consequences of these realizations as disenchantment, dispassion and liberation.

AN 3. 13 The Buddha describes three types of people among worldly people and also these three types of people among bhikkhus. The three types are:

- Someone who has no expectations (*nirāso*, literally: not hungry),
- someone with longing (*āsaṃso*),
- someone without longing (*vigatāso*, literally: who no longer goes).

"What individual is without longing? Here a bhikkhu is an arahant, one in whom the influxes have been disintegrated. He hears: 'A bhikkhu of such and such a name, it is said, having realised direct knowledge by seeing things, enters and dwells in the liberation of mind, which is liberation through wisdom, which is influx-free with the disintegration of the influxes. It does not occur to him: 'When will I, too, through the disintegration of the influxes, enter and abide in the liberation of mind, which is liberation through wisdom, which is influx-free with the disintegration of the influxes?' And why not? The longing that once existed in him, the unliberated, is now calmed in him. This person is called without longing."

AN 3. 91

*"There is the liberation of the mind with the cessation of consciousness (*viññāna*) in the one liberated by the decay of thirst (*taṇhā*), just as there is the cessation of the lamp light."*

The arahant is described with images in AN 4. 5 as follows:

"An individual who has crossed [the stream], reached the other shore, stands on solid ground." The stream here is the world or the sense objects. The arahant has gone beyond it. He has crossed the stream with his practice. The other shore is *Nibbāna*. He stands on solid ground because his attainment of liberation of the mind is unshakeable and irreversible.

The Buddha spoke of four bindings or yokes (*yoga*): The yoke of the senses, the yoke of becoming, the yoke of views, the yoke of ignorance. The arahant has overcome all four. He is no longer bound to anything:

"But having entirely understood sense pleasures and the bond of existence, having uprooted the bond of views and having ignorance illuminated, the sages have severed all bonds; they have gone beyond bondage." AN 4. 10

In AN 4. 195 the Buddha describes to the householder Vappa, a follower of another sect, what an arahant's reactions to sense objects are like:

"A bhikkhu, Vappa, whose consciousness is thus rightly liberated, has attained six constant states of mind: He sees a form with his eyes, he hears a sound with his ears, he smells an odour with his nose, he tastes a flavour with his tongue, he feels a touch with his body, he knows a thing with his mind, he is neither pleasantly moved nor unpleasantly moved. He dwells equanimously, mindful and clearly understanding. When he feels a feeling that is limited to the body, he knows: 'I feel a feeling that is limited to the body.' When he feels a feeling whose lifespan ceases, he knows: 'I feel a feeling whose lifespan ceases.' And he knows: 'When the body breaks away, after the end of the lifespan, all feelings, that are all not pleasant, will have cooled down here'."

"Without reaching the end of the world, there can be no end to suffering." SN 35. 116

The world here stands for the six sense bases with their corresponding objects.

In AN 5. 200 five escapes are presented as elementary. The arahant has taken these escapes. The arahant does not find pleasure in sense objects, but in renunciation. The arahant takes no pleasure in illwill, but in non-illwill. The arahant takes no pleasure in cruelty, but in non-cruelty. The arahant takes no pleasure in matter, but in the immaterial. The arahant does not find pleasure with his own group⁴⁵, but with the cessation of his own group.

He is free from the latent tendencies (*anusaya*), has cut off thirst, cast off the fetters, rightly understood conceit and thus put an end to suffering.

In SN 1. 25 a deva asks the Buddha about the way an arahant speaks:

1. (The Devatā:)

"The bhikkhu who is an accomplished one, who has done his work, in whom worldly influences are destroyed, who carries the last body, would he say: 'I' speak?

Would he say: They speak to 'me'?"

2. (The Exalted One:)

"The bhikkhu who is an accomplished one, who has done his work, in whom worldly influences are destroyed, who bears the last body, he may well say: 'I' speak.

He may well say: They speak 'to me'.

Knowing the way of speaking in the world, the knowing one speaks like this only in conversation."

3. (The Devatā:)

"The bhikkhu who is an accomplished one, who has done his work, in whom worldly influences are destroyed, who bears the last body, may this bhikkhu, like deluded, say well: 'I' say? Can he say: they say to 'me'?"

4. (The Exalted One:)

"For him who has given up delusion, there are no bonds, for him all bonds of delusion are removed. He, the insightful one, has left mortality behind him: He may well say: 'I' say. He may well say: 'to me', they say.

Knowing the way of speaking in the world, the knowing person only speaks like this in conversation."

In MN 35 the Buddha is provocatively asked by a follower of another religious school how he trains his disciples. The Buddha replied, summarised, that he teaches them impermanence and selflessness in regard to the sense bases. A controversial discussion arose. Finally, Saccaka, a follower of the Nigaṇṭhas, asked the Buddha about an arahant:

"Lord Gotama, in what way is a bhikkhu an arahant with disintegrated influxes who has lived the holy life, has done what should be done, has laid down the burden, has attained the true goal, has disintegrated the fetters of becoming, and is liberated by ultimate knowledge?"

"Here, Aggivessana, whatever kind of form, past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, low or sublime, far or near - a bhikkhu has seen any form with excellent wisdom as it is: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self', and through non-attachment he is liberated. What kind of feeling ... What kind of perception ... What kind of formations ... What kind of consciousness ... In this way a bhikkhu is an arahant with disintegrated influxes who has lived the holy life, has done what should be done, has laid down the burden, has attained the true goal, has disintegrated the fetters of becoming, and is fully liberated through ultimate knowledge. When a bhikkhu's mind is thus liberated, he possesses three unsurpassable qualities: unsurpassable

⁴⁵ *Sakkāyaṃ* literally means own group, but is often translated as personality. The term implies the identification of the five groups of existence as one's own.

seeing, unsurpassable practice of the way, and unsurpassable liberation. When a bhikkhu has such a liberated consciousness, he still honours, respects, appreciates, and reveres the Tathāgata thus: >The Awakened One, this Exalted One is awakened and teaches the dhamma leading to awakening. The Exalted One has tamed himself and teaches the dhamma for taming. The Exalted One is at peace and teaches the dhamma leading to peace. The Exalted One has crossed over and teaches the dhamma for crossing over. The Exalted One has attained final Nibbāna and teaches the dhamma leading to final Nibbāna.<

Having said this, Saccaka the son of Nigaṇṭha replied: *"Lord Gotama, we were bold and impudent when we thought we could attack Lord Gotama in debate. A man could perhaps attack an angry elephant and find safety, but he could not attack Master Gotama and find safety. A man could perhaps attack a blazing conflagration and find safety, but he could not attack Master Gotama and find safety. A man might attack a terrible poisonous snake and find safety, but he could not attack Master Gotama and find safety. We were bold and impudent when we thought we could attack Master Gotama in debate. May the Exalted One, together with the Saṅgha of bhikkhus, agree to accept tomorrow's meal from me."* The Exalted One silently agreed.

6. Examples of Arahants in the Pāli Canon

We find descriptions of very different people who attained arahantship in India during the Buddha's time. They were not always from the beginning convinced of the Buddha's teachings. They had very different life backgrounds. They had very different characters. They had very different worldly living conditions. They often belonged to different religious faiths. Their approach to arahantship with regard to Buddhist practice was very different.

Achieving arahantship is also linked to various other skills and was achieved in different ways. Some had little knowledge of Buddhist meditation and attained arahantship very quickly through a clear, short statement or teaching from the Buddha or one of his disciples. Others had to practise the teachings systematically over a longer or shorter period of time. I would like to present a small selection of female and male arahants based on information from the Pāli Canon.

The Buddha said for example in SN 8. 7:

"Also in these five hundred bhikkhus, Sāriputta, I have nothing to blame, whether committed physically or with words.

Of these five hundred bhikkhus, Sāriputta, sixty bhikkhus have the threefold knowledge, sixty bhikkhus possess the six supernatural knowledges, sixty are liberated in both ways and the rest are liberated by wisdom."

The Buddha Gotama himself was the first arahant in this world cycle. After he had attained arahantship, he thought:

"This dhamma I have attained is profound, difficult to see and difficult to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by contemplation, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. But this population amuses itself with desire, enjoys desire, delights in pleasure. It is difficult for such a population to recognise this truth, namely the specific conditionality, the dependant origination. And it is also difficult to recognise this truth, namely the calming of all formations, the letting go of all attachment, the disintegration of desire, dispassion, the cessation, Nibbāna. If I were to teach the dhamma, others would not understand me, and that would be tiring and burdensome for me." MN 26

But then the Brahma Sahampati came to him and asked him to teach. The Buddha then reflected on whom he should teach this *dhamma* he had rediscovered. He finally remembered the five world renunciants with whom he had practised asceticism before his awakening.

He first taught them the Dhammacakkappavattanasuttaṃ – Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma, SN 56. 11. As they had not yet attained arahantship after listening to this teaching, he taught them the Anattalakkhaṇasuttaṃ - The Characteristics of Non-Self, SN 22. 59. On listening to this discourse, all five ascetics attained arahantship. They were also the first five bhikkhus, for they ordained under the Buddha. Thus there were six arahants.

"Then the bhikkhus of the group of five, thus taught and instructed by me, being themselves subject to birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, seeking the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna, attained the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna; being themselves subject to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, having understood the danger in what is subject to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, seeking the unageing, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, and undefiled supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna, they attained the unageing, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, and undefiled supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna. The knowledge and vision arose in them: 'Our deliverance is unshakeable; this is our last birth; there is no renewal of being.'" MN 26

It becomes evident here that these five world-renouncers already had the motivation before the Buddha taught them to finally overcome birth, old age, sickness and death. They had already realised that birth and its consequences were a disadvantage.

Soon after, Yasa, the son of a rich merchant from Benares, attained arahantship. He had lived a luxurious, extravagant life, had no knowledge of the teachings and had not yet been ordained when he attained arahantship. Only then did he accept ordination without any rules because he did not want to and could not return to his luxurious home. Yasa was tired of the luxurious life and had met the Buddha when he went out.

The Buddha taught him about giving (*dāna*), ethics (*sīla*), heaven (*sagga*), the disadvantage, the fall, the defilements in regard to sense objects, and the benefit of renunciation. When Yasa's mind became receptive, he taught him about the unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), the origination of the unsatisfactoriness, the cessation of the unsatisfactoriness and the path leading to the cessation of the unsatisfactoriness. And Yasa understood: 'Whatever has the nature of arising, all that also has the nature of ceasing.'⁴⁶ There were now seven arahants.⁴⁶ It is noteworthy here that Yasa attained arahantship as a householder without monastic training and only then ordained.

Soon after, four friends of Yasa came to see how he was living now. The friends, named Vimala, Subāhu, Puṇṇaji, Gavampati, also attained arahantship without prior knowledge at a short teaching of the Buddha and then ordained. Now there were eleven arahants. With these friends, too, we see that they were able to attain arahantship as householders.

Another fifty friends of Yasa then came to him and the Buddha. They ordained after a teaching from the Buddha and after another teaching they attained arahantship. Thus there were sixty-one arahants in the world.

More and more men came who wanted to ordain. The Buddha also allowed the other already ordained bhikkhus to ordain others without him. There were no Vinaya rules at that time. Ordination was conferred simply by shaving the head and putting on the robe, as well as going for refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha.

It is then reported of one thousand bhikkhus who were previously matted-hair ascetics who, at the teaching: 'Burning' SN 35. 28, attained arahantship. The thousand bhikkhus were previously the followers of Uruvelakassapa (500 followers), Nadīkassapa (300 followers), and Gayākassapa (200 followers). The Buddha had performed many miracles, by which the leaders became convinced of the Buddha. They ordained with their followers.

Such were the beginnings of the Saṅgha. In the course of the Buddha's lifetime, thousands of people, men and women, attained arahantship. Some of them are described in more detail below, according to the tradition from the Pāḷi Canon. Stories from the commentaries are not included here.

46 Cf. Mahāvaggapāḷi, 6th Council edition, Pabbajākathā, § 25 ff

Sāriputta

Sāriputta was one of the two chief disciples of the Buddha. He was not one of the first to attain arahantship under the Buddha Gotama.

Sāriputta was a member of another religious group. He practised with Moggallāna, his close friend since childhood, under the wandering ascetic Sañcaya. They had the motivation to attain arahantship, that is, to transcend birth, old age and death. The two friends, Sāriputta and Moggallāna, had promised each other that whoever attained the deathless (*Nibbāna*) first would tell the other about it.

The venerable Assaji, one of the first five disciples of the Buddha, went for alms in Rājagaha. Sāriputta met him and noticed that Assaji was walking and behaving in a very mindful and dignified manner. He waited until he had eaten his almsfood and then asked him who his teacher was and what this teacher taught. Assaji explained to him that a Sakyan's son was his teacher and he briefly explained the Buddha's teachings:

"Whatever things arise through causes, the Thus Gone speaks about this cause, and also about the end of it. That is the teaching of the Great World Renouncer."

Vinaya: Mahāvagga § 60

*(Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā, tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha;
Tesañca yo nirodho, evaṃvādī mahāsamaṇo'ti.)*

Sāriputta attained streamentry while listening to the *dhamma* preached by Assaji. He understood spontaneously:

*"Whatever things come into being,
all these things also have an end."*

Vinaya: Mahāvagga § 60

*(Yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ,
sabbam taṃ nirodhadhamma'nti.)*

As agreed, he immediately informed his friend Moggallāna and briefly explained the lesson he had just heard. Moggallāna also attained streamentry in the same way.

In MN 74 it is reported how Sāriputta attained arahantship.

The wandering ascetic Dīghanakha was discussing opinions with the Buddha. The Buddha explained various opinions with the conclusion of how a sage would view each opinion: Through opinions come disagreements, through disagreements come disputes, through disputes comes quarrel; when there is quarrel, there is displeasure.

"Because he foresees differences of opinion, disputes, quarrels and annoyance for himself, he overcomes that view and does not accept any other view. In this way the overcoming of these views comes about; in this way the abandonment of these views comes about."

The Buddha explained the impermanence, the unsatisfactoriness and the selflessness of the body and feelings to the wandering ascetic in accordance with reality. He explained to him the dependant origination of feelings. He explained to him that when the noble disciple sees thus, he becomes disenchanted; when he is disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate; when he is dispassionate, he is liberated. It follows the standard description of the attainment of arahantship.

"On that occasion the venerable Sāriputta stood behind the Blessed One and fanned him. Then he thought: 'The Blessed One truly speaks with direct knowledge of overcoming all these things; the Blessed One truly speaks with direct knowledge of the abandoning of all these things.' While the venerable Sāriputta was thus reflecting on this, his consciousness was liberated from the influxes through non-attachment." MN 74

The wandering ascetic Dīghanakha attained streamentry. He went for refuge in the Buddha as *upāsaka* (devotee).

The method by which the venerable Sāriputta practised is found in MN 111 Anupadasuttaṃ. We find no reports in the Pāḷi Canon that after streamentry Sāriputta attained the two awakening stages of once-returning and nonreturning. Thus it can be assumed that he also attained these in quick succession while listening to the *dhamma*, as reported in MN 74.

In MN 111 it is reported that Sāriputta practised the first to fourth *jhāna* and after each *jhāna* examined the mental factors individually. He also practised the four immaterial attainments and the cessation of perception and feeling.

The arising, existence and passing away of these factors became clear to him. He neither was attracted, nor rejecting, nor clinging; he was not bound, he was free, separated [from the world], with unrestricted mind.

After attaining the cessation of perception and feeling, the influxes were overcome in him, i.e. he attained arahantship.

"And then, bhikkhus, with the complete transcending of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, Sāriputta entered and dwelt in the cessation of perception and feeling. And his influxes completely disintegrated as he saw with wisdom." MN 111

Here it is reported that he attained arahantship after emerging from the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling. He practised this attainment in succession to the four *jhānā* and the four immaterial attainments. In MN 74 it is reported that he attained arahantship while listening to and fanning cool air for the Buddha. If he attained arahantship after emerging from the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling, he must have attained nonreturning before this attainment, for this attainment is only attained by non-returners and arahants.

In AN 4. 173 Sāriputta proclaims that two weeks after his ordination he attained the four analytical discriminations (*paṭisambhidā*). The four analytical discriminations are:

- the analytical discrimination of meanings,
- the analytical discrimination of things,
- the analytical discrimination of (word) explanations (language) and
- the analytical discrimination of perspicuity or penetration.

Since these occur with the attainment of arahantship, it can be concluded that he attained arahantship two weeks after his ordination, which was preceded by streamentry.

In SN 21. 2 Sāriputta explained to the other bhikkhus that there is nothing in the world whose change or becoming different would cause him worry, lamentation, physical pain, mental discomfort or despair. He also said that for a long time the I-making, mine-making and the latent tendency to conceit had been well removed from him. He thus also explained the attainment of arahantship at this point.

In AN 4. 168 Sāriputta replies to Mahā-Moggallāna's question as to how he attained arahantship that he attained the highest goal effortlessly and with quick understanding. 'Effortlessly' is explained in AN 4. 169 as:

Attainment of the four *jhānā*, with five powers of a practitioner (*sekhabalāni*), namely confidence, shamefulness, moral fear, energy and wisdom as support, the five faculties, namely confidence, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom, are well developed.

From a statement by Sāriputta, we can easily see the attitude of an arahant towards life and death. The arahant has neither attachment to life nor longing for death:

*"I do not rejoice in death,
nor do I rejoice in life;
I will lay down this body
with sustained mindfulness and clear understanding."* Theragāthā 1001

Sāriputta was repeatedly praised by the Buddha, especially for his wisdom. In AN 1. 24 he singled him out among the bhikkhus as the one with great wisdom.

