



Saññāvedayitanirodha – The Cessation of Perception and Feeling

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1. Introduction

The cessation of perception and feeling (*saññāvedayitanirodha*), also called *nirodha samāpatti*, is the highest attainment we find in Theravāda Buddhist literature. It comes ninth in the *suttā* after the enumeration of the four fine-material *jhānā* and that of the non-material attainments. It is the culmination of the entire Buddhist path of liberation.

In MN 31, the Buddha visits three bhikkhus. They are the venerables Anuruddha, Nandiya, and Kimbila. The Buddha asks whether all three of them abide diligent, ardent, and resolute, and whether they have attained superhuman states. Upon inquiry, Anuruddha enumerates all four *jhānā* and all four non-material attainments, followed by the cessation of perception and feeling. The Buddha confirms, "There is no other pleasant abiding higher or more sublime than this."

This attainment is frequently mentioned in the Pāli canon. According to the enumeration, namely in succession to the eight *samatha* attainments, one might assume it to be a *samatha* attainment. However, with the previously enumerated *samatha* attainments alone, one cannot attain this stage. While for the other *samatha* attainments the objects are clear, it is not clear from the scriptures what the object of this attainment is.

In modern Buddhist literature, this attainment is not mentioned. Nor is it presented as a goal to strive for. In the *suttā*, the attainment of this stage of mental development is presented as a goal to strive for and as the goal of the teaching. Thus, in MN 30, the Buddha explains to the brahmin householder Piṅgalakoccha the path to the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling, concluding by saying:

"I say that this person, brahmin, is like a man needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, who came to a great tree standing possessed of heartwood, and cutting off its heartwood, took it away knowing it was heartwood; and so whatever it was he had to make with heartwood, his purpose will have been served.

So this holy life, brahmin, 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." MN 30 The Shorter Discourse on the Simile of the Heartwood – Cūlasāropamasuttaṃ.

It is thus called unshakable liberation of mind (*cetovimutti*) and thus cannot be annulled by anything. It is also a higher attainment than the fruit attainments of the four paths, also of that of the non-returner and arahat.

Therefore, it should be known and valued by everyone who is engaged in the Buddha's teachings and wishes to achieve the goal. Supportive conditions should also be created so that people can still achieve this goal nowadays. It should be clear to us that only if there are people who can achieve this highest attainment the Buddha's teaching can be maintained in this world. Because if no one knows the highest goal anymore, the way to it cannot be taught.

Thus, the great relevance of this attainment should be realized by both householders as supporters and practitioners as those who strive for it, especially with regard to establishing the Buddha's teaching in a country where its profundity is unknown.

In MN 137 The Exposition of the Sixfold Base - Saḷāyatanavibhaṅgasuttaṃ the Buddha says:

"Guided by the elephant tamer, bhikkhus, the elephant to be tamed goes in one direction - east, west, north, or south. Guided by the horse tamer, bhikkhus, the horse to be tamed goes in one direction - east, west, north, or south. Guided by the ox tamer, bhikkhus, the ox to be tamed goes in one direction - east, west, north, or south.

Bhikkhus, guided by the Tathagata, accomplished and fully enlightened, the person to be tamed goes in eight directions.

Possessed of material form, he sees forms: this is the first direction. Not perceiving forms internally, he sees forms externally: this is the second direction. He is resolved only upon the beautiful: this is the third direction. With the complete surmounting of perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of sensory impact, with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, aware

that 'space is infinite,' he enters upon and abides in the base of infinite space: this is the fourth direction. By completely surmounting the base of infinite space, aware that 'consciousness is infinite,' he enters upon and abides in the base of infinite consciousness: this is the fifth direction. By completely surmounting the base of infinite consciousness, aware that 'there is nothing,' he enters upon and abides in the base of nothingness: this is the sixth direction. By completely surmounting the base of nothingness, he enters upon and abides in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception: this is the seventh direction. By completely surmounting the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, he enters upon and abides in the cessation of perception and feeling: this is the eighth direction. Bhikkhus, guided by the Tathagata, accomplished and fully enlightened, the person to be tamed goes in these eight directions."

It is noteworthy that the Buddha here speaks in general of humans (*purisa*, literally man) and not only of the ordained bhikkhu in the enumeration of these sublime states of mind up to the very highest. These are eight liberations (*vimokkha*), containing first temporary liberations and as the eighth the final, irreversible liberation.