In AN 1. 23 it is said about Sāriputta:

"Bhikkhus, I do not see even a single person who properly continues to keep in motion the unsurpassed wheel of the dhamma set in motion by the Tathāgata as does Sāriputta."

In SN 2. 29 Sāriputta is also praised by both the Buddha and Ānanda. The Buddha said the following:

"So it is, Ananda, so it is! Indeed, Ananda, who would not approve of Sāriputta, unless he were foolish, full of hatred, deluded, or mentally deranged?"

- *Sāriputta, Ananda, is wise.*
- *Sāriputta has great wisdom, Ānanda.*
- *Sāriputta has extensive wisdom, Ānanda.*
- *Sāriputta has joyous wisdom, Ānanda.*
- *Sāriputta has impulsive wisdom, Ānanda.*
- *Sāriputta has sharp wisdom, Ānanda.*
- *Sāriputta has penetrating wisdom, Ānanda.*
- *Sāriputta has few wishes, Ānanda.*
- *Sāriputta is satisfied, Ānanda.*
- *Seclusion, Ānanda, is what Sāriputta seeks.*
- *Sāriputta does not seek socialising, Ānanda.*
- *Energetic, Ānanda, is Sāriputta.*
- *Sāriputta gives advice, Ānanda.*
- *Sāriputta speaks forgiving words, Ānanda.*
- *An exhorter, Ānanda, is Sāriputta.*
- *Sāriputta rebukes the bad."*

We find many suttā in the Pāḷi Canon given by Sāriputta to other bhikkhus. He was able to expound the teaching in detail. His way of teaching was an analytical one according to ultimate truths.

The Paṭisambhidāmagga, an analytical exposition of the most important aspects of the Buddha's entire teaching, is also attributed to Sāriputta.

In SN 22. 2 the Buddha praises Sāriputta not only for his wisdom, but also for his compassion towards the bhikkhus who lead the holy life with him.

But Sāriputta also showed his strong compassion towards the non-ordained devotees. In SN 55. 26, for example, we find an incident where Sāriputta visits the generous Anāthapiṇḍika, who is seriously ill. Anāthapiṇḍika had asked for this. Sāriputta turns to the sick man with a skilful combination of compassion and wisdom. Sāriputta reminds Anāthapiṇḍika of his attainment of streamentry and the associated faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha and his good ethical behaviour. He also reminds him of the noble eightfold path, which Anāthapiṇḍika practises in the right way, in contrast to an ignorant worldling who takes the wrong path and can thus end up in the lower realms of suffering. Anāthapiṇḍika can no longer be born there due to his good qualities, which cannot be lost because he has attained streamentry. Through these clear teachings, Anāthapiṇḍika's pain immediately disappeared and he offered Sāriputta his own food.

Sāriputta also visits the seriously ill brahmin Dhānañjāni at his request. Previously, MN 97 reports how Sāriputta tries to bring the brahmin Dhānañjāni to the right path of the *dhamma*. Sāriputta also uses a skilful way of combining compassion and the teachings of the *dhamma* when he visits the seriously ill brahmin. He asks the brahmin which realms of existence are better than others. Finally, the brahmin replies that the brahma world is better than the deva world. Sāriputta then teaches him the four Brahmavihārā: kind benevolence, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity towards oneself and all beings. After this teaching, Sāriputta leaves, goes to the Buddha and tells the Buddha about his visit to Dhānañjāni. The Buddha knows that the brahmin has died meanwhile and has been born in the Brahma world. Here, however, the Buddha rebukes Sāriputta for not having taught the brahmin more, presumably in order to achieve streamentry. We see here that the Buddha could see the brahmin's abilities and also that he had died and where he was reborn. Sāriputta obviously did not have these abilities.

We find another story of Sāriputta's care of a sick person in MN 144. The bhikkhu Channa is also seriously ill and sees no possibility of improvement of his illness. He wants to kill himself. Sāriputta tries to stop him. He compassionately offers to improve the material situation of the sick man. He offered to send him a better assistant, to provide him with suitable food and medicine. But the bhikkhu Channa could not be persuaded to refrain from suicide. Then Sāriputta tried to remind the bhikkhu Channa of his knowledge of the *dhamma*. He asked him about the sense doors, the consciousness arising there and their objects (eye, ear, etc.). The bhikkhu Channa knew about all the components: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self'. Sāriputta further asked him what he had seen and realised with direct knowledge (*abhiññā*). Channa replied that he had seen cessation (*nirodha*). From this one could deduce that he wanted to say that he had attained arahantship.

Again, Sāriputta was not sure what Channa had achieved. Only the Buddha confirmed to him that Channa was blameless and thus expressed that he had attained arahantship. Sāriputta interjected that Channa had contact with blameworthy families. The Buddha did not see this as blameworthy or as a sign that Channa was not an arahant. He pointed out:

"Sāriputta, if one abandons this body and clings to a new body, then I say one is blameworthy. There was nothing of this in the bhikkhu Channa; the bhikkhu Channa took the knife blamelessly."
MN 144

Sāriputta saw contacts with people who did not live according to the *dhamma* as an obstacle for him as an arahant and wished not to be in contact with such people. In other words, he did not accept everything he encountered, but made a selection.

"May I not be with anyone who desires evil, who is sluggish, who has little energy, not be with an unlearned one [in the dhamma], a disrespectful one. What good would it do if I were [together] with such a one?" Thg 987

So he did not turn his compassion and wise teachings to all beings, but only to those who were already living in the way of the *dhamma*. He differentiated with whom he wanted to be together and he did not try to teach anyone.

Mahā-Moggallāna

The Buddha's second chief disciple was Mahā-Moggallāna, a friend of Sāriputta since early childhood.

In MN 141 the Buddha said about the two:

"Cultivate friendship with Sāriputta and Moggallāna, bhikkhus; socialise with Sāriputta and Moggallāna. They are wise and helpful to their companions in the holy life. Sāriputta is like a woman giving birth; Moggallāna is like a wet nurse. Sāriputta trains others for the fruit of stream-entry, Moggallāna for the supreme goal. Sāriputta, bhikkhus, is able to proclaim, teach, describe, establish, reveal, expound, and explain the Four Noble Truths."

In AN 2. 131 the Buddha said:

"Bhikkhus, a bhikkhu with faith, with right aspiring should wish: 'May I be like Sāriputta and Moggallāna.' Sāriputta and Moggallāna are the standard and [good] example among my bhikkhu disciples."

How Moggallāna attained streamentry has already been described in the chapter on Sāriputta. After Moggallāna had ordained with the Buddha and became a chief disciple with Sāriputta, he endeavoured to attain the highest goal of arahantship. He practised in the land of Magadha. At that time he was overcome by severe drowsiness during meditation. The Buddha appeared in front of him through his supernatural powers. The Buddha gave him a detailed teaching on how to overcome drowsiness. (AN 7. 58)

At the end of the teaching, Moggallāna asked the Buddha how to be liberated from thirst, how to attain the final cessation, the highest safety, the highest purest behaviour, the highest perfection, how to become the best among devas and humans.

The Buddha then explained the practice as follows:

"Here, Moggallāna, a bhikkhu has heard: Not any single thing (dhamma) is worth approaching. Now when the bhikkhu has heard this, he sees all things with direct knowledge.

When he has seen all things with direct knowledge, he understands them thoroughly. When he has thus thoroughly understood each thing and then feels any feeling, whether pleasant, unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant, he dwells on these feelings in the contemplation of their impermanence, in the contemplation with dispassion, in the contemplation of the cessation of them and in the contemplation of letting go.

When he dwells in this contemplation of feeling, he no longer clings to anything in the world. When he is no longer attached to anything, he is no longer agitated; when he is no longer agitated, he thus attains Nibbāna." AN 7. 58

Through this teaching, which includes dealing with fatigue, refraining from exalting oneself through self-exaltation, refraining from heated exchanges and refraining from staying in the company of householders, and the above-quoted practice instruction, Mahā-Moggallāna is said to have attained arahantship.

In 4. 167 it is reported how Sāriputta asked Mahā-Moggallāna how he attained arahantship. Mahā-Moggallāna replied: *"On that of these four paths of progress which is painful and connected with quick understanding, on this path, friend, my consciousness was liberated from the influxes without clinging."*

When progress is painful, the obstacles are strong and lead to suffering and worry. With rapid understanding, the five faculties are strongly developed.

In AN 1. 24 Mahā-Moggallāna is particularly emphasised by the Buddha as someone who possesses supernatural powers (*iddhimantā*).

We find in several suttā descriptions of how Mahā-Moggallāna used his supernatural powers, mainly to convince others of the *dhamma*.

In SN 51. 14 it is reported that the Buddha asked him to shake up bhikkhus who were staying at Migara's mother's monastery with distracted minds, talkative, excited, and careless. He shook the monastery with a tap of his big toe. The bhikkhus were shaken.⁴⁷ In the same way, he shook the palace of the king of devas, Sakka, whom he could visit in his heavenly realm due to his supernatural powers. He also wanted to shake up the king of the devas, Sakka, for his indulgence in sense pleasures and for being arrogant.⁴⁸

In SN 51. 31 the Buddha explains to other bhikkhus that Mahā-Moggallāna has attained the various supernatural powers by the four paths of power (*iddhipādā*).

The supernatural powers are:

1. Having been one, he becomes many; having been many, he becomes one. He becomes visible, he disappears. He passes unhindered through a brick wall, through a wall, through a mountain, as if they were empty space. He can emerge from the earth and plunge into it as if it were water. He walks on water that does not break, as if it were earth. He travels in space with his legs crossed, like a bird with wings. He also touches and caresses this moon and this sun, so full of strength and power, with his hand. He lets the body go to the Brahma world with skill. He exercises the skill of going with the body to the Brahma world.
2. The heavenly ear,
3. exploring the minds of others,
4. the divine eye (knowledge of the death and appearance of beings),
5. the knowledge of past lives,
6. knowledge about the decay of the influxes.

Due to the four paths of power, the influxes disintegrated and he can experience the influx-free liberation of the mind, the liberation through wisdom.

Some arahants have skills 1. to 4., but not all. All arahants have knowledge 5. to 6.. Knowledge 1. to 5. can be attained through *samatha* meditation. Knowledge 6. can only be attained through *vipassanā* meditation.

In SN 19 Lakkhaṇasaṃyutta it is described how Mahā-Moggallāna could see many ghosts on Vulture's Peak Mountain near Rājagaha. He explained to another bhikkhu what actions in previous lives had caused these ghosts to suffer now. He could see both the ghosts invisible to the normal eye and the cause from their previous lives for their present experiences.

In SN 8. 10 it is reported how Mahā-Moggallāna was able to examine the mind of five hundred bhikkhus and found them all to be arahants. In the same sutta he is praised by the bhikkhu Vaṅḡisa:

*"The sage sitting on the slope of the mountain,
the conqueror of suffering,
surrounded by the adoring students,
who know the three knowledges,
who have left death behind them.*

*Mogallāna, who had great spiritual power,
grasped their mind.
Examining their consciousness,
he saw it as completely liberated
and without foundations [for existence]."*

47 Cf. also Thg. 1203

48 Cf. MN 37, Thg. 1205

In SN 40. 1 ff Mahā-Moggallāna said of himself:

"If one could rightly say of someone, friends: 'Supported by the master, the disciple has attained great direct knowledge', then he could rightly say of me: 'Supported by the master, the disciple has attained great direct knowledge'."

Although Mahā-Moggallāna's supernatural powers were highly developed, a Māra was able to penetrate his abdomen to the intestines. We find this incident reported in MN 50. But because of his supernatural powers, he could see that it was Māra who was making his stomach heavy and uncomfortable and that he was not afflicted with any disease. When he drew Māra's attention to the kammic consequences of this action, he left Mahā-Moggallāna's body through his mouth. Mahā-Moggallāna himself had once been a Māra in the time of a former Buddha. He tried to turn the people against the bhikkhus and injured a bhikkhu on the head. He had to live in a lower realm of existence with suffering for a long time. Here it is shown that the kammic effect must still appear and Mahā-Moggallāna could still be harassed by the Māra for a short time, although in this, his last life, he had strong supernatural abilities and had attained arahantship.

The book of Theragāthā verses contains sayings that originate from Mahā-Moggallāna about a woman. He not only thought these sayings but uttered them to the woman, for she responds to him. He must react very harshly to this woman, which is astonishing for a chief disciple of a Buddha, neither compassion towards the woman is conveyed, nor a sober view of the elements and their impermanence, but a contemplation of disgust expressed in harsh words. The Buddha recommended non-beauty contemplation and impurity contemplation of the body in order to overcome lust. In an arahant this should already have been overcome.

Thg. 1153

*"You have a body like a hut of bones,
held together by flesh and sinews.
Ugh! Filled with malodour;
you are greedy for the bodies of others."*

1154

*"A bag of faeces, covered in skin;
the breast with a boil, like a demon;
Nine streams are in your body,
These always flow out of it."*

1155

*"Thus nine streams flow from this one that are foul-smelling;
a hindrance: The bhikkhu should avoid this body
which is like urine,
if he desires the pure goal."*

1156

*"So it is when the knower has recognised them,
as I know them,
you should avoid them from a distance
like a pit of faeces in the rain."*

1157

*"That's right, great hero,
as the world renouncer said:
Here [in this body] some sink,
like an old bull in the mud."*

Anuruddha

Anuruddha was a cousin of the Buddha and the brother of Mahānāma, a devoted non-ordained follower. The family was very rich and the young Anuruddha lived in splendour. Since many young men from Kapilavatthu had already ordained, Mahānāma felt that someone from their family should also ordain. Anuruddha had no interest in the ascetic life of a monk. It was only when his brother explained to him how arduous the householder's life would be for him that he decided to accept ordination. He went to the Buddha with several other young men. They were all ordained.⁴⁹

He was able to quickly develop the divine eye. Difficulties in Kasiṇa meditation are discussed with the Buddha in MN 128. In this sutta it is also reported how Anuruddha lived harmoniously and silently with his two bhikkhu friends Nandiya and Kambila. The Buddha explained to Anuruddha how he could overcome subtle obstacles to meditation in order to achieve *jhāna* concentration. The Buddha himself knew these obstacles from his own practice; after recognising and overcoming them, the Buddha was able to attain arahantship (Buddhahood).

In AN 3. 131 we find how Anuruddha attained arahantship. He approached the venerable Sāriputta:

"Here, friend Sāriputta, with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I survey a thousandfold world system. Energy is aroused in me without slackening; my mindfulness is established without confusion; my body is tranquil without disturbance; my mind is concentrated and one-pointed. Yet my mind is still not liberated from the influxes through nonclinging."

[The venerable Sāriputta said:] *"Friend Anuruddha, when you think: 'With the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I survey a thousandfold world system,' this is conceit (māna) with you.*

And when you think: 'Energy is aroused in me without slackening; my mindfulness is established without confusion; my body is tranquil without disturbance; my mind is concentrated and one-pointed,' this is restlessness (uddhacca) with you.

And when you think: 'Yet my mind is still not liberated from the influxes through non-clinging,' this is remorse (kukkucca) with you.

It would be good if you would abandon these three qualities and stop attending to them. Instead, direct your mind to the deathless element (Nibbāna)!"

"And the venerable Anuruddha subsequently abandoned these three things, paid no attention to them, and focussed his consciousness on the deathless element. And alone, secluded, diligent, zealous, resolutely dwelling, the venerable Anuruddha, after not long, attained the supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of good house leave home and go forth into homelessness, by seeing the dhamma and direct knowledge he realised it himself and dwelt in it.

*He understood: 'Birth is finished,
the holy life has been lived,
what should be done has been done,
there is no more state of existence.'*

Thus the venerable Anuruddha had become one of the arahants."

We see here how important good friendship is along the way. And we also see how important trust and openness are among good friends. It is not about glossing over and confirming one's own shortcomings, as worldly people wish it, but about clearly recognising and expressing the shortcomings by the good, wise friend.

49 Cf. Vinaya Piṭaka: Cullavagga, Vol. V, PTS, Translation I. B. Horner, Bristol 2013, p. 253 ff

In MN 31 it is reported how the Buddha visited Anuruddha and his two friends Nandiya and Kimbila again. By this time they had already attained all four *jhānā* and all four immaterial attainments. They had also attained the cessation of perception and feeling.

Anuruddha reported to the Buddha: *"Venerable sir, whenever we wish, with the complete transcending of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, we enter and abide in the cessation of perception and feeling. And our influxes have disintegrated through our seeing with wisdom. Venerable sir, this is a superhuman state, clarity of knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, a pleasant abiding that we have attained by surpassing the previous abiding, by bringing that abiding to cessation. And, venerable sir, we see no other pleasant abiding that is higher or more sublime than this one."*

"Well, well, Anuruddha, there is no other pleasant abiding that is higher or more sublime than this."

At the end of the sutta, the Buddha said:

"See, Dīgha, how those three men of good family practise for the welfare and happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare and happiness of celestial beings and human beings."

After the Buddha had left, Nandiya and Kimbila asked Anuruddha if he knew that they too were dwelling in this sublime abode, since he spoke to the Buddha of 'we'. Anuruddha replied: *"The venerable ones have never reported to me that they have attained those abidings and attainments. And yet, by encompassing the mind of the venerable ones with my mind, I know that they have attained those abidings and attainments. And celestial beings have also reported to me: 'These venerable ones have attained those abidings and those attainments.' Then I proclaimed it when I was asked directly by the Blessed One."*

Here we see that Anuruddha had attained the ability to know the state of mind of others and also the devine ear.

In SN 9. 6 a deva went to Anuruddha, who was staying in a forest in the land of Kosala. Then a devatā belonging to the group of the Thirty-three gods, named Jālinī, who had been the wife of the venerable Anuruddha in a previous life, went there. She invited him to return to the Gods of the Thirty-three, where all his wishes would be fulfilled and where he could dwell surrounded by heavenly maidens.

He replied: *"The heavenly girls have gone a bad way, they are fixed in identity. The beings who crave for them have also taken a bad path."*

The bad path here refers to the transience of the heavenly world. Although the heavenly world is pleasant at the moment, it can always be followed by existence in lower, painful realms.

Anuruddha then instructed her further:

"You don't understand, stupid one, what the word of the arahants is:

All formations are impermanent; they have the nature of arising and passing away. After they have come into being, they pass away; their calming is blissful."

*"Now there is no more new life in a group of gods, Jālinī!
Disintegrated is the cycle of births,
There is no longer any becoming."*

The sutta ends with these words.

We also see here, as in many other suttā, that the language of the arahant is very direct and the response to a deluded being is not carefully spoken by an arahant.

We find reports in the Pāḷi Canon that Anuruddha was particularly fond of simple robes made of rags, that he had not slept for fifty-five years and had overcome tiredness for 25 years (Thg 904).

He placed great emphasis on the practice of the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*).

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was the Buddha's stepmother. His biological mother died a week after his birth. After the Buddha's father Suddhodana died, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī wanted to take ordination under the Buddha. We find this incident recounted in AN 8. 51. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was the first Buddhist nun and she paved the way for women to practise outside the home without any household responsibilities and thus to attain arahantship.

In 8. 51⁵⁰ it is reported how Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī asked the Buddha, who was in his hometown Kapilavatthu at that time, three times to allow women to go into homelessness. The Buddha refused her request each time without giving an explanation. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī wept and left. The Buddha left shortly afterwards to go to Vesālī.

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī followed him, accompanied by numerous Sakyan women, to Vesālī. They shaved their hair and put on saffron-coloured robes. With swollen feet and dust-covered limbs, full of pain, weeping, Mahā-Pajāpatī Gotamī stood in front of the gate of the house where the Buddha was staying. The venerable Ānanda saw her there and asked what her concern was. He compassionately turned to the Buddha and presented the women's request to him. However, the Buddha again refused to ordain women. Ānanda asked three times. Each time the Buddha refused and he also told Ānanda that he should not approve of women becoming homeless. Ānanda then asked whether women could attain the four stages of awakening up to arahantship. The Buddha confirmed that women could attain arahantship. Ānanda continued to support the concerns of women and reminded the Buddha of the compassion that Mahā-Pajāpatī Gotamī had shown towards him:

"Therefore, lord, if the woman is able to do so, and since Mahā-Pajāpatī Gotamī has rendered great service to the Blessed One, is his aunt, was his tutor and nourisher, and nursed the Blessed One with her own milk after his mother's death - therefore, lord, it would be good if the Blessed One would allow women to go forth from the house into homelessness under the teaching and discipline proclaimed by the Thus Gone One."

The Buddha then made it a condition for women who move into homelessness that they must observe eight rules.⁵¹

Mahā-Pajāpatī Gotamī accepted these rules without hesitation. In the Vinaya Pīṭaka⁵² it is further reported that the Buddha pleased Mahā-Pajāpatī Gotamī with a *dhamma* discourse. Afterwards, the Buddha issued the rule that bhikkhus should ordain women. Mahā-Pajāpatī Gotamī and the other women accompanying her were ordained only by accepting the eight special rules.

Then Mahā-Pajāpatī Gotamī asked the Buddha to explain the teaching to her briefly⁵³, so that she could practise in seclusion, untiringly, diligently and resolutely.

The Buddha explained to her:

"With those things, Gotamī, which you know lead to lust and not to dispassion, which lead to attachment and not to detachment, which lead to accumulation and not to diminution, which lead to many desires and not to desirelessness, to dissatisfaction and not to contentment, that they lead to sociability and not to seclusion, to sloth and not to energy, that they lead to difficulty of support and not to ease of support, you may take it for granted that this is not the teaching, not the discipline, not the master's teaching.

These things lead to lust and not to dispassion; they lead to attachment and not to detachment; they lead to accumulation and not to diminution; they lead to many desires and not to desirelessness; they lead to dissatisfaction and not to contentment; they lead to sociability and not to seclusion; they lead to sloth and not to energy; they lead to difficult supportability and not to easy supportability. With all these individual things you should recognise: 'This is not the teaching, this is not the discipline, this is not the master's teaching. With those things, Gotamī, with which you understand: 'These things lead to dispassion, not to lust; they lead to detachment, not to

50 We also find this account in Cullavagga of Vinaya Pīṭaka chapter 10.

51 Cf. AN 8. 51

52 Cf. Cullavagga chapter 10.

53 Cf. AN 8. 53

attachment; they lead to diminution, not to accumulation; they lead to diminishing desires, not to many desires; they lead to contentment, not to discontent; they lead to seclusion, not to companionship; they lead to energy, not to inertia; they lead to easy supportability, not to difficult supportability. In all these individual things you should recognise: 'This is the teaching, this is the discipline, this is the master's teaching'." AN 8. 53

According to the commentaries, Mahā-Pajāpati Gotamī attained arahantship during this teaching. She is said to have already had streamentry. We see here that the Buddha knew exactly what she needed to practise even more, for this is a special teaching in which distinctive discernment is strengthened.

Mahā-Pajāpati Gotamī was the eldest according to ordination among the nuns.⁵⁴

At the request of Mahā-Pajāpati Gotamī, the Buddha instructed the venerable Nandaka⁵⁵ to give a *dhamma* talk to the bhikkhunīs who had ordained with Mahā-Pajāpati Gotamī. This was a question-and-answer dialogue. The venerable One asked the bhikkhunīs concerning all six internal and external sense bases and concerning the corresponding consciousness whether they are impermanent or permanent, whether that which is impermanent is unsatisfactory or satisfactory, whether that which is unsatisfactory and has the nature of change can be called 'this is mine', 'this I am' and 'this is my self'. The bhikkhunīs answered rightly and finally:

"What is the cause? We, venerable sir, have already seen this with right wisdom as it is: These six inner sense bases are impermanent."

The bhikkhu Nandaka then replied: *"Good, good, sisters, this is how it is for a noble disciple who has seen this with right wisdom."*

According to these statements, one could assume that the bhikkhunīs already had streamentry. They are also questioned about feelings, their impermanence and conditionality. A skilful comparison is given for penetrating wisdom and its way of realization and the seven awakening factors are briefly explained. The bhikkhunīs then took their leave of Nandaka and of the Buddha as well.

The Buddha said: *"Our intention has not yet been fulfilled."* And he asked Nandaka again the next day to give a teaching to the bhikkhunīs in the same way.

And that happened. After the discourse, the bhikkhunīs paid their respects to the Buddha. After they had left, he said the following to the bhikkhus:

"Bhikkhus, just as many people on the Uposatha day of the fifteenth are not in doubt or unclear as to whether the moon is full or not yet, and the moon is indeed full, in the same way those bhikkhunīs are satisfied with Nandaka's discourse on the dhamma, and so the intention has been fulfilled. Bhikkhus, even the least advanced of those five hundred bhikkhunīs is a streamenterer, no longer subject to destruction, knowing (the way), heading for awakening."

It is likely that some bhikkhunīs attained arahantship, for this was their intention.

In the *dhamma* lecture, the bhikkhunīs are taught essential things for awakening: The three universal characteristics: Impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness of the sense bases and the corresponding modes of consciousness, as well as the impermanence and conditionality of feelings. In addition, the seven awakening factors necessary for understanding are explained. These things, as we see here, are to be considered repeatedly.

54 Cf. AN 1. 24

55 Cf. MN 146



Bhiikkhunī Hall, Wat Thepthidaram, Bangkok, photo CG

Khema

Just as Sāriputta was pre-eminent in wisdom among the bhikkhus, so in AN 1. 24 the Buddha named bhikkhunī Khema as pre-eminent in wisdom (*mahāpaññānaṃ*) among the bhikkhunīs. Although he was initially reluctant to ordain women, he later praised outstanding women in the Saṅgha. In SN 17. 24 and AN 2. 132, the Buddha recommends bhikkhunī Khema and Uppalavannā as worthy of emulation.

The name Khema means security and is used synonymously for *Nibbāna*, the ultimate security. Khema was one of the three wives of King Bimbisāra of Magadha. She lived in the palace in Rājagaha. King Bimbisāra was a devoted follower and generous supporter of the Buddha. He is said to have attained streamentry.

Khema is said to have attained streamentry on the basis of the following Dhammapada saying, which was integrated into a *dhamma* discourse by the Buddha.

*“Who swims in the stream of lust,
he’s just like the spiders in the web.
But the wise cut through this and go on, ignoring it,
overcoming all suffering.”* Dhp 347

The Buddha briefly explained here, using a figurative example, that lust leads to suffering. At the end of the *dhamma* discourse, she is said to have attained arahantship. She asked her husband, King Bimbisara, to be allowed to go into homelessness. He agreed.

In the Therīgāthā verses we find an incident where she was addressed by Māra. Here it becomes clear that she was beautiful and young. Māra tried to seduce her to enjoy sensual pleasures. Khema’s response was that this body was dirty, prone to disease and decay, causing trouble and that she had shame and that desire for sense objects had been uprooted. She compares sensual

pleasures to a sword smeared with poison and the five groups of existence to a pile of flesh. What the Evil One calls sensual pleasure is passionless to her. She has transcended all pleasure and overcome the darkness concerning the groups of existence.

We find a story in Saṃyuttanikāya SN 44.1 where King Pasenadi had heard of her wisdom and wanted to talk to her about the *dhmma*. He asked her the question that preoccupies many, namely,

"What happens to the Buddha after death?"

He asked her:

"Does the Buddha exist after death?"

Does the Buddha not exist after death?"

Does he both exist and not exist?"

Does he neither exist after death nor not?"

Khema replied each time that the Buddha had not said anything about it. King Pasenadi expressed his astonishment at this answer. Khema explained by asking counter questions. She asked the king if there was any counter, estimator or calculator capable of counting the grains of sand in the Ganges or calculating the amount of water in the ocean.

King Pasenadi's questions imply the view and desire for an existence after death or for non-existence. Both views were rejected by the Buddha as wrong views and lead to a personality view, to the view that there is an 'I'. This wrong and suffering-causing view is taken away through *vipassanā* meditation. Khema did not want any of these views and speculations to arise in the king. She did not want to give rise to the wrong view that an 'I' is destroyed, nor that an 'I' continues to exist. She explained that the five groups of existence (body, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness) were overcome by the Buddha and could not develop again. Later, King Pasenadi went to the Buddha, told him about the conversation with Khema and asked the Buddha the same questions. The Buddha confirmed Khema's answers by replying in the same way.

Uppalavaṇṇā

Uppalavaṇṇā is especially emphasised by the Buddha in AN 1. 24 among the bhikkhunīs as one with supernatural powers (*iddhimantī*), like among the bhikkhus Mahā-Moggallāna. Her name means 'the colour of the blue lotus'.

In SN 17. 24 the Buddha singled her out as particularly worthy of emulation by other bhikkhunīs. In the verses of the nuns (Therīgāthā, verses 224 to 234) she herself reports that she has attained knowledge of remembering previous lives, the heavenly eye and ear, the knowledge of the state of mind of others. She says that with the attainment of arahantship she also attained the six supernatural powers. She used her supernatural powers to create a carriage with four horses and travelled to the Buddha.

She also said:

*"Sensual pleasures are like poisonous weapons,
the groups of existence are like rotten meat.*

What others call pleasure in sensual objects is non-pleasure for me.

Pleasure in everything is destroyed for me.

The dark mass [of ignorance] is destroyed." (Therī 235)

In the Suttavibhaṅga⁵⁶ of the Vinaya-Piṭaka we find an account of a rape she suffered. She lived alone in a hut in the forest. During her alms round, a former lover from her lay life hid in her hut. When she returned, he raped her. When the Buddha heard about it, he said that she had not

56 Cf. Vinaya Piṭaka: Suttavibhaṅga, Vol. I, PTS, Translation I. B. Horner, Bristol 2014, p. 53 f

committed an offence because she had not consented. Sexual intercourse is an offence for bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs that results in disrobing and lifelong expulsion from the Order. Here we find a story about the experience of *dukkha* in a female arahant.

Here, too, it becomes clear that with an arahant the effect of earlier unwholesome kammās does not cease and thus suffering can be experienced. The arahant's reaction is neither unwholesome nor wholesome, but kammically neutral. No new kamma can be created. No more unwholesome reactions can occur.

In SN 5. 5 it is reported how Māra tried to frighten her when she was meditating alone in the forest.

She responded to Māra's words:

*"Though a hundred thousand rogues
Just like you might come here,
I stir not a hair, I feel no terror;
Even alone, Mara, I don't fear you.*

*I can make myself disappear
Or I can enter inside your belly.
I can stand between your eyebrows
Yet you won't catch a glimpse of me.*

*I am the master of my mind,
The bases of power (iddhipādā) are well developed;
I am freed from all bondage,
Therefore I don't fear you, friend."*

Mahā-Kassapa

Mahā-Kassapa is particularly emphasised by the Buddha in AN 1. 24 as a bhikkhu who takes upon himself the ascetic practice (*dhutaṅga*).

In the Saṃyuttanikāya there is an entire chapter on Kassapa.

SN 16. 11 tells how Mahā-Kassapa met the Buddha for the first time and how he attained arahantship:

He had completed the renunciation of the world for himself by putting on the robe and shaving his head. He had no teacher. As he was travelling thus, he saw the Blessed One between Rājagaha and Nālandā, sitting by the Bahuputta Cetiya. On seeing him, the thought occurred to him:

"If I should ever see the Teacher, it is the Blessed One himself that I would see. If I should ever see the Fortunate One, it is the Blessed One himself that I would see. If I should ever see the Perfectly Awakened One, it is the Blessed One himself that I would see." Then I prostrated myself right there at the Blessed One's feet and said to him: 'Venerable sir, the Blessed One is my teacher, I am his disciple. Venerable sir, the Blessed One is my teacher, I am his disciple.'"

The Buddha immediately gave him specific but brief teachings:

"When I had said this, the Blessed One said to me: 'Kassapa, if one who does not know and see should say to a disciple so single-minded as yourself: 'I know, I see,' his head would split. But knowing, Kassapa, I say, 'I know'; seeing, I say, 'I see.'

Therefore, Kassapa, you should train yourself thus: 'I will arouse a keen sense of shame and fear of wrongdoing towards elders, the newly ordained, and those of middle status.' Thus should you train yourself."

"Therefore, Kassapa, you should train yourself thus: 'Whenever I listen to any dhamma connected

with the wholesome, I will listen to it with eager ears, attending to it as a matter of vital concern, applying my whole mind to it.' Thus should you train yourself."

"Therefore, Kassapa, you should train yourself thus: 'I will never relinquish mindfulness directed to the body associated with joy.' Thus should you train yourself."

The Buddha could see Mahā-Kassapa's abilities and obstacles clearly, because these teachings do not contain instructions on *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation. This must have been known to Mahā-Kassapa.

After the Blessed One had admonished him with this admonition, he got up and left. Mahā-Kassapa described the attainment of arahantship to Ānanda as follows:

"For seven days, friend, I ate the country's almsfood as a debtor, but on the eighth day final knowledge arose."

SN 16. 1 states:

"This one, our Kassapa, is content with any robe, and he praises contentment with any robe, and he does not engage in any improper, unseemly activity for the sake of a robe. If he has not received a robe, he feels no lack; if he has received a robe, he enjoys it without attachment, without intoxication, without committing an offence, seeing the danger, knowing the escape."

In the same way, the Buddha spoke about the other three requisites, shelter, food and medicine. He encouraged the other bhikkhus to follow Kassapa's example.

In the following suttā, Kassapa was further praised by the Buddha: He did not cling to the families. He had no resistance when he got nothing. He did not allow unpleasant feelings to arise. He taught the *dhmma* without expectations for himself, without flattering others, but as the Buddha had taught him out of compassion for beings.

He praised the almsround, a robe made of rags, frugality, contentment, seclusion, not being in company, not socialising, being energetic, arousing energy, he praised the forest life, even though he was already old and the Buddha asked him whether he didn't want to have more comfort. He also behaved this way out of compassion for others, to be a good example for later generations when they hear about it. So he emphasised a secluded, extremely modest life in order to be content, to achieve the goal of the teaching and to be able to live well once one has achieved the goal.

In SN 16. 9 the Buddha names the nine attainments⁵⁷, as well as the six supernatural powers up to liberation free of influxes, which he can attain and says after each attainment that Mahā-Kassapa can also attain them like himself. He thus presents Mahā-Kassapa as special, equal to him in regard to all attainments.

We find three places in the Kassapasamyutta where the Buddha asks Mahā-Kassapa to teach the bhikkhus. Each time Mahā-Kassapa hesitates because he sees shortcomings in the bhikkhus that make his work of explaining the teaching to them in vain. Even already at that time, i.e. during the Buddha's lifetime, he saw the decline of the order.

Here, too, the Buddha puts Mahā-Kassapa on the same level as himself, for he says again: 'Either I will give a lecture or you will'.