For the ordinary person, even one who has studied the Buddha's teachings and has not gone through the insight stages of *vipassanā* meditation, the aspiration to this noble state will not be comprehensible. The normal person enjoys his or her consciousness and always wants to have new experiences, for him or her the Buddha's teaching is also interesting as a concept of thinking, from which he can adopt for himself some behavior and ways of thinking recommended by the Buddha, in order to have it more pleasant in worldly life, i.e. to experience less *dukkha*. His life is centered on craving. The desire for this supreme attainment in which activities of consciousness come to a complete stop, which was emphasized by the Buddha as the culmination of his teaching, arises only with increasing understanding of existence in *vipassanā* meditation and with the final overcoming of craving for sense objects, as well as with the overcoming of aversion.

2. Word Meaning

The Pāli word *saññāvedayitanirodha* is composed of the words:

- *saññā* meaning perception,
- *vedayita* meaning feeling or what is felt,
- *nirodha* meaning cessation.

Perception is a mental factor (*cetasika*) that accompanies all types of consciousness (*citta*) and that has an important function in the cognitive process. For this reason, the Buddha singled out this mental factor in the enumeration of the five groups of existence, because perception is one of the five groups of existence.

The characteristic of perception is perceiving an object; if there is no object, there can be no perception. Perception perceives the qualities of an object, while consciousness merely knows that an object is there and recognizes it as such.

The function of perception consists in the fact that it sets markers which make the later recognition possible or in the recognition of an already earlier perceived object.

Its manifestation consists in the fact that it holds on to the mark as it has perceived the object.

Perception recognizes the sense objects according to their colour, form and shape and arranges them in their context of experience.

Through its memory function, the mind is able to recognize things and beings it has previously perceived. This creates an individual perception of the world; it is merely the mixture of present perception and memory of earlier perceptions. Through this memory of earlier perception, mixed with unwise attention, concepts and thus delusion arise. Perception is thus learned and habitual. To come to pure perception of objects, purification of the mind is necessary, such as occurs in *samatha* meditation or by right mindfulness (*sammā sati*).

Perception perceives the qualities of an object. However, this perception is not objective, but influenced by the subjective previous perceptions.

Perception does not distinguish between wholesome and unwholesome, which is the function of wisdom (*paññā*), but perception sets markers for what is wholesome and what is unwholesome.

Thus, perception connects present experiences with past experiences and can thereby classify objects. Technically, the process is such that the consciousness that appears at the 5 sense doors and picks up an object is followed by mind consciousness that originates in the heart. Thereupon, the consciousness combines the present experience with previous experiences stored in the brain as matter produced by previously arisen consciousness. In the conventional sense, this is an important function for being able to live, for recognizing things and being able to classify them, for example, for knowing whether food is edible, for averting danger, and so on. Perception has an important function for learning.

However, one also speaks of proliferated perception or proliferating thoughts based on proliferating perceptions. In this sense, perception is disturbing pure mindfulness, which is helpful in understanding an object directly. Thus, perception can link experience to past emotional reactions, distorting the actual perception of the object currently being experienced.

In Aṅguttara Nikāya 4.49, the Buddha describes four distortions or perversions that can take place on three levels, the level of perception, the level of consciousness, and the level of view.

Distortion of perception (*saññā vipallāsa*) is the lowest level. It is the false perception of objects by repeated deluded perception.

- The first distortion is seeing impermanent things as permanent.
- The second sees unsatisfactory things as satisfying.
- The third considers things which are selfless to be self.
- The fourth sees non-beautiful things as beautiful.

These four distorted perceptions must be purified on the path of insight through *vipassanā* meditation.

Vedayita corresponds to the mental factor feeling (*vedanā*). Feeling is a mental factor (*cetasika*) that feels the object. All types of consciousness are accompanied by feeling. This mental factor, like the mental factor perception, is absent from the attainment of *saññāvedayitanirodha* - the cessation of perception and feeling.

Feeling is to be distinguished from sensation, which is physical in nature, such as hardness, pressure, and so on. It is the object of body consciousness, which is accompanied by one of the two bodily feelings (pleasant - *sukha*, unpleasant - *dukkha*).

Feeling is also to be distinguished from emotion, which is a complex mental experience based on memories, and is not a single mental factor. Feeling comes second in the usual enumeration of the five groups of existence in the teachings, following the physical group. Feeling is specially treated by the Buddha because it has a special significance for the beings in the cycle of existence. Feeling gives rise to craving. This is how it is presented in the sequence of dependant origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). It is a crucial condition for craving, for the second noble truth, the cause of suffering, because this craving in turn causes suffering. Repeated craving leads to attachment. Attachment causes increased suffering. Often, attachment to past feelings also occurs, leading to daydreaming or searching for the corresponding objects.

In the teachings, the Buddha distinguishes five types of feelings:

- physically pleasant feeling,
- physically unpleasant feeling,
- mentally pleasant feeling,
- mentally unpleasant feeling,
- mentally neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling.