"Admonish the bhikkhus, Kassapa, give a dhamma talk to the bhikkhus, Kassapa, either I, Kassapa, should admonish the bhikkhus, or you should; either I should give a dhamma talk to the bhikkhus, or you should." (SN 16. 6)

Kassapa responded to the Buddha's request by reporting that bhikkhus speak only for competing with each other in regard to their ability to give discourses and less to convey content. The Buddha sent for the bhikkhus and admonished them. They showed repentance.

⁵⁷ Four finematerial *jhāna* (*rūpa jhāna*), four immaterial bases (*arūpāyatana*), the cessation of perception and feeling.

In SN 16. 7 Kassapa also explains why he does not want to teach the bhikkhus:

"Venerable sir, the bhikkhus are difficult to admonish now, and they have qualities which make them difficult to admonish. They are impatient and do not accept instruction respectfully. Venerable sir, for one who has no faith in regard to wholesome states, no sense of shame, no fear of wrongdoing, no energy, and no wisdom, whether day or night comes only decline is to be expected in regard to wholesome states, not growth."

Mahā-Kassapa compares the bhikkhu community to the waning moon. It loses size and luminosity. It is also reported in SN 16. 8 that the Buddha asked Mahā-Kassapa to give a *dhamma* talk to the bhikkhus. Here, too, he hesitates. The Buddha himself says:

Yes, but earlier, Kassapa,

- the older bhikkhus were forest dwellers and praised the forest life;
- were those who lived on almsfood and praised the life of almsfood;
- have been those who wore rags and praised the wearing of rags;
- have been those who possessed (only) the three garments and have praised the possession of (only) three garments;
- have been frugal and have praised frugality;
- have been satisfied and have praised the satisfaction;
- have been secluded and have praised seclusion;
- have been without contacts and have praised not being in company;
- have been energetic and have praised the energy.

The Buddha also problematizes the fact that the bhikkhus no longer place any value on these qualities. It will not lead to happiness for them and they are no longer an inspiration for others to imitate them. The Buddha goes on to say that even in his time the bhikkhus were focussed on becoming famous and well-known and getting plenty of requisites. When others see this, they will imitate the bhikkhus with this bad behaviour. It will lead to suffering for them.

Kassapa also complains to the Buddha about the decline of the order that was already taking place at that time, the bhikkhus no longer live as he did, they practise contrary qualities and enjoy being famous, well-known and revered.

Also in SN 16. 13 Mahā-Kassapa had a conversation with the Buddha about the decline of the teaching. He asked the Buddha why formerly there have been few precepts but many attained supreme knowledge, and why at the time of the conversation there were many precepts but few attained supreme knowledge. So it was already the case during the Buddha's lifetime that the understanding of the teachings was declining and fewer beings were attaining arahantship. The Buddha explained this decrease as follows:

"It is so, Kassapa, that when beings abandon the right dhamma and thus it disappears, there are many training rules, but fewer bhikkhus attain supreme knowledge. The right dhamma does not disappear, Kassapa, as long as no falsification of the right dhamma arises in the world. But when a falsification of the right dhamma appears in the world, then the right dhamma disappears."

The Buddha said that it is not the four elements, earth, water, fire and air, that make the teaching disappear, but deluded people.

He names five factors that lead to the falsification of doctrine:

Bhikkhus as well as bhikkhunīs and followers (*upāsakā*) and female followers (*upāsikā*) have

1. no respect or regard for the teacher.
2. They have no respect or regard for the doctrine,
3. no respect and esteem for the community (*saṅgha*⁵⁸),
4. no respect and no regard for the training,

⁵⁸ According to the sutta definition, Saṅgha includes the four beings: Stream-enterers, once-returners, non-returners, arahants.

5. no respect and regard for concentration (*samādhi*).

The opposite leads to the continuation of the right teaching.

Mahā-Kassapa gave *dhamma* talks to the bhikkhunīs. But here, too, he hesitated. Only after Ānanda had asked him three times did he follow him to teach the bhikkhunīs.

We see in SN 16. 10., 11. that Kassapa, who is so praised by the Buddha with regard to his attainments, was in no way gentle and reserved towards Ānanda. He addressed Ānanda as a boy, even though he already had grey hair. He reprimanded him very clearly about what he had done wrong to his young disciples. His great interest was not to make the *dhamma* disappear or falsify it. He made it very clear that he was an arahant and was praised by the Buddha, comparing himself to a large elephant that one tries to hide with a palm leaf. Just as this is impossible, his supernatural abilities could not be hidden, he said.

Kisā Gotamī, Patācārā

Kisā Gotamī's and Patācārā's stories before their ordinations are described in detail and movingly in the commentaries, especially in the commentary on the Dhammapada. The commentary stories will not be discussed further here. Both women lived in Sāvattthī. They both lost family members tragically, which led to great grief and confusion for both of them. They were ordained and both attained arahantship.

In AN 1. 24 Kisā Gotamī is singled out by the Buddha as one who wore coarse robes, an ascetic practice; Patācārā is singled out because of her Vinaya knowledge.

In the Dhammapada, verse 287, the Buddha speaks to Kisā Gotamī:

*"The one with a clinging mind,
doting on his children and cattle,
is seized by death
like the great flood a sleeping village."*

She was shaken up in her grief by these words and attained streamentry. She is said to have ordained as a result of this. When the Buddha saw that she had the maturity for full awakening, he spoke to her:

*"Better than the life of one who lives a hundred years and
does not see the path to the deathless,
is just one day in the life of the one,
who sees the path to the deathless."* Dh 114

Thereupon she is said to have attained arahantship.

Verses in the Therīgāthā that originate from her recount tell the story that we find in the commentaries on Patācārā. It may be that she reflects the story of Patācārā, for both came from Sāvattthī and probably met as bhikkhunīs. And Kisā Gotamī also spoke about the general suffering of women, which was illustrated by the story of Patācārā.

She said that life as a woman is suffering (*dukkha*). Giving birth to children is great suffering. The birth of a child is associated with great pain. Before that she said that one should fully understand suffering, its origination and cessation, the eightfold path and the four noble truths. This understanding, which includes the entire Buddha's teachings, was also her personal way out of suffering and out of the suffering of existence in general through the attainment of arahantship.

She then tells the story that is identical to Patācārā's commentary story.

While Patācārā was on her way to her parents' house to give birth to her child, her husband died on the way. She gave birth to a son on the way. But both sons died on the way to her parents,

which she continued alone. Her parents and brother were burned to death as she approached their house.

But she attained deathlessness, the final *Nibbāna*.

In SN 5. 3 we find an incident where Kisā Gotamī was sitting at the foot of a tree and was approached by Māra. Here it is reported that she lost her son. Māra asked her if she was looking for a husband.

She replied:

*"It is the end of mother with son,
this is also the end with men;
I have no worries, I do not weep,
nor am I afraid, friend.*

*Joy is destroyed everywhere,
the mass of darkness has been broken through.
The army of death has been defeated,
I dwell without influxes."* SN 5. 3

To Patācārā the Buddha spoke in her confusion after the death of her entire family:

*"Not sons, not parents and relatives can help
the one who is destined for death,
You can't find protection with relatives."* Dh 288

*"Having understood this fact,
the sage who is restrained by ethics
should quickly make his way to Nibbāna."* Dh 289

Based on these verses, Patācārā was able to attain streamentry. She then ordained.

In the Therīgāthā verses, Patācārā briefly recounts how she attained arahantship. She washed her feet in front of her hut and while watching the water running down her feet, she attained concentration. She entered her hut and while pressing down the wick of the oil lamp with a needle to extinguish it, she realised the impermanence of all phenomena.⁵⁹

She was also able to help other bhikkhunīs to attain arahantship. Thus, in Therīgāthā verses 119 to 121, thirty nuns report how they attained the threefold knowledge of remembering past lives, the divine eye and the disintegration of the influxes through the teachings of the bhikkhunī Patācārā.

The bhikkhunī Candā also followed Patācārā's instructions after she had been ordained and attained the threefold knowledge.⁶⁰ Bhikkhunī Uttarā was able to apply the same method with the same result.⁶¹

We see from the two women Patācārā and Kisā Gotamī that through the experience of immense suffering, which was even connected with confusion of the mind but also with meeting with a fully awakened being, a final end to suffering can be attained very quickly.

59 Cf. Therīgāthā verses 114 - 116

60 Cf. Therīgāthā verses 124 - 125

61 Cf. Therīgāthā verses 178 - 181

Rāhula

Rāhula was the only son of the Buddha Gotama. On the night he was born, the future Buddha went into homelessness with the motivation to put an end to the suffering of birth and death.

In the Mahāvagga book of the Vinaya Piṭaka, it is reported how Rāhula joined the order as a novice (*sāmaṇera*). A year after his awakening, the Buddha went to his hometown Kapilavatthu. He went to the palace of his father Suddhodana. Rāhula's mother sent her son to his father, the Buddha, to ask him about his inheritance. Rāhula was seven years old at that time. Rāhula ran after the Buddha until the Buddha instructed Sāriputta to ordain Rāhula as a novice. On this occasion, the Buddha gave precise instructions on how a novice should be ordained. The candidate had to be able to speak and go for the threefold refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha. Suddhodana, the Buddha's father, requested permission from the parents for ordination as a novice after Rāhula's ordination.⁶²

In AN 1. 24, Rāhula is singled out by the Buddha as a bhikkhu who is eager to practise (*sikkhākāmaṇa*) or who follows the training.

The Vinaya Suttavibhaṅga reports an incident that took place in Kosambi at Badarika's monastery. The bhikkhus did not allow Rāhula, who was still a novice, to spend the night with them in one room. There was a rule from the Buddha that bhikkhus should not lie down in the same place with not fully ordained ones. When the venerable Rāhula had not been given a place to lie down, he sat down in the toilet to sleep. In the morning, the Buddha found him there. The Buddha was astonished. Thereupon the venerable Rāhula reported the matter to the Buddha. The Buddha gave the bhikkhus a discourse on this matter and modified the rule. He allowed bhikkhus to sleep in one place with not fully ordained persons for a maximum of two or three nights.⁶³

We find several important suttā in the Pāḷi Canon that the Buddha gave to Rāhula. Thus it is said in a sutta in verse form in the Sutta Nipāta (Sn II. 11) that this sutta was often given to Rāhula. He recommends to him at this point:

- to be together with noble friends,
- to stay in remote, secluded places without noise,
- to eat in moderation,
- not to develop a desire for the four requisites (robe, food, accommodation, medicine),
- to follow the Vinaya rules,
- to protect the sense doors,
- to practise mindfulness of the body,
- to develop a lot of disenchantment (*nibbida*),
- to avoid signs associated with beauty and lust,
- to direct the consciousness towards the non-beautiful,
- to concentrate the consciousness in one direction,
- to develop the signless,
- to overcome the latent tendency towards conceit by understanding the conceit in order to behave peacefully.

Here the Buddha briefly gave important instructions for attaining arahantship.

In MN 61, the Buddha strongly warns his son Rāhula not to lie, for *"if one is not ashamed to lie deliberately, then there is no evil, I say, that one would not do."* He also advises him to thoroughly reflect on all actions in body, speech and mind before performing them, during its performance and afterwards in order to avoid suffering for himself and others.

62 Cf. Vinaya-Piṭaka, Vol. 4, translated by I. B. Horner, Bristol, 2014, PTS, p. 103 f

63 Cf. Vinaya-Piṭaka, Vol. 2, translated by I. B. Horner, Bristol, 2012, PTS, p. 195 f

In MN 62 the Buddha asked Rāhula to observe the five aggregates/groups of existence (matter, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness) as:

'This is not mine', 'this I am not', 'this is not my self'.

Afterwards, the venerable Sāriputta gave him mindfulness of breathing as an object of meditation. In the evening he asked the Buddha how he should practise mindfulness of breathing. However, the Buddha gave him instructions on how to practise the five-element meditation with space as the fifth element in regard to the 42 parts of the body, so that he could finally see them as well as

'This is not mine', 'this I am not', 'this is not my self'.

He advised him to develop calmness towards the elements in his mind through this kind of contemplation.⁶⁴

He also recommended that he should develop the four Brahmavihārā, kind benevolence, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, as well as non-beauty contemplation. The latter should serve to avoid lust.

In this sutta, he recommends contemplating the impermanence of all phenomena in order to overcome conceit. Only after these exercises did he respond to Rāhula's question about mindfulness of breathing. He explained this as *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation.

In this sutta we find detailed instructions on both the *samatha* and the *vipassanā* meditation.

There are several suttā in SN 18 which are about Rāhula and in which Rāhula asks the Buddha to give him instructions on overcoming conceit. This seems to have been a particular problem for him, which is understandable given his family background and especially his relation to the Buddha as a biological son. The Buddha always advises him to consider the impermanence of all phenomena.

In MN 147⁶⁵ it is then reported that the Buddha could see that the abilities for the disintegration of the influxes had matured in his son and so he finally gave him instructions for attaining arahantship. Many thousands of devas were present while the teaching was given to Rāhula in question and answer form.

The following questions were asked by the Buddha and answered by Rāhula concerning the 6 sense bases, the corresponding objects, contact, feelings, perceptions, types of consciousness and forms:

"Is the eye permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, venerable sir."

"Is that which is impermanent suffering or happiness?"

"Suffering, venerable sir."

"Is that which is impermanent, painful and subject to change suitable to be regarded in this way:

'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'?

"No, venerable sir."

The Buddha then explained that through this contemplation disenchantment should arise. Through disenchantment one becomes dispassionate and through dispassion liberation (*vimutti*) arises. At the end it is reported that Rāhula attained arahantship and many thousands of devas attained streamentry.

We also find this instruction to Rāhula in SN 18. 1, but it is not reported there that Rāhula attained arahantship. It can be assumed that he received this detailed instruction on *vipassanā* meditation from the Buddha frequently.

64 The brief instructions for element meditation to Rāhula can be found in AN 4. 177.

65 This sutta is also found in SN 35. 121.

Vaṅgīsa

In SN 8. 12 the bhikkhu Vaṅgīsa reports what the Buddha taught him and what he achieved:

"He taught me the dhamma on the aggregates, the bases and the elements (khandhāyatana-dhātuyo).

When I heard the dhamma from him, I went into homelessness."

...

"Three knowledges are attained, the Buddha's teaching is done.

I know previous existences, the divine eye has been purified,

someone with three knowledges,

someone who has attained spiritual powers (iddhi),

someone who knows the minds of others."

In this sutta, Vaṅgīsa describes in quick succession, in verse form, the task that the Buddha gave him, namely to examine existence in regard to the five aggregates, the sense bases and the elements, and he also describes the result that he achieved with this complex exercise. In the Theragātā verses, the verses of arahants, Vaṅgīsa is described in detail. He also describes his difficulties in practice:

*"I, who has left the house into homelessness,
am overcome by bold, dark thoughts.*

...

I am burning with sensuality,

the consciousness is completely burnt,

good is cessation,

show it to me out of compassion, Gotama."

He speaks these last verses to Ānanda, who advises him:

*"Develop mindfulness with the unattractive,
concentrate it well, develop one-pointedness,
practise mindfulness of the body,
develop frequently disenchantment.*

*You who have sunk into the tendency to pride,
develop the signless,
from there comes the deep understanding of pride,
you will be a practitioner of peace."*

In the Saṃyuttanikāya is the eighth chapter about the bhikkhu Vaṅgīsa. He spoke there several times about lust that assailed him, but he quickly remembered the *dhamma* taught by the Buddha and the path that leads to *Nibbāna*. He sees all things as impermanent (SN 8. 2).

In AN 1. 24 the Buddha singles him out as one who can express clear knowledge.

Various Brahmins

In SN 7. 1 we find the story of the brahmin couple Dhanañjānī. The wife Dhanañjānī had great faith in the Buddha. Once when she was serving food to the brahmins and her husband in their house, she said three times: *„Honour to the Exalted One, the Holy One, the Perfectly Self-awakened One!"*

Upon hearing these words, the brahmin of the Bhāradvāja family said to his wife Dhanañjānī: *"This wretched woman is in the habit of praising the bald-headed ascetic at every possible*

opportunity. But now, wretched woman, I will refute your master's teaching."

The woman replied that there was no one in this world who could refute the Blessed One's teaching. *"You go too, brahmin; when you have gone, you will recognise it,"* she replied.

"Then the brahmin of the Bhāradvāja family, annoyed and displeased, went to where the Blessed One was. Having gone there, he greeted the Blessed One, and having exchanged greetings and courtesies with him, he sat down to one side.

Sitting to one side, the brahmin of the house of Bhāradvāja then addressed the Blessed One with the verse:

'What do you have to cut off to live happily?

What do you have to cut off to have no worries?

What is the one thing whose destruction pleases you, Gotama?'

(The Exalted One:)

'You have to cut off anger in order to live happily;

You have to cut off anger so you don't have to worry.

The destruction of anger, whose root is poison and whose summit is sweet, brahmin, the noble one praise; for when you have cut it off, you suffer no more sorrow.'

On hearing this, the brahmin of the Bhāradvāja family said to the Blessed One: 'Wonderful, Lord Gotama! Wonderful, Lord Gotama! As when, Lord Gotama, one raises up something overturned, or unveils something veiled, or shows a lost person the right way, or brings a lamp into a dark room with the intention: Let those who have eyes see the objects - in the same way the truth has been clarified by the Lord Gotama through many discussions. Therefore I go for refuge in the Lord Gotama and in the teaching and in the community of bhikkhus. May I obtain homelessness and higher ordination from Lord Gotama.

The brahmin of the Bhāradvāja family received homelessness and higher ordination from the Exalted One.

Not long after the venerable Bhāradvāja had received the higher ordination and was dwelling alone and secluded, diligently, eagerly, resolutely, after not long time he attained the supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of good houses rightly leave home and go into homelessness, by seeing the dhamma and direct knowledge he realised it himself and dwelt in it.

He understood directly: 'Birth is finished,

the holy life has been lived,

what should be done has been done.

There is no more state of existence.'

And the venerable Bhāradvāja had become one of the arahants." (SN 7. 1)

We see here that even with prior practice of other belief systems, insight into the laws of our existence and liberation from suffering can be achieved very quickly if attachments are given up and the right practice is practised.

In Brāhmaṇasaṃyutta SN 7 we find several similar cases of how members of another religion went into homelessness under the Buddha and very quickly attained arahantship. They were even angry with the Buddha at first when they heard that members of their religion had gone into homelessness under him.

In SN 7. 2, for example, about the brahmin Akkosaka-Bhāradvāja is reported. He was angry and displeased when he heard about the ordination of the brahmin from the Bhāradvāja family (see SN 7. 1.). He went to the Buddha and insulted him with coarse and mean words.

The Buddha used a skilful example and did not engage in this kind of communication. He asked the brahmin if guests sometimes came to him, if he offered them food. The brahmin answered

affirmatively. The Buddha explained to him that if they do not eat the food offered, then to whom does it belong? It belongs to the host. In the same way, he said, the insulting words remain with the brahmin himself, for the Buddha does not accept them. The brahmin further accused him that this was an angry statement. The Buddha replied:

*"How should anger arise in one who is without anger, in the tamed one, the one with right conduct, the one liberated by right knowledge, the peaceful one, the accomplished one?
It is only worse for you if you meet the angry one angrily;
the one who does not meet the angry one angrily wins the battle,
where victory is hard to come by.*

*For the welfare of both he practises,
for one's own as well as for the other's,
the one who sees the other angrily practises mindfulness.*

*Him who brings healing to both himself and the other,
only people who are ignorant of the doctrine (dhamma) consider him as a fool."*

These words and the calmness of the Buddha convinced the angry brahmin and he too went for refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha and asked for ordination. It is also said of him in the same words as in SN 7. 1 that he soon attained arahantship.

Similarly, two brahmins are reported in SN 7. 3., SN 7. 4. Both were angry, but the Buddha skilfully calmed them down and they accepted the ordination and attained arahantship soon afterwards.

There are other stories in the same Samyuttya about how brahmins, members of another religion, received only very brief teachings from the Buddha, then went for refuge, accepted ordination and very soon attained arahantship. For some of them, the Buddha emphasised the obstacles very clearly and very personally. To the brahmin Suddhika Bhāradvāja he said:

*"Even if one mumbles many sayings,
one does not become a brahmin by birth,
When one is defiled inwardly with filth and practises hypocrisy." SN 7. 7, SN 7. 8*

To the brahmin Sundarika Bhāradvāja he said:

*"Your pride, brahmin, is a hundredweight for you,
your anger is smoke,
In the ashes (lie) your lies." SN 7. 9*

However, we also find a brahmin named Sundarika Bhāradvāja in MN 7. Whether it is the same person is not clear. The name Sundarika implies that it is someone who is somehow connected to the river Sundarikā. The name Bhāradvāja is a clan name. The brahmin Sundarika Bhāradvāja listens to the Vatthupama Sutta, a somewhat more detailed teaching, goes for refuge, goes into homelessness and also very quickly attains arahantship. In Sutta Nipāta III. 4 we also find an encounter between the Buddha and a brahmin named Sundarika Bhāradvāja. The frame story is the same as in SN 7. 9, but the conversation differs from that in SN 7. 9.

In SN 7. 10 a brahmin enumerates to the Buddha in very clear words with clear examples the burdens of the householder's life and says that he, the Buddha as an ascetic, does not have all these and can therefore be happy. The Buddha repeats the brahmin's words and confirms that he can live happily. Thereupon this brahmin also goes for refuge, accepts the ordination and very soon attains arahantship.

The fetters do not seem to be so tight for these brahmins. A few clear words of the Buddha are convincing for them and after energetic practice in seclusion they can reach the highest goal of the teaching, arahantship. If one were to speak to Western people like this nowadays, after 2500 years, they would feel personally hurt and run away.

In SN 7. 11 the story of the ploughman (Kasi) Bhāradvāja is given. The Buddha teaches him and he goes for refuge. In the Sutta Nipāta I. 4. we also find an account of a brahmin named Kasi Bhāradvāja. This member of the Bhāradvāja clan goes into homelessness under the Buddha and then very quickly attains arahantship after energetic, secluded practice. In both suttā, the frame story and the dialogue are the same. During the distribution of food to the field labourers of Kasi Bhāradvāja, the Buddha stood silently to one side. It is already a sign that the Buddha knew that the brahmin was receptive to his teaching, because every morning before the almsround he overruled to whom he should give advice, who was receptive to the teaching, and then he would give that person the opportunity to give food and to receive teachings. The brahmin told the Buddha that he should also plough, sow and then eat as he did. To this the Buddha replied that he also ploughs and sows, which refers to the *dhamma* practice in a figurative sense. We can also see here that the brahmin was not friendly to the Buddha at first and doubted his way of life. However, he was very quickly convinced and, according to Sutta Nipāta, very soon attained the highest goal of arahantship after his ordination. The Buddha was so impressive and convincing here that a farmer spontaneously left his property, fields, labourers and presumably his family behind and went into homelessness.

In MN 7 we find the path of the brahmin Sundarika Bhāradvāja. He listened to the discourse MN 7 (see above). And asked the Buddha whether he also practised ritual bathing in the river.

The Buddha replied:

*"The fool may jump in there again and again,
but the dark deeds are not cleansed there.*

...

*Here, brahmin, you should only bathe:
give protection to all beings.*

*If you do not speak a lie,
if you do not harm any living being,
if you do not take what has not been given,
have faith,
are not stingy.*

*What need for you to go to Gaya?
For any well will be your Gaya."*

Thereupon the brahmin went for refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha and asked to be allowed to go into homelessness.

And the brahmin Sundarika Bhāradvāja went into homelessness under the Blessed One and was ordained. And soon, not long after his ordination, after he lived alone, withdrawn, prudent, eager and determined, the venerable Bhāradvāja, seeing things with direct knowledge, attained and dwelt in the supreme goal of the holy life for which sons of good family rightly leave home for homelessness.

He understood directly:

*'Birth is finished,
the holy life has been lived,
what should be done has been done.
There is no more state of existence.'*

And the venerable Bhāradvāja became one of the arahants.

In the Middle Length Discourses MN 57 about ascetics from other sects is reported. The Buddha explains to a naked ascetic, whose companion had been practising the dog exercise for a long time, where this practice leads to.

"Here someone develops the dog-duty fully and uninterruptedly; he develops the dog-habit fully and uninterruptedly; he develops the dog-mind fully and uninterruptedly; he develops dog-behaviour fully and uninterruptedly.

Having done so, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in the company of dogs. But if he has such a view as this: 'By this virtue or observance or asceticism or holy life I shall become a [great] god or some [lesser] god/ that is wrong view in his case. Now there are two destinations for one with wrong view, I say: hell or the animal realm. So, Puṇṇa, if his dog-duty succeeds, it will lead him to the company of dogs; if it fails, it will lead him to the lower realms of suffering.'

The ascetic was deeply touched by what the Buddha explained about this practice, had faith in the Buddha and asked for ordination. It is also reported that he attained arahantship very quickly after ordination, although he had previously practised a completely opposite practice.

"Then Seniya, the naked ascetic with the dog training, received permission to go forth into homelessness under the Blessed One, And soon, not long after his full ordination, dwelling alone, withdrawn, diligent, ardent, and resolute, the venerable Seniya, by realising for himself with direct knowledge by seeing things entered upon and abided in that supreme goal of the holy life for which sons of good family rightly leave home and go into homelessness. He directly knew: 'Birth is finished, the holy life has been lived, what should be done has been done, there is no more state of being.' And the venerable Seniya became one of the arahants."

In AN 3. 101, however, the Buddha also said about the effect of actions:

"If, bhikkhus, one were to say thus: 'A person experiences kamma in precisely the same way that he created it,' in such a case there could be no living of the spiritual life and no opportunity would be seen for completely making an end of suffering.

But if one were to say thus: 'When a person creates kamma that is to be experienced in a particular way, he experiences its result precisely in that way,' in such a case the living of the spiritual life is possible and an opportunity is seen for completely making an end of suffering."

We see here that the naked ascetic Seniya was very quickly convinced by the Buddha's words about his wrong practice and was presumably correctly instructed and thus attained full awakening. Due to the disintegration of the influxes, by which another birth is not possible anymore, kamma committed in earlier times can no longer have an effect in a new existence. We do not know what other effects the bhikkhu Seniya had to experience in his last life as an arahant. There is no account of this in the Pāḷi Canon.

Mahākoṭṭhita

Mahākoṭṭhika was singled out in AN 1. 24 as one who has attained the four analytical discriminations (*paṭisambhidā*).

We find several suttā in the Pāḷi Canon where he discusses with Sāriputta or asks him. In SN 12. 67 he asks Sāriputta about dependant origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*).

In SN 22. 122 he asks Sāriputta what a bhikkhu who follows ethics has to observe. Sāriputta answers that he has to discern thoroughly the five aggregates/groups of existence, which are groups of clinging, as impermanent, as unsatisfactory, as disease and ulcer, as sting, as evil, as oppression, as something alien, degenerate, empty, selfless.

In other suttā he asked him about non-knowledge, gratification (*assāda*), about origination, about sense bases and their objects, what happens to the Buddha after his death. There are also suttā in which Sāriputta asks Mahākoṭṭhika. It is not so clear why they are questioning each other when they both have such wide knowledge of *dhamma*. In MN 43, too, the two outstanding bhikkhus talk about important questions of the *dhamma*.⁶⁶ It can be assumed that other bhikkhus are present to learn from the question and answer dialogue.

66 Cf. also SN 22. 122, SN 22. 127 - 128, SN 35. 191, SN 44. 3, AN 4. 174, AN 9. 13

When the Buddha gave the sutta MN 118 on in-breath and out-breath, Ānāpānassatisuttam, Mahākoṭṭhika was also present, along with other famous bhikkhus.

Māgandīya

The wandering ascetic Māgandīya, who also attained arahantship, is described only in MN 75. At that time he speaks of the Buddha as a destroyer of growth. The Buddha approaches him directly and asks him whether he had spoken about the Buddha in this way:

"Magandīya, the eye delights in forms, takes delight in forms, rejoices in forms; that has been tamed by the Tathagata, guarded, protected, and restrained, and he teaches the dhamma for its restraint. Was it with reference to this that you said: 'The recluse Gotama is a destroyer of growth'?" MN 75

Māgandīya confirmed that he had spoken this way because it was in their scriptures.

He also claims that heavenly sensual pleasures are more excellent and sublime than human sensual pleasures. The Buddha tries at length to convince him of the impermanence, the unsatisfactoriness and the selflessness of sense objects. He also tells of his own ignorant attitude towards sense objects when he was still living in his parents' palace.

This is followed by a discussion about health and *Nibbāna*. Māgandīya believes to find health in this body and also *Nibbāna*. He thinks he lives happily in his body. In this long discussion, the Buddha is finally able to convince him of the *dhamma* to such an extent that Māgandīya goes for refuge and asks for ordination. He is ordained and it is reported that he attained arahantship after a short time. Here again we see how someone with an attitude contrary to the *dhamma* can quickly be convinced and attain the highest goal of the teaching.

Raṭṭhapāla

In MN 82 we find the story of Raṭṭhapāla. He was a wealthy householder and had a great wish to ordain under the Buddha. He was very determined. But his parents only agreed to his wish after he had endeavoured for a long time. He lay down on the floor and said that he would die there if he was not allowed to go into homelessness. His friends were then able to mediate successfully so that he finally received his parents' permission and was able to accept ordination. The Buddha names him in AN 1. 24 as being at the head of those who went into homelessness with confidence.

"Not long after the venerable Raṭṭhapāla had received the higher ordination, dwelling alone and secluded, diligent, ardent, resolute, he attained the supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of good households leave home and go forth into homelessness, realising it through seeing the dhamma and direct knowledge.

*He understood: 'Birth is finished,
the holy life has been lived,
what should be done has been done.
There is no more state of existence.'*

And the venerable Raṭṭhapāla had become one of the arahants." MN 82

Afterwards, Raṭṭhapāla asked the Buddha if he could visit his parents.

"Then the Blessed One penetrated the mind of the venerable Raṭṭhapāla with his mind. When he knew that Raṭṭhapāla, the son of a good family, was unable to abandon the practice and return to the low life, he said to him: 'Now is the time, Raṭṭhapāla, to do what you think.'"

His parents did not recognise him. His father insulted him and refused to give him any alms. He was given rice porridge by a slave girl, which she actually wanted to throw away. The slave

recognised him and told Raṭṭhapāla's mother about it. Now the father wanted to persuade Raṭṭhapāla to have the meal with him. But for the day, Raṭṭhapāla refused as he had finished his meal. He silently agreed to an invitation for the next day. The father tried by all means to persuade his son to return to the householder's life. He had heaped gold coins and gold bars into a large pile and covered with mats. Then he said to Raṭṭhapāla's former wives: *"Come, daughters-in-law, dress yourselves up in jewellery, just as Raṭṭhapāla loved you best, just as he found you lovable."*

He had prepared exquisite dishes.

When Raṭṭhapāla came to eat the next day, his father said to him:

"Dear Raṭṭhapāla, this is your maternal wealth; your paternal wealth is one time as much and the wealth of your ancestors is even more. Dear Raṭṭhapāla, you can enjoy wealth and accumulate merit. So come, dear one, give up the practice and return to the low life, enjoy wealth and accumulate merit." Raṭṭhapāla replied very clearly: *"Householder, if you would follow my words, then have this heap of gold coins and gold bars loaded onto carts and driven away and dumped into the river in the middle of the Ganges. Why is this so? Because, householder, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair will come to you because of this."*

We see here very clearly Raṭṭhapāla's attitude, based on insight into the nature of things. His former wives asked him what the nymphs were like for whose sake he led the holy life. He addressed his former wives as sisters. They fainted. Finally, he asked his father to give him the food and not to cause him any more trouble. After he had eaten, he stood up and uttered the following verses:

*"Behold a puppet here pranked out,
a body built up out of sores,
sick, an object for concern,
where no stability abides.*

*Behold a figure here pranked out
with jewellery and earrings too,
a skeleton wrapped up in skin,
made attractive by its clothes.*

*Its feet adorned with henna dye
and powder smeared upon its face:
It may beguile a fool, but not
a seeker of the further shore.*

*Its hair is dressed in eightfold plaits
and unguent smeared upon its eyes:
It may beguile a fool, but not
a seeker of the further shore.*

*A filthy body well adorned
like a new-painted unguent pot:
It may beguile a fool, but not
a seeker of the further shore.*

*The deer-hunter set out the snare
but the deer did not spring the trap;
we ate the bait and now depart
leaving the hunters to lament."*

We see here that Raṭṭhapāla was in no way gentle, empathetic and polite with his parents and his former wives. He was very direct with the insight he gained. He knew that craving, which characterised their lives, only leads to *dukkha*. *Dhamma* had become so normal to him that he was no longer interested in the householder life. He expressed this clearly.

Raṭṭhapāla then went to the king's garden and sat down at the foot of a tree to spend the day. The king then went to his pleasure garden to meet him. He wanted to talk to Raṭṭhapāla about the

purpose of his ordination. He thought that one goes into homelessness for four reasons, namely loss due to ageing, illness, loss of wealth and loss of loved ones.

None of these reasons applied to Raṭṭhapāla. He explained the *dhamma* to the king as he had heard it from the Buddha and how it moved him to go into homelessness.

He spoke of four summaries of the *dhamma* taught by the Exalted One who knows and sees, who is realised and fully awakened.

1. The world⁶⁷ is unstable and is being carried away.
2. The world is without protection and without a protector.
3. The world is not one's own, everything has to be overcome and one has to leave.
4. The world is incomplete, unsatisfactory and a slave to desire.

Raṭṭhapāla gave examples of these four points: The world is unstable for example due to ageing, deterioration of the body. It is without protection because one has to endure all experiences, such as illness, oneself. The world is not our own, because we cannot take any of our possessions with us into the next life. Beings are enslaved by possessions and pleasure, because they chase after pleasure and possessions.

The king was convinced by Raṭṭhapāla on all points.

Here, too, Raṭṭhapāla concluded the conversation with the king with verses:

*"I see men wealthy in the world,
who yet from ignorance give not their gathered wealth.
Greedily they hoard away their riches
longing still for further sensual pleasures.*

*A king who has conquered the earth by force
and rules over the land the ocean bounds
is yet unsated with the sea's near shore
and hungers for its further shore as well.
..."*

We also see here that Raṭṭhapāla did not speak cautiously and politely, but very directly, both to his parents and to the king. He himself was very quickly convinced of the *dhamma* and left his possessions and family behind. Many people in the West today, where the real *dhamma* is still unknown, would feel offended by such statements and behaviour and would walk away and stop listening.

Puṇṇa

In MN 145 the Buddha gives the bhikkhu Puṇṇa a teaching on the 6 sense bases and their objects and that the noble disciple does not delight in them and can only overcome suffering in this way. The bhikkhu Puṇṇa wants to go to the land of Sunāparanta to practise. The Buddha warns him about the people there, as they are wild and rude. But Puṇṇa is determined to practise there. He has a very equanimous attitude towards all the difficulties mentioned by the Buddha. He can then consolidate five hundred women and five hundred men in the *dhamma* in the land of Sunāparanta and he himself attains arahantship.