The Pāḷi word *nirodha* means cessation. It is used in the Pāḷicanon both in reference to the ultimate end, which is called *Nibbāna*, and for the end of individual factors.

Thus, the word *saññāvedayitanirodha* means that at this attainment the mental factors of perception (*saññā*) and feeling (*vedanā*) cease (*nirodha*), i.e., do not occur anymore. By this term, which we find in the *suttā* for this attainment, it is not expressed that consciousness (*citta*), which has the function of cognizing an object, ceases altogether.

The cessation of perception and feeling is also called attainment of cessation (*nirodha samāpatti*).

3. Prerequisites for this Attainment

In the Suttā, this highest attainment is always mentioned last in the list of nine attainments. Thus, the eight attainments before it, are prerequisites for this highest goal. They are the four *jhāna* that one can practice with various material objects, such as Anāpānasati, Kasina or Brahmavihārā. Already in the course of these four mental absorptions, the mind passes through an increasing refinement of perception. The mind becomes calmer, and as the Buddha describes it, in the fourth absorption the purity of mindfulness is attained. In order to practice these four attainments, a well-developed continuous mindfulness is necessary from the beginning, and the mind must be free from mental defilements. In order to practice the attainments that are pleasant in several aspects and beneficial for spiritual development, a great amount of wholesome kamma must be accumulated in the stream of consciousness, ethics (*sīla*) and giving (*dāna*) must have been well developed.

After these four absorptions with material objects, another period of spiritual development begins. The mind completely transcends matter. This process can only take place if it is combined with insight. It must be clear, at least from a conventional point of view, that matter, including one's own body, always leads to disadvantages and to suffering. The pursuit of accumulation of matter and the enjoyment of sense objects to the point of hedonism must have already been abandoned in the practitioner's life, otherwise these fine attainments that refine the mind cannot be achieved. In the attainment before the cessation of perception and feeling, perception is already very reduced, as the name of this attainment indicates, and thus all associative thinking is eliminated. It is a state of mind that the Buddha has repeatedly emphasized as desirable, but which is not comprehensible to the normal thinking person or the person who deals with *dhmma* purely intellectually or academically.

All eight attainments must be well established in the stream of consciousness for the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling to be called up. This requires a prolonged practice, requiring months or years of continuous practice in retreat. Only when each attainment can be practiced for about two hours without interruption, when one can, wherever, whenever, and for however long one wishes, produce the sign, when one can, wherever, whenever, and for however long one wishes, enter into the individual absorption, when one fixes the time for dwelling in the absorption and then dwells in it accordingly, when one can emerge from the absorption without delay thereafter, when one can contemplate and differentiate the *jhāna* factors immediately after emerging, the cessation of perception and feeling is attainable.

With the enumeration of the eight *samatha* attainments in the suttā, it becomes clear that the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling is not attainable with pure *vipassanā* meditation, also called *Satipatthāna-Vipassanā*, even for a being who has thus attained arahatship with pure *vipassanā* meditation.

In the suttā, in the context of the exposition of the cessation of perception and feeling, *vipassanā* meditation is mentioned in SN 41.6 in a conversation with the householder Citta and the Bhikkhu Kāmabhū. It is clarified that in addition to *samatha* attainments, *vipassanā* meditation is necessary. Citta asks the bhikkhu at the end of a talk about the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling, "*Venerable, what things need to be prepared many times for the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling?*"

Venerable Kāmabhū replies, "*Really, householder, you ask last what you should have asked first, but I will answer: for the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, two things must be prepared many times: Concentration (samatha) and insight (vipassanā).*"

In MN 111 One by One - Anupadasuttaṃ, the Buddha praises Venerable Sāriputta for his wisdom. He enumerates all four *jhānā* and all four non-material attainments and describes exactly how Sāriputta practices them. He practices one *samatha* attainment after another and after each with the factors involved *vipassanā*. It is described as follows:

"And the states in the first jhāna - the initial application, the sustained application, the joy, the happiness, and the unification of mind; the contact, feeling, perception, volition, and conscious-

ness; the wish, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention - these states were defined by him one by one as they occurred; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared. He understood thus: 'So indeed, these states, not having been, come into being; having been, they vanish.' Regarding those states, he abided unattracted, unrepelled, independent, detached, free, dissociated, with a mind rid of barriers. He understood: 'There is an escape beyond,' and with the cultivation of that [attainment], he confirmed that there is."

Following this description of the practice in pairs of *samatha* and *vipassanā*, it is said:
"Again, *bhikkhus*, by completely surmounting the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, *Sāriputta* entered upon and abided in the cessation of perception and feeling. And his influxes were destroyed by his seeing with wisdom."