67 *Loko*: The Buddha also refers to the world (*loko*) as the five groups of existence (*khandha*).

Bakkula

MN 124 reports on the bhikkhu Bakkula. He was already ordained for 80 years. He said that in those 80 years he did not remember that thoughts of sense objects, thoughts of illwill, or thoughts of cruelty ever arose in him.

He does not remember ever having accepted a robe from householders in this 80 years, nor has he ever sewn or dyed a robe.

He also cannot remember ever having accepted an invitation to a meal or having had the desire to be invited.

He also does not remember ever having sat in a house during this time, looking at the appearance of a woman.

He emphasises all these things as special to him. But he also points out that in these 80 years he has not taught the *dhamma* to any woman, not to an ordained woman, not to a non-ordained woman, not to an aspirant, that he has not entered the bhikkhunīs' lodgings, that he has not given ordination to any woman.

During the time since his ordination, he did not train any bhikkhu and thus did not live near him. He has neither received nor given massage, he has not experienced any suffering during this time, he has not taken any medicine, he has never spent the rainy season in a village, he has never had a cushioned seat or a bed.

He attained arahantship on the eighth day after his ordination.

Shortly before his death, he called all the bhikkhus out of their rooms because he knew that he would enter the final *Nibbāna*. We see here that he must have lived in a monastery with other monks, but did not teach anyone during his lifetime.

Here we see a bhikkhu who ordained at an advanced age of 80 and lived a very ascetic life with good health. But he was not willing to teach, neither women nor young bhikkhus did he teach. In addition to asceticism, he also emphasised this behaviour of not having taught as particularly praiseworthy. The practice of meditation or mindfulness is not mentioned in this sutta. The emphasis is on the description of asceticism and withdrawal from any interaction with others. Possibly due to his advanced age at ordination, he was no longer able to engage in activities other than secluded asceticism.

In AN 1. 24 the Buddha singled him out as someone with few illnesses. Since Bakkula had already been ordained for eighty years when this dialogue took place, this event must have taken place at least 35 years after the Buddha's death. It therefore remains to be seen whether the things that he himself emphasised as so praiseworthy were also seen in this way by the Buddha. Nor can this conversation have been part of the review of the teachings at the first council three months after the Buddha's *Parinibbāna*.

The beautiful and the ugly bhikkhu

In the Bhikkhusaṃyutta of the Saṃyuttanikāya we find several short descriptions of the Buddha about arahants.

Thus he said in SN 21. 5 of the bhikkhu Sujāta:

"The Blessed One saw the venerable Sujāta approaching from afar. When he saw him, he addressed the bhikkhus:

'From both sides, bhikkhus, this noble son shines: he is of beautiful form, worthy of beholding, full of grace, endowed with supreme beauty of appearance; and that supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of good house rightly leave home and go forth into homelessness, by seeing things with direct knowledge he himself realised it and dwelt in it'. Thus spoke the Exalted One. And when the Blessed One had thus spoken, the Blessed One said this:

'This bhikkhu truly shines with a sincere mind; the unbound, the unchained, the unattached. He carries the last body after defeating Māra and his army.'

In SN 21. 6 we see that external beauty does not necessarily characterise an arahant. The Buddha said there:

"The Exalted One saw the venerable Bhaddiya the dwarf approaching from afar. When he saw him, he addressed the bhikkhus:

'Bhikkhus, do you see that bhikkhu approaching? Ugly is he, unattractive to look at, deformed, despised by the bhikkhus?'

'Yes, venerable sir.'

'This bhikkhu, bhikkhus, possesses great supernormal power, he is mighty. It is not easy to find a state of attainment that has not already been attained by this bhikkhu. And that supreme goal of the holy life for which sons of good family leave home in the right way and go into homelessness, by seeing things with direct knowledge he realised it himself and dwelt in it.'

Thus spoke the Blessed One. Having said this, the Fortunate One, the teacher, further said this:

*'The swan, the heron and the peacock,
the elephant and the spotted deer
all fear the lion,
regardless of the size of their bodies.*

*It is the same among human beings
the one who is rich in wisdom,
he is big there,
Not the stupid one with a strong body."*

Tālapuṭa

We also find in the Saṃyuttanikāya the story of a theatre director named Tālapuṭa from Rājagaha, who, after the Buddha gave him profound teachings about his work, ordained under the Buddha. He attained arahantship soon after his ordination, although he was engaged in professionally unwholesome activities before his ordination.

He was famous and had a large audience. He thought that after death he would be born among the laughing devas because one of his actors had told him so. He thought so because he made his audience laugh and delighted them with truth and lies (*saccālikena*). Finally the Buddha explained to him:

"When an actor on the stage or at an assembly presents things with lust, aversion and delusion to beings who are not yet free from lust, aversion, and delusion, who are bound with the bondage of lust, aversion, and delusion, then they are led even more to lust, aversion, and delusion. Intoxicated and careless himself, he makes others intoxicated and careless: Thus, when the body breaks off, after death, he enters the agonising laughter realm (niraya)⁶⁸. But if one has the view:

'The actor who, on the stage or in an assembly, by truth and lies, makes people laugh and delights them, who on the breaking up of the body, after death, comes to the community of the laughing devas', then that is his wrong view. But with wrong view, director, he faces two paths, I say: the agonising realm (niraya) or the womb of an animal."

Tālapuṭa burst into tears when he heard this. He went for refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha and asked for ordination.

Soon after his ordination, after living alone, secluded and practising diligently and energetically, he attained arahantship. So it is according SN 42. 2. In the Theragāthā verses 1096 ff he describes his inner difficulties, but also his great longing to attain arahantship. He longs to be able to see impermanence, to have overcome lust, aversion and delusion in order to be able to live happily and without fear in the forest. It becomes clear how fatigue, hunger, thirst, wind, heat, insects and

⁶⁸ This is part of the Avici realm, where the residents are tormented by constant demonstrations that make them laugh. Imagine having to laugh for 24 hours.

creepy-crawlies plague him. It becomes clear in the Theragāthā verses that he does not identify with all thoughts, for he speaks with his mind, clearly recognising its tendencies without identifying with them.

*"Family, friends, loved ones, relatives, enjoyment,
pleasure, sensual pleasures in the world,
everything was given up,
I have achieved this;
and now you, consciousness, are not satisfied with me."* Th 1112

*"Four distortions⁶⁹ lived and consolidated,
so, consciousness, you led me around when I was a young man.
Are the fetters and bonds not yet cut off?
Then join the compassionate one, the great sage."* Th 1146

As we have seen in the preceding descriptions, there are many stories of people who attained arahantship very quickly during the Buddha's lifetime. However, there are also reports of people who needed a long time of systematic practice of the teachings to attain the goal. Examples of these are people who were very close to the Buddha, such as his son Rāhula or his long-time companion and helper Ānanda. Ānanda knew all the teachings given by the Buddha. But he only attained arahantship after the Buddha's *Parinibbāna*.

Non-ordained Arahants

In the Aṅguttaranikāya, Book 6⁷⁰, there is a series of suttā in which householders (*gahapati*) and non-ordained devotees (*upāsaka*) are said to have gone to the end (*niṭṭhaṅgato*), to have seen the deathless (*amataddaso*), to have realised the deathless and to dwell in it (*amatam sacchikatvā iriyatī*). This description includes the attainment of arahantship. However, this is not the standard description as we find it in many places in the Pāḷi Canon. These devotees are also endowed with six things:

1. With unshakeable confidence in the Awakened One,
2. unshakeable confidence in the teaching (*dhamma*),
3. unshakeable confidence in the saṅgha
4. with noble ethics,
5. with noble knowledge and
6. with noble liberation.

Noble liberation also includes the attainment of arahantship.

One of these householders was Tapussa. He was the first to go for refuge in the Buddha as a non-ordained person. Since there was no *saṅgha* yet, he went for twofold refuge in the Buddha and the *dhamma*. We find no other references in the Pāḷi Canon about his attainments. Other names that are mentioned are:

The householder Bhallika, who was Tapussa's brother, went for the twofold refuge with him.⁷¹

The householder Sudatta [called Anāthapiṇḍika], however, the Buddha said in SN 2. 20 that Anāthapiṇḍika visited him as a deva after his death.

The householder Citta from Macchikāsaṅḍiko was especially emphasised by the Buddha in AN 1.

69 The four distortions are: Seeing the impermanent as permanent, seeing the unsatisfactory as happy, seeing the selfless as self, seeing the non-beautiful as beautiful.

70 Cf. AN 6. 119 Tapussasuttam, AN 6. 120 - 139 Bhallikādisuttāni

71 Cf. AN 1. 24 and Vinaya-Piṭaka, Vol. 4, translated by I. B. Horner, Bristol, 2014, PTS, p. 5f

24 as a non-ordained disciple. In AN 1. 131 - 134 he emphasises him as an exemplary non-ordained follower. In the Saṃyuttanikāya there is an entire chapter about him. There, in SN 41. 10, his death is reported, but it is not mentioned whether there was a rebirth.

The Āḷavaka Hatthaka was also singled out by the Buddha as exemplary. It is said of him that he visited the Buddha as a deva after his death.

The Sakyan Mahānāma was a cousin of the Buddha. We do not find any other indication in the Pāḷi Canon that he attained arahantship, but neither do we find where he was reborn.

The householder Ugga from Vesāli was reborn as a deva son in a mentally produced world.⁷²

The householder Uggata is identical with the householder Ugga from Elephant Village. In AN 8. 22 he mentions eight qualities that are peculiar to him. The seventh quality he describes there is that he has no conceit because devas visit him. However, this statement does not mean that conceit has been overcome altogether. The eighth quality says that he will not return to this world after death.

There is no mention of Sūra Ambaṭṭho, what else he achieved or whether rebirth took place.

Jīvako Komārabhacca was a doctor. We do not find any other indication of an achievement or a new birth.

We do not find any other information about the householder Nakulapitā and the householder Tavakaṇṇiko neither about an attainment nor about a rebirth.

The householders Pūraṇa and Isidatto are said in SN 55. 6 to have entered the stream. There is no further information about their attainment or rebirth.

There are no further references to the householders Sandhāna, Vicaya, Vijayamāhika, Meṇḍaka in the Pāḷi Canon regarding attainment and rebirth.

There are no further references in the Pāḷi Canon to the devotees (*upāsaka*) Vāsetṭha, Ariṭṭha, Sāragga with regard to attainment and rebirth.

So it is not clear whether all the people mentioned in this sutta attained arahantship in the human life in which they met the Buddha. There are certainly many people, ordained and non-ordained, who lived at the Buddha's time and attained arahantship but they are not mentioned in the Pāḷi Canon. The statement in AN 6. 119 to 139 that these people have 'attained the end' (*niṭṭhaṅgata*) is a synonym for the attainment of arahantship.⁷³

Bāhiya

Bāhiya Dārucīriya was not ordained. He asked the Buddha for instruction when he was on alms round. The Buddha refused the request twice because the time during the almsround was not suitable. After Bāhiya asked the Buddha a third time, the Buddha gave a short teaching:

"In the seen will be merely what is seen; in the heard will be merely what is heard; in the sensed will be merely what is sensed; in the cognized will be merely what is cognized. In this way you should train yourself, Bahiya."

"When, Bahiya, for you in the seen is merely what is seen ... in the cognized is merely what is co-

⁷² Cf. AN 5. 44

⁷³ Cf. *niṭṭhaṅgata* - one who has attained perfection (= pabbajitānaṃ arahattaṃ patta), The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary, edited by T. W. Rhys Davids, Bristol 2015, p. 322

gnized, then, Bahiya, you will not be 'with that.' When, Bahiya, you are not 'with that,' then, Bahiya, you will not be 'in that.' When, Bahiya, you are not 'in that,' then, Bahiya, you will be neither here nor beyond nor in between the two. Just this is the end of suffering." Ud I. 10

Through this brief teaching, Bāhiya's influxes decayed and he became an arahant. The Buddha went on. Later, together with other bhikkhus, he saw the corpse of Bāhiya. He had been killed by a cow. The Buddha confirmed to the bhikkhus that Bāhiya had attained arahantship. If such a short but clear teaching leads someone so successfully to the goal, *vipassanā* must have been practised in previous lives, otherwise the selflessness of phenomena cannot be understood so spontaneously. Here we have an example of how an unordained person attained arahantship and died without ordaining. In AN 1. 24 the Buddha emphasises him as the one with quick direct knowledge (*hippābhiññānam*).

Summary of the presentation of individuals who were arahants

We find many descriptions of the attainment of arahantship in the Pāḷi Canon, in which the disciple attained arahantship very quickly. We hardly find any background stories in the suttā. The commentaries often report on earlier lives of the people mentioned in the Pāḷi Canon. The commentary stories have been mostly ignored here because the topic here is more about the doctrine and its understanding. But the commentaries contribute to a better understanding of the *dhamma* as transmitted in the suttā and Vinaya texts. The commentaries are based on oral tradition, as is the entire Pāḷi Canon. The suttā and Vinaya were also not written down until the 1st century BCE. The commentaries often provide helpful hints for understanding the suttā.

Although we find little information about the individual arahants, it can be said that they are very different characters. They bring with them very different conditions, both in terms of their social status and their religion.

To summarise, it can be said that the rapid attainment of arahantship is related to practice in previous lives. Only in one life the necessary perfections cannot be developed to such an extent that the highest goal can be attained. Also, being born at the time of a living Buddha and listening to the *dhamma* from him is related to the accumulation of great merit. In many background stories it becomes clear that great merit was achieved in previous lives through the material support of practitioners.

A strong, important force is also the determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*) for the goal of the Buddha's teachings, done in previous lives.

Turning to the wholesome is also related to merits in previous lives. We see in many life stories that the Buddha's teaching was not known to people in their younger years and that they lived unwholesome lives. Even the Buddha knew nothing of the teaching until the age of 35 and practised extremely different ways of life until he rediscovered the teaching himself. The lack of access to the right *dhamma* comes from the effects of unwholesome actions from the past, which we have all accumulated in our stream of consciousness. These periods of life can come to an end very quickly, as we can learn from many stories about the attainment of arahantship.

7. Descriptions of Arahants from their own Perspective in the Theragāthā and Therīgāthā

There are two collections of verses in the Pāli Canon by arahants who lived in the Buddha's time. One collection is by bhikkhunīs (Therīgāthā), the other by bhikkhus (Theragāthā).

In these collections, various aspects of life are described by the awakened people from their subjective point of view.

We see in both the bhikkhus and the bhikkhunīs that they came from very different backgrounds and had very different approaches to the *dhamma*.

The bhikkhunīs very often talk about the suffering of worldly life (*dukkha*). A frequent topic is the impure or disgusting body. They are often visited by Māra, an embodiment of evil⁷⁴. Inner dialogues with Māra are described. The topic is always that Māra wants to seduce the bhikkhunī to enjoy sense objects and give up the life as a nun. The bhikkhunīs recognise Māra and continue with their practice.

Further topics are the attainments they report. Many report having attained the threefold knowledge (knowledge of recollection of previous lives, knowledge of seeing the appearance and departure of beings with the heavenly eye and knowledge of the disintegration of the influxes), some also have the sixfold knowledge. They often talk about having completely overcome lust. They often describe abandoning as overcoming darkness. In terms of practice, it is reported that they have understood the five aggregates/groups of existence, the six bases and the four elements, and that they have developed the five faculties and the seven awakening factors. The four noble truths, which they understood and which helped them to understand personal suffering (*dukkha*), are also often discussed.

Bhikkhus are often reported to have overcome mental defilements and fetters. They repeatedly report special happiness that they find in practice and seclusion. They report more about the struggle with Māra in the past than being visited by him in the present. Many report the threefold knowledge they have attained, which makes them content. Some have also attained the sixfold knowledge and report supernormal powers. *Jhāna* practice is often emphasised and described as blissful. The mindfulness practice that defines their lives is also frequently described. The secluded life in the forest or in caves, alone and secluded from other bhikkhus, is also repeatedly praised. Another topic is repeatedly women, who are still seen as a seduction or danger. Some intensively practise non-beauty or impurity meditation (*asubha* or *asuci*). Some express the fear of the decline of the teachings already at that time, due to observations of undisciplined bhikkhus. The topic of suffering (*dukkha*) is obviously mentioned much less than among the bhikkhunīs. Many talk about overcoming conceit and are very happy that they have achieved this. A few emphasise strong asceticism as an important practice. Some describe an inner struggle with lust and the seduction of sensual objects. These descriptions are probably statements about the time before they attained arahantship.

Some also describe the general attitude towards life: they are not attached to life, but they do not long for death either. They live mindfully.

*"What is happiness for others is suffering for the noble;
What is painful for others is happiness for the noble sage.
See this teaching, which is so difficult to understand!
Those without insight are confused here!" Sn 762*

74 See also Bhikkhunīsamyutta, Saṃyuttanikāya, 5th Saṃyutta

8. The Arahant and Dealing with *Dukkha*

In SN 4. 23 the bhikkhu Godhika is described. He was able to achieve temporary release of the mind (*sāmayikaṃ cetovimuttiṃ*). He tried six times to attain this, endeavouring diligently, but the mind could not keep this liberation. He then contemplated taking a knife and killing himself. Māra, the Evil One, appeared and tried to stop him by worshipping him and saying that he had not yet attained perfection. But the bhikkhu Godhika had already killed himself. The Buddha said to Māra:

*”Such indeed is how the steadfast act:
they are not attached to life.
Having eradicated thirst with the root,
Godhika has attained final Nibbāna.”*

The Buddha then goes with the bhikkhus to the place where Godhika has taken his life. The Buddha can see Māra looking for Godhika and where the consciousness (*viññāṇaṃ*) has become established. The Buddha says, however, that Godhika’s consciousness has no longer established itself, the bhikkhu Godhika has entered *Parinibbāna*.