In *Patisambhidamagga* 1. 34, regarding the wisdom developed and mastered by attaining the cessation of perception and feeling, it is said:

"With two powers (*bala*): two powers, namely, the power of concentration (*samathabala*) and the power of insight (*vipassanābala*)."

The *samatha* power is also represented here as eight attainments.

The *vipassanā*-power is described as follows:

"What is insight power (*vipassanābalaṃ*)?"

The contemplation of impermanence is insight power.

The contemplation of unsatisfactoriness is insight power.

The contemplation of selflessness is insight power.

The contemplation of disenchantment is insight power.

The contemplation of dispassion is insight power.

The contemplation of cessation is insight power.

The contemplation of letting go is insight power."

These considerations have to be practiced with the preceding *jhānā* as objects. They can be observed in terms of the 5 groups of existence.

It is then further stated in the *Patisambhidamagga*:

"Insightfulness: In what sense is it insightfulness?"

When contemplating impermanence, it [insight power] does not waver by perception of permanence. That is insight power.

When contemplating unsatisfactoriness, it does not waver through perception of happiness. That is insight power.

When contemplating selflessness, it does not waver through perception of a self. That is insight power.

When contemplating disenchantment, it does not waver through pleasure. That is insight power.

When contemplating dispassion, it does not waver through pleasure. That is insight power.

When contemplating cessation, it does not waver through arising. That is insight power.

When contemplating letting go, it does not waver by grasping. That is insight power.

It does not waver, move, or tremble due to ignorance, due to defilements or existence groups associated with ignorance. This is insight power. This is insight as power."

If someone can only attain the 4 *jhānā* and the 4 non-material bases, but does not practice *vipassanā*, the highest attainment for that person is the attainment of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. If someone can only attain *vipassanā* meditation up to path attainment and fruit attainment without being able to attain *jhāna* and without being able to attain the non-material bases, the highest attainment for that person is the corresponding fruit attainment that he has attained.

4. Practicing the Exercise

As described in the previous chapter, one must have the ability to practice all eight *samatha* attainments. They must be well established in the stream of consciousness through long-term practice. For the attainment of the non-material realms, *kasina* meditation is particularly suitable.

However, the Buddha describes in SN 54.8 that one can also reach the non-material realms and the cessation of perception and feeling with mindfulness of in- and out-breath. For it is said there:

"Therefore, Bhikkhus, if a Bhikkhu wishes: 'May I with the complete transcendence of perceptions of forms, with the disappearance of perceptions of sensory impingement [of sense objects on sense bases] and without attention to perceptions of diversity, attain the realm of infinite space as 'space is infinite' and enter and dwell therein,' then he should direct his attention well to this concentration of mindfulness on the in- and out-breath."

Accordingly, to the other non-material realms, it is said.

On the end of perception and feeling it states:

"Therefore, bhikkhus, if a bhikkhu wishes: 'May I, by completely transcending the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception and attain the cessation of perception and feeling and enter and dwell therein,' then he should direct his attention well to this concentration of mindfulness on in- and out-breath."

Very suitable for preparatory exercises are the elements as objects of *kasina* meditation. The body's own matter is thereby well balanced with appropriate practice, which is always a very good basis for longer abiding in all attainments and also for *vipassanā* meditation.

If one can practice well and fluently all eight attainments and *vipassanā*, and has attained non-return or arahatship, before entering the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, one must make a clear resolution (*adhiṭṭhāna*):

'After the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, may the cessation of perception and feeling occur for ... minutes, hours, or days.'

Setting time as *adhiṭṭhāna* practice must also have been well practiced so that the resolution is clear and firm.

In SN 41. 6 Dutiyakāmaḥbhū Sutta, the householder Citta asks Bhikkhu Kāmaḥbhū:

"And how, venerable sir, can one attain the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling?"

"This is not, householder, as if a bhikkhu who attains the cessation of perception and feeling would think: 'I will attain the cessation of perception and feeling,' or 'I am attaining the cessation of perception and feeling,' or 'I have attained the cessation of perception and feeling,' but he has previously developed his consciousness (citta) to the point where it leads to that state."

The commentary says that before entering the attainment, the practitioner has determined the time for how long the abidance should last.¹ This is expressed by the statement, "... he has previously developed his consciousness (*citta*) to such a degree that it leads to this state." This, then, refers to a well developed *adhiṭṭhāna* practice described earlier.

The same question the householder Visākha asked the Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā in MN 44. She answered in the same way. In MN 44 we find a conversation between the Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā and the householder Visākha about various dhamma topics and also about the cessation of perception and feeling. Visākha was a rich merchant from Rājagaha. At his first meeting with the Buddha, he attained stream-entry and later non-return. Dhammadinnā was his wife. She had the desire to enter the Bhikkhunī order. After her world renunciation, she attained arahatship. She had been declared by the Buddha as an outstanding Dhamma teacher. (AN 1. 24) Visākha is also said

1 See Samyutta Nikaya, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi, Cittasamyutta, p. 1443, note 300.

to have taught and to have had five hundred followers.²

It is remarkable what noble communication is presented here by the ex-spouses. It suggests that both could practice this highest attainment.

The same should be done with the emerging from this practice. In SN 41. 6, the householder Citta also asked:

"But how, venerable sir, does one emerge from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling?"

"This is not, householder, as if a bhikkhu who emerges from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling thinks: 'I'm going to stop it' or 'I'm stopping it' or 'I've stopped it', but rather he has developed his consciousness beforehand to the point that it leads to this state."

Again, the end has been previously determined by the consciousness and the consciousness is so well developed that it then ends this state. It is the *pārami adhiṭṭāna* that has been well developed here.

One can enter this attainment for a few minutes up to seven days. The length that the mind is able to dwell in this attainment depends on how well the consciousness has been developed, how one lives, and how the preceding *jhāna* and *vipassanā* meditation are stabilized in the stream of consciousness.

One must practice staying longer and longer in this state by increasing the time one has to set beforehand. In the beginning, only minutes are possible.

If one practices this exercise regularly, and the *jhāna* and *vipassanā* meditation are well established in the stream of consciousness, one can enter this attainment directly after the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception without having previously practiced other attainments. After the wish and *adhiṭṭāna*, the consciousness enters the attainment of the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception for a few moments and then the cessation of perception and feeling. The depth and subjective experience of this attainment, as with all *jhāna* attainments, depend on how the consciousness has been trained. It may be, if the mind is not so well trained, or if there is restlessness both physically and mentally in one's life, only brief moments in realization are possible. One can then enter again and again to practice the ability for longer abiding.

For longer abiding in this attainment, a secluded life, without external distractions and restlessness, is an absolute prerequisite. Noble silence is also an important prerequisite for this exercise.

In AN 9. 40 it is said:

"So too, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu dwells hemmed in by bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, male and female lay followers, kings and royal ministers, sectarian teachers and the disciples of sectarian teachers, on that occasion it occurs to him: I am presently dwelling hemmed in by bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, male and female lay followers, kings and royal ministers, sectarian teachers and the disciples of sectarian teachers. Let me dwell alone, withdrawn from company.

"He resorts to a secluded lodging: the forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a ravine, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle thicket, an open space, a heap of straw. Gone to the forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty hut, he sits down, folding, his legs crosswise, straightening his body, and establishing mindfulness around the mouth."

Then it is explained that the bhikkhu has overcome the five obstacles and enters all eight *samatha* attainments in sequence until he practices the cessation of perception and feeling thereafter.

2 See G.P. Malalasekera: Dictionary of Pali Proper Names, Vol. 2, New Delhi, 1983, p. 897 f

In AN 10.72 Thorns - Kaṇṭakasuttam

“Perception and feeling are a thorn to the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling. Lust is a thorn, hatred is a thorn, and delusion is a thorn. Dwell thornless, bhikkhus! Dwell without thorns! The arahants are thornless. The arahants are without thorns. The arahants are thornless and without thorns.”

If perception and feeling are a disturbance, life must be so directed that proliferated perception and proliferated thinking are avoided altogether, also association with people who are so inclined must be avoided. Likewise, well-developed equanimity towards feelings must have been developed. It must also have been clearly recognized repeatedly through *vipassanā* meditation that any continuation of the formations leads to ever new suffering and only the cessation of all formations leads to liberation from suffering.

So one practices *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation in pairs from the first *jhāna* to the attainment of the base of nothingness. After *vipassanā* meditation with the factors involved in the base of nothingness, one determines the time for how long one wants to dwell in the cessation of perception and feeling. One should start with 5 minutes, then 10 minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, an hour, and so on.

The mind then enters the attainment of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception for a few mind moments, and directly from there into the cessation of perception and feeling. If the determination is strong enough, the attainment will appear for the determined time except for slight deviations.

In the beginning, it is necessary to go again briefly through all the *jhānā* with *samatha* and *vipassanā* after each emerging and before re-entering. When the consciousness is developed far enough, direct re-entry is possible.