It is not clear here whether the bhikkhu Godhika had already attained arahantship before the suicide or only during this act, because the temporary liberation of the mind as a state of concentration can also be practised by the arahant. In any case, it is shown here that either an arahant kills himself or someone can attain arahantship while killing himself. An action that is actually associated with strong aversion, with self-hatred, thus does not seem to be an obstacle for achieving arahantship. However, in addition to this act of selfkilling, a profound understanding of the four noble truths must have taken place in the stream of consciousness of Godhika.

Superficially, it appears that he killed himself out of despair that he could no longer attain the temporary liberation of the mind that can be achieved through *jhāna*. The commentary says that he attained arahantship after severing his carotid arteries and examining the process of dying.

The bhikkhu Godhika was included in the collection of verses by arahants, Theragāthā. We only find the following statement from him there:

*”The pouring rain sounds good;
my little covered hut is pleasant,
there is no draught,
my consciousness is well concentrated:
Then rain cloud rain as much as you like!”* Th 51

Another description of a bhikkhu who was an arahant and committed suicide can be found in SN 22. 87. The bhikkhu Vakkali was very ill and could not obtain relief from his illness. The Buddha visited him. The Buddha could apparently see that he felt remorse, for he asked him why he had remorse and regret. He also asked him if there were any ethical transgressions due to which these states of mind would occur. Vakkali replied that there were no ethical transgressions, but that he regretted not having sought out the Buddha. The Buddha asked why he wanted to see this rotten body. One who sees the *dhamma* also sees the Buddha, one who sees the Buddha sees the *dhamma*.

The Buddha asked him about the characteristics of the five aggregates, whether they are permanent, whether that which is impermanent is blissful or painful, whether that which is painful and subject to change is a self or selfless. Vakkali answered these questions: Body, feelings, perceptions, formations and consciousness are impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless.

The Buddha explained:

”When this is understood and seen in this way, the experienced, noble disciple turns away from the body, he turns away from feeling, he turns away from perception, he turns away from formations,

he turns away from consciousness. Turned away, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion he is liberated.

*When one is liberated, one has the knowledge:
'Liberated.'*

*One understands: 'Birth is finished,
the holy life has been lived,
what should be done has been done.
There is no more state of existence.'"*

Vakkali then asked his friends to take him up a mountain because he didn't want to die in the house.

The Exalted One spent the rest of the day and the night on Vulture Peak Mountain. Two devas visited him there. One deva said to the Buddha: 'The bhikkhu Vakkali is intend on liberation.' The other deva said: 'Surely he will find liberation as one well liberated.'

The next morning, the Buddha turned to the bhikkhus and told them about the devas. He instructed them to go to Vakkali and tell him what the devas had said. And they were to tell him from the Buddha that he should not be afraid of death, that he would have a good death.

The bhikkhus went to Vakkali and told him what the Buddha had told them to do. Vakkali asked the bhikkhus to pay respect to the Buddha on his behalf and said:

*"The body is perishable - I have no doubt about it, Lord - What is perishable is painful - I have no doubt about it! - What is impermanent, painful, changeable, I have no wish, desire or affection for - I have no doubt about it! -
Impermanent are the feeling - the perception - the formations - the consciousness - I do not doubt it, Lord! -
What is impermanent is painful - I have no doubt about that! -
What is impermanent, painful, changeable, I have no wish, desire or affection for it - I am not in the dark about it!"*

The bhikkhus then left Vakkali.

Shortly after the bhikkhus had left, Vakkali took a knife and killed himself.

The Buddha went with many bhikkhus to the mountain where Vakkali had killed himself. They saw clouds of smoke in all directions in the sky. The Buddha explained to the bhikkhus that it was Māra. He searched for the consciousness of Vakkali.

The Buddha said to the bhikkhus:

"Vakkali's consciousness (viññāṇaṃ) is no longer established. Bhikkhu Vakkali has gone into parinibbāna."

Here, too, it is not clear from the sutta text when the bhikkhu Vakkali attained arahantship. According to his statements, which he had transmitted to the Buddha, he expressed himself as having attained arahantship. However, the devas predicted his liberation. The commentary also says in the case of this bhikkhu that he attained arahantship during the dying process because he continued to practise. In any case, here too we find a bhikkhu who was able to attain arahantship even though he had just mortally wounded himself because he was suffering from a very painful illness and could not bear it. So it can be seen that an arahant or someone who is just before it does not have to endure everything and is happy. In both cases there is a state of mind of despair that leads to suicide. In the case of the bhikkhu Vakkali, the Buddha gave him teachings on the three characteristics of the aggregates and Vakkali confirmed that he practised thus, had no doubts and had overcome craving for these groups. Although very pleasant, blissful or equanimous states of mind arise from *vipassanā* practice, these do not seem to have covered the painful state of illness. Since unwholesome consciousness can no longer arise in an arahant, it can only be compassion that causes self-killing.

We find another case of suicide of an arahant or aspirant in SN 35. 87. The same case is also described in MN 144. Here a bhikkhu named Channa was very ill. The two bhikkhus Sāriputta and Mahācunda visited him. Channa told them that his illness was not getting better and that he wanted to use the knife because he had no more desire to live. Sāriputta tried to stop him. Sāriputta asked him whether he saw the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind and the corresponding consciousness and their objects as self. Channa answered in the negative.

Sāriputta further asked what he had realised while contemplating selflessness in these things. Channa could see the cessation of the examined things. Then the bhikkhu Mahācunda said to Channa:

"Therefore, friend Channa, one must constantly pay attention to this teaching of the Blessed One: There is indecision in one who is dependant, in one who is independant, there is no indecision; when there is no indecision, there is tranquility; when there is tranquility, there is no inclination; if there is no inclination, there is no coming and going; if there is no coming and going, there is no dying and appearing; if there is no dying and appearing, there is not this world and no hereafter and no in-between. This is the end of dukkha."

Then Sāriputta and Mahācunda left the bhikkhu Channa. He then killed himself with a knife. Sāriputta then went to the Buddha and asked him where the bhikkhu Channa had gone. The Buddha explained to him that Channa had told him that he was blameless, which is a paraphrase for having attained arahantship. Sāriputta replied that in a Vajjian village called Pubbajira, Channa had associated with families who were his friends, families who were his acquaintances, families who were blamable. The Buddha replied:

"There are families who were friends of bhikkhu Channa, families who were his acquaintances, families who were blamable; but I do not say that he was blameworthy to that extent. Sāriputta, if one abandons this body and clings to a new body, then I say one is blameworthy. There was nothing of this in the bhikkhu Channa; the bhikkhu Channa took the knife blamelessly."

Here the Buddha's statement makes it clear that it is not primarily a matter of excellent behaviour according to Vinaya, which an arahant must practise, but of the realization that the aggregates are impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless, because only in this way can attachment to them be released. Close contact with families was and is not permitted for bhikkhus according to the Vinaya rules.

In SN 35. 63 the Buddha answered the question of the bhikkhu Migajālo as to what it would mean if he said: 'Living alone'. Summarising, the Buddha replied:

"Unbound by the fetter of pleasure, Migajālo, a bhikkhu lives alone, it is said. Whether he dwells in the company of bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, followers and devotees, kings or royal ministers, with other pilgrims or their disciples: When he dwells thus, he dwells alone, it is said. And why? His partner, thirst (taṇhā), is overcome by him. Therefore, they say, he dwells alone."

The Buddha also said that the bhikkhu Channa had already attained arahantship when he killed himself, for he said, *"The bhikkhu Channa took the knife blamelessly."* Here the Buddha clearly emphasised what is important for the attainment of arahantship or for life as an arahant. According to this, the essential thing is to completely let go of the desire for existence and attachment to existence.

Another story about the experience of *dukkha* in an arahant is found in the case of the bhikkhuni Uppalavaṇṇā. The account of a rape she suffered has already been presented.

So it is also clear here that in an arahant, previously committed unwholesome kammās can give effect, that this does not cease as long as there is existence and therefore suffering can be experienced.

The bhikkhu Aṅgulimāla, who himself had killed many people in the life in which he attained arahantship, also experienced suffering. Once we see here that someone who has committed grave unwholesome actions in the same life, such as murder, can attain arahantship through insight into the nature of phenomena. But we also see that attaining arahantship does not prevent one from experiencing the consequences of unwholesome actions as *dukkha*. In MN 86 it is reported that he attained arahantship. Then it is said:

"Then, when it was morning, the venerable Aṅgulimāla dressed, took his bowl and outer robe, and went in to Sāvathī for alms. On that occasion someone threw a clod of earth and hit the venerable Aṅgulimāla on the body, another threw a club and hit him on the body, and yet another threw a potsherd and hit him on the body. Then the venerable Aṅgulimāla went to the Blessed One with blood flowing from his wounded head, his alms bowl broken and his outer robe torn. The Exalted One saw him coming in the distance and said to him: 'Endure it, brahmin! Endure it, brahmin! You are experiencing here and now the result of deeds for which you would have been tormented for many years, many centuries, many millennia in the lower realms of existence.'"

He himself said in the same sutta:

*"Let my enemies hear discourse on the dhamma,
let them be devoted to the Buddha's teaching,
let my enemies wait on those good people
who lead others to accept the dhamma.*

*Let my enemies give ear from time to time
and hear the dhamma of those who preach forbearance,
of those who speak as well in praise of kindness,
and let them follow up that dhamma with kind deeds.*

*For surely then they would not wish to harm me,
nor would they think of harming other beings,
so those who would protect all, frail or strong,
let them attain the all-surpassing peace."*

In MN 50 the venerable Mahā-Moggallāna is reported as walking up and down in the open air. On that occasion Māra the Evil One slipped into the venerable Mahā-Moggallāna's belly and entered his bowels. Then the venerable Mahā-Moggallāna pondered: 'Why does my belly feel so heavy? One would think it was full of beans.' So he left his walking path and went to his resting place, where he sat down on a prepared seat.

When he had sat down, he paid careful attention to himself, and he saw that Māra the Evil One had slipped into his belly and entered his bowels. When Māra knew that the venerable Mahā-Moggallāna had recognised him, he left his body through his mouth and stood beside the door. The venerable Mahā-Moggallāna told Māra that he himself had once been a Māra named Dūsī at the time of the Buddha Kakusandha. This Māra Dūsī tried to turn the villagers against the bhikkhus.

The following is also reported:

"Then, when it was morning, the Blessed One Kakusandha, accomplished and fully awakened, dressed, and taking his bowl and outer robe, he went into the village for alms with the venerable Vidhura as his attendant.

Then the Māra Dūsī took possession of a certain boy, and picking up a stone, he struck the venerable Vidhura on the head with it and cut his head. With blood running from his cut head, the venerable Vidhura followed close behind the Blessed One Kakusandha, accomplished and fully awakened. Then the Blessed One Kakusandha, accomplished and fully awakened, turned around and looked at him with the elephant look: 'This Māra Dūsī knows no bounds.' And with that look, Evil

One, the Māra Dūsī fell from that place and reappeared in the Great Hell. Now, Evil One, there are three names for the Great Hell: the hell of the six bases for contact, the hell of the impalement with stakes, and the hell to be felt for oneself. Then, Evil One, the wardens of hell came up to me and said: 'Good sir, when stake meets stake in your heart, then you will know: >I have been roasting in hell for a thousand years.<' For many a year, Evil One, for many a century, for many a millennium, I roasted in that Great Hell. For ten millennia I roasted in the auxiliary of that Great Hell, experiencing the feeling called that of emergence from ripening. My body had the same form as a human body, Evil One, but my head had the form of a fish's head."

We see here how the experiences that the venerable Mahā-Moggallāna had are kammically caused. Just as he caused suffering to others in previous lives, even after a long time of living in hell, he must still experience unpleasantness as a monk due to Māra's actions, because having an invader like Māra in the intestines is certainly not a pleasant experience. Mahā-Moggallāna was praised by the Buddha for his outstanding supernormal powers (*iddhi*).⁷⁵

It is also reported in the commentaries that the venerable Mahā-Moggallāna met a violent death.⁷⁶ Robbers were able to catch him and beat him, shattering his bones. He managed to drag himself to the Buddha and died there. Such a death is certainly anything but pleasant and is associated with a great deal of physical *dukkha*. In the commentaries this cruel experience is also linked to earlier actions. The venerable Mahā-Moggallāna is said to have beaten his parents-in-law to death in a previous life. These incidents are not reported in the suttā.

The Buddha himself also experienced physical suffering.

In AN 10. 67 it is reported how the Buddha, accompanied by a large number of bhikkhus, was travelling through the Kosalaland. He arrived outside the Kosalatown of Nālakapāna. There he stayed in the Palāsa forest near Nālakapāna. During this time he sat with the bhikkhus once on a full moon day. After teaching, exhorting, encouraging and motivating the bhikkhus for a large part of the night, he approached the venerable Sāriputta and asked him if he could continue teaching the bhikkhus, as his back was aching and he wanted to stretch out.

SN 47. 9 also reports an illness of the Buddha: *"Then, after the Blessed One had begun the rainy season, he was overcome by a serious illness accompanied by strong [painful] feelings leading to death. But the Blessed One endured it mindfully, clearly understanding and without being tormented."*

We see from various examples in the Pāḷi Canon that the arahant is not free from physical pain and that even a Buddha with supernatural powers cannot avoid experiencing it. The effects of kamma (actions) can manifest as long as the five aggregates/groups exist, for they are the field where kamma shows effect.

The self-awakened Buddha Gotama also died of poisoning by mushrooms; the poison could affect the body and lead to death. The poisoning was also associated with unpleasant physical feelings. He was unable to ward off this illness.⁷⁷

The arahant may still experience physical suffering due to the kammic effect of past unwholesome actions, but he can no longer react with aversion, resistance or evasion to sense objects, as all influxes have been disintegrated.

"He understands the arising, the passing away, the enjoyment, the danger, the escape from these feelings as they are. ... When he feels a pleasant feeling, he does not feel it as a fettered person."

⁷⁵ Cf. AN 1. 24

⁷⁶ Cf. G. P. Malalasekera: Dictionary of Pāḷi Proper Names, Vol II, p. 546

⁷⁷ Cf. DN 16

When he feels an unpleasant feeling, he does not feel it as a fettered person. When he feels a neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling, he does not feel it as a fettered person. It is said, bhikkhus: 'The learned noble disciple is not fettered by birth, aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, bodily pain, mental discomfort, despair. He is not fettered by suffering, I say.' SN 36. 6

9. How an Arahant Lived in India at Buddha Gotama's Time

From a description in MN 122, which depicts the behaviour of someone who cannot attain liberation of the mind, one can draw conclusions about how an arahant lived.

It is said there:

*"Ananda, a bhikkhu does not shine by delighting in company,
by taking delight in company,
by devoting himself to delight in company;
by loving to socialise,
by enjoying to socialise,
by rejoicing in socialising.*

*Indeed, Ananda, it is not possible
that a bhikkhu who delights in company,
takes delight in company,
and devotes himself to delight in company,
who loves to socialise,
enjoys in socialising,
and rejoices in socialising,
will ever obtain at will, without trouble or difficulty,
the happiness of renunciation, the happiness of seclusion, the happiness of peace,
the happiness of perfect awakening (sambodhi).*

*But it can be expected
that when a bhikkhu lives alone,
withdrawn from society,
he will obtain at will, without trouble or difficulty,
the happiness of renunciation, the happiness of seclusion,
the happiness of peace, the happiness of perfect awakening."*

*"Indeed, Ananda, it is not possible that a bhikkhu who delights in company, takes delight in company, and devotes himself to delight in company, who loves to socialise, enjoys in socialising, and rejoices in socialising, will ever enter upon and abide in either the deliverance of mind that is temporary and pleasing or in [the deliverance of mind] that is consistent and unshakeable.
But it can be expected that when a bhikkhu lives alone, withdrawn from society, he will enter upon and abide in the deliverance of mind that is temporary and pleasing or in [the deliverance of mind] that is consistent and unshakeable."*

The temporary liberation of mind includes the fourth finematerial *jhāna*, the immaterial attainments and the *Brahmavihāra* as *jhānā*. The enduring, unshakeable liberations are the fruits of the four paths, especially the fruit of arahantship. We see here that an arahant who has fully understood these conditions would not be able to lead a householder's life, for this is characterised by company and pleasure.

In SN 52. 5 the venerable Sāriputta and the venerable Anuruddha discuss what a bhikkhu who is no longer in the practice (*asekha*), that is, who has attained the highest goal, should practise. Anuruddha answered Sāriputta:

"The bhikkhu who is no longer in training should practise the four foundations of mindfulness and dwell in them. What are the four foundations of mindfulness? ..."

Also in SN 52. 9 the venerable Anuruddha emphasises to the venerable Sāriputta the importance of the practice of the four foundations of mindfulness for an arahant:

"Radiant are your faculties, friend Anuruddho, your appearance is bright and pure. In what abode does the venerable Anuruddho now often dwell?"

"In the four foundations of mindfulness in which mindfulness is well established, friend: thus I now dwell frequently. In which four? ...