5. Nibbāna as object

The object for attaining the cessation of perception and feeling is not explicitly stated in the Pāḷicanon. One comes to know it through correct practice. The object is the end of all formations, *Nibbāna*. The mind, through the refinement of consciousness by the preceding *samatha* attainments and through the insight process by *vipassanā* meditation practiced in pairs, no longer takes objects. He lets go of all conditionally arisen objects because he has directly seen their impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness. He now takes only *Nibbāna* as an object, which is empty of all formations. Also, through the preceding non-material realms, the mind has already been prepared for this subtle attainment through the refinement of object and consciousness with mental factors.

6. Consciousness, mental factors and body during the cessation of perception and feeling

Consciousness is composed of individual moments of consciousness that continuously arise and pass away and arise in the heart.

At the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, not only do these two mental factors end, but also the lifelong uninterrupted arising and passing away of mind moments. This process stops and a consciousness arises, which exists for the entire previously determined period of time for the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling, without consisting of individual arising and passing moments. Herein lies the absolute subtle tranquility that distinguishes this state from all that can be experienced.

Also in fruition experiences of all four paths and in all eight attainments of *samatha* meditation, mind moments continuously arise and pass away after a very short lifetime. Also in sleep, mind moments continuously arise. These do not occur in a cognitive process, as in all active states of consciousness, including fruition and *jhāna* attainments, but are single but continuously arising and passing away mind moments.

The standing single consciousness in the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling is accompanied by other mental factors, except perception and feeling. This is also a peculiarity, because perception and feeling are universal factors of mind that accompany every other consciousness. The mental factors initial application (*vitakka*) and sustained application (*vicāra*), as well as joy, do not occur. As with all fruition experiences, the consciousness of the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling is accompanied by all three abstinences of the noble eightfold path (right speech, right action, right livelihood). Thus, at this time, the entire noble eightfold path, as in fruition experiences, occurs and finds its perfection here.

The attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling directly follows a few moments of consciousness of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

After emerging from cessation of perception and feeling, a mental process of the corresponding fruition occurs, that of non-return or arahatship. After that, the life continuum occurs.

In Visuddhi Magga it is said about the consciousness of cessation of perception and feeling:

*Yā anupubbanirodhavasena cittacetāsikānaṃ dhammānaṃ appavatti.*³

“What is not continued by the cessation of the succession of things like consciousness and mental factors.”

This passage has often been mistranslated, namely in the sense that consciousness disappears altogether. However, it only means that the succession of consciousness and mental factors, as explained above, does not continue. It is also called in the Suttā ‘the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññāvedayitanirodha*)’ and not the cessation of consciousness (*cittanirodha*).

When one has actually attained the eight *samatha* attainments, one has very good concentration through which a completely different state of mind from that of everyday thinking is attained. Moreover, if one is trained in the recognition and differentiation of physical and mental phenomena through proper *vipassanā* meditation, it is not difficult to analyze also the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling retrospectively after emerging in the manner outlined above.

In SN 41.6, the householder Citta asks the Bhikkhu Kāmabhū what difference there is between a dead person who has fulfilled time and a Bhikkhu who practices the cessation of perception and feeling. The bhikkhu replies:

“Householder, in the case of one who is dead and gone, whose bodily formations have ceased and subsided, whose verbal formations have ceased and subsided, whose mental formations have

3 Visuddhi Magga, PTS, London, 1975, S. 702

ceased and subsided, the vitality is extinguished, the heat has been dissipated, the [sense] faculties are fully broken up.

But in the case of a bhikkhu, householder, who has attained the cessation of perception and feeling, whose bodily formations, verbal formations, and mental formations have ceased and subsided, but the vitality is not extinguished, the physical heat has not been dissipated, the faculties are serene. This is the difference, householder, between one who is dead and gone and a bhikkhu who has attained the cessation of perception and feeling.”

From this statement it is clear that kamma-produced materiality is further produced, because only this contains the material life faculty, which is expressed in the quotation as: 'the vitality is not extinguished'. Also the [sense-]faculties are not broken off, but purified, so also here matter, which is kamma-produced, is produced. Likewise, heat has not been dissipated, that is, body heat is maintained. Body heat is one of the 42 body parts that the Buddha mentions, for example, in MN 140. It is produced by temperature-produced matter, food-produced matter, consciousness-produced matter, and kamma-produced matter.

Consciousness-produced matter is not produced during the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, since the arising and passing away of moments of consciousness has come to stop.

Food-produced matter is produced as long as food is burned.

Kamma-produced matter is produced as long as the life span produced by kamma in the previous life continues, that is, as long as death has not occurred.

In summary, this means that all types of matter, except that produced by consciousness, continue to be produced. In retrospect, after leaving the attainment, by analyzing materiality, one can observe these different kinds of matter that occurred during the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling.

Cessation of bodily formations only means that the in-breath and out-breath stops. This occurs already since the fourth *jhāna*, as mental activities are reduced then. MN 44 states:

”The inbreath and outbreath, friend Visākha, are the formations of the body. ... inbreath and outbreath is bodily, these things are closely connected with the body; therefore, inbreath and outbreath are the formations of the body.”

7. Effects

In MN 59 The Many Kinds of Feeling - Bahavedanīyasuttaṃ, the Buddha refers to the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling as happiness. He explains that there are living beings who see happiness in sense objects. He says that happiness even in the first *jhāna*, which is secluded from sense pleasure, is higher and more sublime than sense pleasure. He then enumerates all the *jhānā* and non-material attainments, and each time refers to them as happiness, which is higher than that of the preceding attainment.

This happiness is independent of the happy feeling (*somanassa* or *sukha vedanā*), because in the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling there is no feeling at all. It is a happiness which is not a feeling and goes beyond impermanent feeling through insight.

In MN 25 The Bait - Nivāpasuttaṃ, the Buddha addresses the Bhikkhus in the Jeta Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park, in Sāvattihī. The Buddha explains here with a parable of a deer-trapper setting bait for a herd of deer that the *samatha* attainments are not accessible to Māra, the wicked. Bait is an expression for the five bases of sensual pleasure. Trapper is an expression for Māra, the evil one. The trapper's retinue is an expression for Māra's retinue. Deer herd is an expression for monks and brahmins.

About the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling, the Buddha says:

"Again, by completely surmounting the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the cessation of perception and feeling. And his influxes are destroyed by his seeing with wisdom. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Mara, to have become invisible to the Evil One by depriving Mara's eye of its opportunity, and to have crossed beyond attachment to the world."

That is what the Blessed One said. The bhikkhus were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words."

Interest in worldly things completely disappears by abiding in this noble sublime dwelling. Thus, in SN 41.6, the householder Citta asks where the consciousness of a Bhikkhu who has left the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling is inclined to. The Bhikkhu Kāmabhū replies that consciousness is inclined towards seclusion (*viveka*). By seclusion here is meant not only bodily seclusion, but also mental seclusion. The highest seclusion is *Nibbāna*.

In MN 26 The Noble Search - (Ariyapariyesanā Sutta) - Pāsārāsisuttaṃ it is said about someone who practices the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling:

"This Bhikkhu is said ... to have crossed beyond attachment to the world. He walks detached, he stands detached, he sits detached, he lies detached. What is the cause? Because he is out of the Evil One's range."

In MN 50 The Rebuke to Māra - Māratajjanīyasuttaṃ, the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna explains to Māra, the evil one, that in a previous life at the time of the Buddha Kakusandha, he himself was once Māra. The Buddha Kakusandha had two chief disciples, named Vidhura and Sañjīva. The Venerable Sañjīva, after going to the forest or to the foot of a tree or to an empty hut, was able to enter the cessation of perception and feeling without difficulty.

It is said of him in the sutta:

"It happened once, Evil One, that the venerable Sañjīva had seated himself at the root of a certain tree and entered upon the cessation of perception and feeling. Some cowherds, shepherds, and ploughmen passing by saw the venerable Sañjīva sitting at the root of the tree having entered upon the cessation of perception and feeling, and they thought: 'It is wonderful, sirs, it is marvellous! There is this recluse sitting here dead. Let us cremate him.' Then the cowherds, shepherds, and ploughmen collected grass, wood, and cowdung, and having piled it up against the venerable Sañjīva's body, they set fire to it and went on their way."

"Now, Evil One, when the night had ended, the venerable Sañjīva emerged from the attainment. He shook his robe, and then, it being morning, he dressed, and taking his bowl and outer robe, he

went into the village for alms. The cowherds, shepherds, and ploughmen passing by saw the venerable Sañjīva wandering for alms, and they thought: 'It is wonderful, sirs, it is marvellous! This recluse who was sitting there dead has come back to life!' That was how the venerable Sañjīva came to have the designation 'Sañjīva'."

We see here that in this noble state, the practitioner not only cannot be attacked by evil, but even the body remains invulnerable to fire.

After reaching the cessation of perception and feeling, body and mind are completely relaxed and light. The mind is calm, clear, content, undemanding, equanimous. The body is hardly noticeable. This state is a deep rest for the body and mind that cannot be compared to anything in the world. Less sleep is necessary when practicing this attainment regularly.

Both in the attainment and afterwards, according to the dwelling time in the attainment, a complete absence of *dukkha* is the result.

While dwelling in this sublime attainment, the result of unwholesome past actions cannot take effect.

SN 28.9 The attainment of cessation - Nirodhasamāpattisuttaṃ.