He who, friend, is a bhikkhu, an arahant, one in whom the influxes have been disintegrated, an accomplished one who has done what should be done, who has laid aside the burden, has attained his goal, has completely disintegrated the fetters that bind to existence, is liberated by perfect insight, has his consciousness well established in the four foundations of mindfulness and dwells in them frequently."

Sāriputta replies:

"It is indeed a gain for us, friend, we have indeed been fortunate to have heard this powerful word from the mouth of the venerable Anuruddho."

The venerable Anuruddha also said of himself that he had developed and frequently practised the four foundations of mindfulness and thereby attained great direct knowledge (*mahābhiññata*) (SN 52. 6) or thereby frequently dwelt in the influx-free liberation of mind. (SN 52. 24)

10. After the Death of an Arahant

A description of what is after the death of an arahant and thus of the *Nibbāna* was given shortly by the Buddha:

*"The body is broken,
perception is finished,
feelings have all been cooled,
the formations have been calmed,
and consciousness has ceased."* Ud 9. 79

"Nibbāna is the greatest happiness." MN 75

For a worldlyling or disciple who has realised the first to third path, death is called *maraṇa* (death), for an arahant it is called *parinibbāna* (final *Nibbāna*).

The Buddha rejects all considerations of what happens after his death or the death of an arahant as speculative. This question is irrelevant for liberation.

"Vaccha, 'speculative view' is something that the Tathagata has put away. For the Tathagata, Vaccha, has seen this: 'Such is [material] form, such its origin, such its disappearance; such is feeling, such its origin, such its disappearance; such is perception, such its origin, such its disappearance; such are formations, such their origin, such their disappearance; such is consciousness, such its origin, such its disappearance.' Therefore, I say, with the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishing of all conceivings, all excogitations, all I making, mine-making, and the underlying tendency to conceit, the Tathagata is liberated through not clinging." MN 72

The Buddha did not answer what happens after the death of an arahant.

"When a bhikkhu's mind is liberated thus, Master Gotama, where does he reappear [after death]?"

'The term 'reappears' does not apply, Vaccha.'

'Then he does not reappear, Master Gotama?'

'The term 'does not reappear' does not apply, Vaccha.'

'Then he both reappears and does not reappear, Master Gotama?'

'The term 'both reappears and does not reappear' does not apply, Vaccha.'

'Then he neither reappears nor does not reappear, Master Gotama?'

'The term 'neither reappears nor does not reappear' does not apply, Vaccha.'

'When Master Gotama is asked these four questions, he replies: 'The term 'reappears' does not apply, Vaccha; the term 'does not reappear' does not apply, Vaccha; the term 'both reappears and does not reappear' does not apply, Vaccha; the term 'neither reappears nor does not reappear' does not apply, Vaccha. 'Here I have fallen into bewilderment, Master Gotama, here I have fallen into confusion, and the measure of confidence I had gained through previous conversation with Master Gotama has now disappeared.'

'It is enough to cause you bewilderment, Vaccha, enough to cause you confusion. For this dhamma, Vaccha, is profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. It is hard for you to understand it when you hold another view, accept another teaching, approve of another teaching, pursue a different training, and follow a different teacher. So I shall question you about this in return, Vaccha. Answer as you choose.

What do you think, Vaccha? Suppose a fire were burning in front of you. Would you know: 'This fire is burning in front of me'?"

'I would, Master Gotama.'

'If someone were to ask you, Vaccha: 'What does this fire burning in front of you burn in dependence on?' - being asked thus, what would you answer?'

'Being asked thus, Master Gotama, I would answer: 'This fire burning in front of me burns in dependence on grass and sticks.'

,If that fire in front of you were to be extinguished, would you know: 'This fire in front of me has been extinguished'?'

'I would, Master Gotama.'

'If someone were to ask you, Vaccha: 'When that fire in front of you was extinguished, to which direction did it go: to the east, the west, the north or the south?' - being asked thus, what would you answer?'

'That does not apply, Master Gotama. The fire burned in dependence on its fuel of grass and sticks. When that is used up, if it does not get any more fuel, being without fuel, it is reckoned as extinguished.'

'So too, Vaccha, the Tathagata has abandoned that material form by which one describing the Tathagata might describe him; he has cut it off at the root, made it like a palm stump, done away with it so that it is no longer subject to future arising.

The Tathagata is liberated from reckoning in terms of material form, Vaccha, he is profound, immeasurable, unfathomable like the ocean. The term 'reappears' does not apply, the term 'does not reappear' does not apply, the term 'both reappears and does not reappear' does not apply, the term 'neither reappears nor does not reappear' does not apply. The Tathagata has abandoned that feeling by which one describing the Tathagata might describe him ... has abandoned those formations by which one describing the Tathagata might describe him ... has abandoned that consciousness by which one describing the Tathagata might describe him; he has cut it off at the root, made it like a palm stump, done away with it so that it is no longer subject to future arising. The Tathagata is liberated from reckoning in terms of consciousness, Vaccha; he is profound, immeasurable, unfathomable like the ocean. ...'" MN 72

In DN 9 the Buddha said on this subject:

"'Why, Lord, does the Exalted One leave the questions unexplained?'

'This, Poṭṭhapāda, does not lead to goodness, does not lead to the teaching, does not lead to the holy life, does not lead to disenchantment, does not lead to dispassion, does not lead to cessation, does not lead to peace, does not lead to direct knowledge, does not lead to awakening, does not lead to Nibbāna. Therefore, I leave these questions unexplained.'

'But what does the Exalted One declare?'

'This is the unsatisfactory, this, Poṭṭhapāda, is explained by me.

This is the cause of the unsatisfactory ...

This is the cessation of the unsatisfactory ...

This is the way leading to the cessation of the unsatisfactory, this, Poṭṭhapāda, is explained by me.'

'But why did the Exalted One declare this?'

'This, Poṭṭhapāda leads to goodness, leads to the teaching, to the holy life, leads to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to Nibbāna. Therefore I declare these things.'

'So it is, Blessed One, so it is Well Gone One. Whatever the Blessed One thinks the time has come for, let him do.'

Then the Blessed One got up from his seat and left."

SN 48. 53 states:

'Furthermore, bhikkhus, the bhikkhu who is beyond training understands the six faculties, the eye faculty, the ear faculty, the nose faculty, the tongue faculty, the body faculty, the mind faculty:

'These six faculties will dissolve completely and totally without remainder, and no other six faculties will arise anywhere in any way,' he understands. This too, bhikkhus, is a method on the basis of which a bhikkhu beyond training, who is already at the stage of being beyond training, understands: 'I am beyond training'.'

11. Conclusion

The attainment of arahantship is synonymous with the complete disintegration of the influxes and the understanding of the ultimate truth.

When the influxes have been completely disintegrated, no more mental impurities can appear in the stream of consciousness. Therefore, no new *dukkha* can be created. But the results of previous unwholesome actions can still be experienced as long as the five groups of existence/aggregates exist.

The way to achieve arahantship is a gradual path of the intensive practice of ethics, concentration and wisdom. There must be strong confidence in this path.

The arahant lives a secluded life. Since conceit has also been disintegrated, he can no longer strive to excel. This tendency of the arahant is also supported by the fact that he no longer has any desire for becoming. This means not only to become a being in a future life, but also to be or become a special being in this life.

His state of mind is characterised by equanimity towards the things he has to experience, by the utmost attentiveness and unwavering trust in the teaching.

The arahant knows the ultimate goal of the Buddha's teaching through his own experience and is therefore invaluable in upholding the teaching.

The question of what happens after the life in which arahantship is attained was answered by the Buddha only with *Nibbāna*. He rejected any further elaboration on this because it would give rise to wrong views and thus new mental defilements. Arahantship itself in the sense of overcoming all mental defilements is therefore the goal of the Pāḷi Canon and thus of the early Buddhist teachings. Since the arahant has completely overcome craving (*lobha*), rebirth and existence cannot occur, because craving (*lobha*) is one of the causes that lead to rebirth. Craving is one of the two causes for appearance in any realm of existence. The second cause is an action (*kamma*). A wholesome action leads to birth in the higher, pleasant realms of existence, an unwholesome action leads to birth in the lower, painful realms of existence. Without craving, existence is not possible.

In another way, dependant origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) states that the first link is ignorance, which is the condition for formations. Formations are the essential mark of existence. With the attainment of arahantship, the influx of ignorance is completely cut off. Therefore, the causal chain of dependant origination can no longer become manifest and existence can no longer arise from this perspective either. When the cause ceases to exist, there is no longer a result.

The goal of so-called arahantship also existed in other religious groups. However, this goal was associated with an eternal rebirth in the realms of the gods. The wish for knowledge about the future of an arahant is based on subtle craving, just like a nihilistic view or annihilation view, which the Buddha also rejected.

Nowadays, there are diffuse ideas about the Buddha's teachings in the Western world because they come up against a completely different culture and have not been anchored in this cultural framework by full-time practitioners. It is primarily a movement of lay people whose motivation is often a worldly one. They either want to save the entire world or improve their own personal lives, without seeing existence itself as suffering, as the Buddha saw it and explained it.

So it is very important to look at what we find in the Pāḷi Canon about the Buddha's teachings in order to avoid a motivation for practice based on mental defilements. The Buddha has explained very clearly and in detail which states of mind and ways of thinking belong to mental defilements and to what extent the mind gives rise to the latter.

Mental defilements always lead to suffering (*dukkha*). The Buddha could see these things, namely which causes bring about which results, in the past and as well in the future and present. This is why the understanding of which mental factors count as mental defilements differs from the view of ordinary people. The Buddha's teaching is only about overcoming all *dukkha*. In this text on the arahant in the Pāḷi Canon, an attempt has been made to illustrate the corresponding practice.

Confidence in the Buddha and his followers, who realised this teaching, is a very important prerequisite.

In states of mind that are characterised by a false view (of a person) and arrogance, however, the mental factor confidence does not occur at all and therefore cannot be developed. One's own motivation for practising the Buddha's teachings must therefore be checked again and again on the basis of knowledge from the scriptures. However, as mental defilements are always associated with delusion, it is often difficult to see one's own mental defilements with regard to the motivation to practise. This is why the Buddha repeatedly emphasised the importance of a good friend on the path. But to follow a good friend, confidence is also necessary. Most Western people take part in retreats, i.e. meditation retreats, in order to perfect themselves as a person or to relax. This false motivation makes the path to insight more difficult and new suffering will be the result. Based on his knowledge of these conditions, the Buddha repeatedly taught unconditional, generous giving without expecting anything in return as the first step as the practice for householders. The power of this beneficial action should not be underestimated, but it is very difficult for Western people because society is characterised by desire. For ordained persons, the Buddha taught a strict code of behaviour, which includes renouncing all material luxuries and possessions, as well as seclusion.

It should also be pointed out that only the arahant knows the actual goal of the Buddha's teachings and the path to it. For this reason, his teachings on the ultimate freedom from suffering are much more valuable than those of an unawakened being striving for Buddhahood. The arahant has recognised any striving for becoming of a being as unwholesome and therefore no longer strives for it and is thus freed from suffering.

As long as the teaching is upheld in the form we find it in the Pāḷi Canon, there will also be arahants and they in turn can show other beings the right path. However, if the Pāḷi Canon is no longer studied thoroughly and, above all, if it is not practised accordingly, there will be no more arahants and the right path will be lost in this world cycle. *Dhamma* cannot be taught simply by putting on a robe and shaving one's head, when the goal is unknown. The Buddha's teachings are also for ordained people not about an alternative culture of life.

The motivation to practise *dhamma* can only be understanding of existence in order to avoid an unwholesome motivation. Any idea of wanting to become a certain being is unwholesome and a mental defilement and causes suffering. When all the circumstances of life have been understood and the mind has been freed from all mental impurities, then arahantship has been achieved and then a good teacher has emerged, provided there are students who are willing to follow the path.

The Buddhist path of insight is not a consolation for suffering or the creation of some new being. It is an intensive purification process of one's own thoughts and actions.

Selflessness (*anatta*) is an important insight in *vipassanā* meditation to overcome misconceptions. Altruism is an important initial step on the path of realization and as a preparation for insight into the selfless nature of existence. When selflessness has been understood, altruism follows naturally.

Certain steps towards letting go of identification with a person must already have been taken before beginning any practice. Otherwise, the confusion associated with the view of a self is so strong that it prevents any process of insight.

The clear ideal of the Pāḷi Canon and thus of the original Buddha's teachings was degraded by Mahayana Buddhism and the Bodhisatta ideal and was lost in many places. The ideal of the original Buddhism is no longer seen and pursued as a goal in modern Buddhism in the West, which is mostly introduced by laypeople.

The arahant as a teacher knows the goal, he at least knows his individual path and is therefore extremely valuable for the preservation of the original Buddha's teaching, while the bodhisatta does not know the goal.

As we can see from many examples from the Pāḷi Canon, the attainment of arahantship can go hand in hand with the attainment of supernatural powers (*iddhi*). However, supernatural powers are not a condition or always a result of attaining arahantship. The essential thing is to understand the four noble truths, namely that all conditionally arisen things are suffering (*dukkha*), that the cause of experiencing *dukkha* is craving, that the cessation of *dukkha* is *Nibbāna* and that the path to it is the noble eightfold path.

With the arahant, there is neither a false view of a person who is to be completed, nor arrogance, which entails comparing oneself with others. Likewise, there is no aversion. The arahant has no aversion towards life, but has understood it and therefore goes beyond it.

The arahant has cut off all mental defilements. This cutting off happens only by cutting off the roots through *vipassanā*, by seeing *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*. It does not happen through an intellectual process or by creating the perfect human being.

Arahantship can be compared to cutting down a tree with poisonous fruit; if the roots are removed, the fruit can no longer grow and ripen. One doesn't take each fruit in ones hand and ask oneself: 'Is this poisonous or not?' Instead, one knows that they are poisonous because they cause discomfort.

To protect oneself and others from the consequences of poisoning, one cuts down the tree and removes the roots so that the tree can no longer grow back. Removing the roots is only possible by recognising their causes and their transience, by recognising what is unsatisfactory in them and seeing their selflessness. This comprehensive process of realization is not an intellectual one, but a process of direct seeing, which happens out of deep concentration and can cut off all unwholesome roots in four very short moments. In order for this event to occur, a long preparation is required, which takes place over many lifetimes.

It is not a question of finding the easiest possible path, but of seeing what the Buddha taught as fundamental for realising the goal of his teaching. It may then be, on the path of systematic practice, that someone understands very quickly and attains the goal or attains the paths before attaining arahantship. A wait-and-see attitude and a path that is as comfortable as possible with as little effort as possible is an expression of laziness and will not lead to the goal. Laziness is one of the hindrances and thus blocks progress in practice right from the start.

That is why it is always important to practise *samatha* and *vipassanā* systematically. By deepening *samatha*, *vipassanā* also becomes more profound and the understanding of the things that make up life grows.

An arahant should also systematically practise *samatha* and *vipassanā*, as well as *sati* (mindfulness) again and again in order to live happily.

Appendix

"What are the ten powers of one whose influxes are exhausted?"⁷⁸ PSM II.9

Here, a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted has clearly seen correctly with right wisdom all formations as impermanent. Now when a bhikkhu has seen with right wisdom all formations as they are as impermanent, then it is a power of a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted. With regard to that power, a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted realises the exhaustion of the influxes: 'The influxes are exhausted in me.' (1)

And furthermore, a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted has clearly seen correctly, with right wisdom, all sense objects as [burning] charcoal, just as they are. Now when a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted has seen, with right wisdom, all sense objects as [burning] charcoal as they are, then it is a power of a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted. With regard to that power, a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted recognises the exhaustion of the influxes: 'The influxes are exhausted in me.' (2)

And furthermore, the consciousness of a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted is inclined to seclusion, tends to seclusion, is orientated towards seclusion, is established in seclusion, delights in renunciation, has ceased with all things leading to influxes. Now when, the consciousness of a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted, is inclined to seclusion, tends to seclusion, is orientated to seclusion, is established in seclusion, delights in renunciation, has ceased with all things leading to influxes, it is a power of a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted. With regard to that power, a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted realises the exhaustion of the influxes: 'The influxes are exhausted in me.' (3)

And furthermore, in a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted, the four foundations of mindfulness are developed, well developed. Now when the four foundations of mindfulness are developed, well developed in a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted, it is a power of a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted. With regard to that power, a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted knows the exhaustion of the influxes: 'The influxes are exhausted in me.' (4)

And furthermore, in a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted, the four right endeavours are developed, well developed. ... (5)

the four (supernormal) paths of power (iddhipādā) are developed, well developed ... (6)

the five faculties are developed, well developed ... (7)

the five powers are developed, well developed ... (8)

the seven awakening factors are developed, well developed ... (9)

the noble eightfold path is developed, well developed. (10)

Now, when a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted has developed the noble eightfold path, well developed, it is a power of a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted. With regard to that power, a bhikkhu whose influxes are exhausted realises the exhaustion of the influxes: 'The influxes are exhausted in me.' These are ten powers of one whose influxes are exhausted."

78 Cf. Paṭisambhidāmagga - The Path of Analytical Discernment, II. 9. chapter on Forces - Balakathā

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Abbreviations

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|-------|------------------|
| AN | Aṅguttara Nikāya |
| DN | Dīgha Nikāya |
| KN | Khuddaka Nikāya |
| MN | Majjhima Nikāya |
| SN | Saṃyutta Nikāya |
| Dhp | Dhammapada |
| Sn | Suttanipāta |
| Th | Theragāthā |
| Therī | Therīgāthā |

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