"Thus I have heard. At one time Venerable Sāriputta was staying in Sāvathī, in the Jeta Grove, in Anāthapindika's Park.

The Venerable Sāriputta had dressed in the morning and taken robe and bowl, he entered Sāvathī for alms. After returning from almsround, having finished his meal, he went into the dark forest to stay there for the day. After entering the dark forest, he sat down at the foot of a tree to spend the day.

In the evening, after emerging from seclusion, Venerable Sāriputta went back to the Jeta grove, to Anāthapindika's Park.

Venerable Ānanda saw Venerable Sāriputta coming from afar and then said to him:

"Serene are your faculties, friend Sāriputta, pure and bright is the color of your face! In what dwelling did the Venerable Sāriputta spend the day?"

"Having completely transcended the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, I dwelt, friend, in the cessation of perception and feeling. ..."

"After all, in the Venerable Sāriputta, the latent tendencies of I-making, mine-making, and conceit have long been well eradicated! ..."

The attainment of cessation of perception and feeling is a preview of the ultimate rest. In this attainment, no sense of time, no sense of space, no sense of anything occurs. It is absolute stillness. Even an equanimous feeling, which still experiences an object in a sublime way, falls away completely.

8. By Whom is the Cessation of Perception and Feeling to be Attained?

If one tries to attain the cessation of perception and feeling, as described above, with well-established *samatha* practice and comprehensive *vipassanā* practice, one will experience by oneself that there is no further attainment after the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception as long as one has not attained the third path, the path of non-return. Only non-returners and arahats can attain this sublime goal. As long as craving for sense objects is still possible in the stream of consciousness, as it is still the case with the stream-enterer and once-returner, this goal cannot be attained. It must also no longer be possible for aversion and associated mental factors to occur in the stream of consciousness if one wishes to achieve this goal.

By the following statement of the Buddha in AN 5.166 Cessation - Nirodhasuttaṃ, it becomes evident that the cessation of perception and feeling can only be attained by non-returners and arahats:

“Then the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus:

‘Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu accomplished in virtuous behavior, concentration, and wisdom might enter and emerge from the cessation of perception and feeling. If he does not reach final knowledge in this very life, then, having been reborn among a certain group of mind-made [deities] that transcend the company of devas that subsist on edible food, he might [again] enter and emerge from the cessation of perception and feeling. There is this possibility.’

This is what the Blessed One said. Having said this, the Fortunate One got up from his seat and entered his dwelling.”

In MN 113 Sappurisasuttaṃ, the Buddha says that the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling can only be attained by a Sappurisa, that is, by a good man (human being) and not by an asappurisa, a bad man. The latter can achieve the eight *samatha* attainments but not the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling.

The bad person is described as follows: *“I have attained the attainment of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; but these other bhikkhus have not attained the attainment of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.’ Thus he praises himself and belittles others, on account of his attainment of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. This is also the state of a bad person.”*

The good person is described as not seeing any state as his own, not praising himself and not belittling others.

So here it is clear that with strong conceit or pride (*māna*) this state cannot be attained. Conceit (*māna*) is completely overcome and eliminated as a mental factor from the stream of consciousness only with the path of arahatship.

In the commentary on SN 41. 6 Dutiyakāmaḥāsuttam⁴, it is said that the householder Citta was able to attain the cessation of perception and feeling and therefore asked the bhikkhu Kāmaḥā about it to find out whether he also knew this state from his own experience and could attain this state.

4 See Saṃyutta Nikāya, Translation Bhikkhu Bodhi, Somerville, USA, 2000, p. 1442, note 297.

9. The Practice of Buddha Gotama before Entering Parinibbāna

In both SN 6. 15 Final Nibbāna - Parinibbānasuttaṃ and DN 16 The Great Discourse of Final Nibbāna - Mahāparinibbānasuttaṃ we find the description of the practice as the Buddha practiced before his entry into final *Nibbāna*.

He practiced successively from the first *jhāna* until he attained the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, and then entered the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling. After leaving this supreme attainment, he again entered the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception and practiced in reverse order until the first *jhāna*. Then he practiced again from the first to the fourth *jhāna*, and from there he entered the final *Nibbāna*.

When the Blessed One was abiding in the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling, Venerable Ānanda said the following to Venerable Anuruddha: *"Completely expired, Venerable Anuruddha, is the Blessed One."* - *"Not, friend Ānanda, is the Blessed One completely expired; he entered the cessation of perception and feeling."*

Before entering the Parinibbāna, the Blessed One said to the bhikkhus:

"Let me say to you, bhikkhus: ,All conditioned things are of the nature to decay, strive with diligence (appamādena sampādeṭhā)."