

涅槃之貌

錄自《聖道修行》

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我們都清楚火熄滅是什麼樣子。火焰熄掉了，火也就永遠消失。當我們第一次聽到佛教修行目標是「涅槃」一詞時（其字面意義是指火的熄滅），再也想像不出有哪個宗教目標比「涅槃」來得沈悶了：完全的寂滅。這是翻譯所引起的錯誤認知，造成詞不達義的情形。火的熄滅在佛陀的年代意指為何？就是熄滅而已。根據古代婆羅門的說法，當火熄滅時，進入「潛伏」的狀態。與其說火已經不存在了，倒不如說它處於寂靜的狀態，而在那個狀態下，火從某一燃料解脫出來，擴散到整個宇宙。當佛陀以此意象向婆羅門解釋涅槃時，佛陀不直接回答已熄滅的火是否還存在，而將重點放在不燃燒的火是不可能定義的：因此，達到「熄滅」狀態的人也是無法形容的。

然而，當佛陀教導其弟子時，佛陀更將涅槃比喻作「自在」。很明顯地，當時所有的印度人都把燃燒的火當成晃動的、依賴的和受限的，既執著燃料，又受制於燃料。火若要點燃，就必須「抓住」燃料。當火放下燃料，火就「自由」了——從晃動、依賴和受限中解脫，處於平靜、自由的狀態中。這也就是為何巴利偈頌不斷以熄滅的火來象徵自在。事實上，這個隱喻只是火的一個意象，另外還有兩個相關的語詞。一、「取」，也就是火從燃料得到「取」。二、蘊，不僅僅意指能界定一切有為法的五蘊（色、受、想、行、識），更有「樹幹」的意思。如同火停止「緣取」樹木，不再從中獲取燃料時，火即隨之熄滅；當心停止緣取五蘊時，心亦解脫自在。

因此，涅槃隱含的意象是自在。巴利論典從涅槃的動詞字根具有「解脫」之意來支持這個說法。那麼，是何種解脫呢？經文提及有兩種層次：第一是指在此生解脫（有餘涅槃），好比火雖熄滅，但餘燼仍有熱度。就如同證悟的阿羅漢，能見種種形色，能聽種種音聲，能覺察苦樂，但貪、瞋、癡已斷無餘。第二是指阿羅漢捨報後的覺受（無餘涅槃），好比火完全熄滅而餘燼變冷。他的一切感官活動都停止，完全從最微細的苦與存在的時空限制中解脫。

佛陀堅決主張即使以「存在」或「不存在」都無法形容「無餘涅槃」，因為語言僅適用在有限的事物上。佛陀的本意——除了火的意象與隱喻外——是眾生可以在此生預嚐解脫自在的滋味，這是值得體驗的究竟安樂。

因此，下一次當你看見火熄滅時，不要只是認為是火消失了，而要當成「放下就可解脫」的課程來學習。 V

The Image of Nirvana

Excerpt from Noble Strategy

by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

Chinese Translation by Cheng Chen-huang

We all know what happens when a fire goes out. The flames die down and the fire is gone for good. So when we first learn that the name for the goal of Buddhist practice, nirvana (nibbana), literally means the extinguishing of a fire, it's hard to imagine a deadlier image for a spiritual goal: utter annihilation. It turns out, though, that this reading of the concept is a mistake in translation, not so much of a word as of an image. What did an extinguished fire represent to the Indians of the Buddha's day? Anything but annihilation.

According to the ancient Brahmins, when a fire was extinguished it went into a state of latency. Rather than ceasing to exist, it became dormant and, in that state--unbound from any particular fuel--diffused throughout the cosmos. When the Buddha used the image to explain nirvana to the Indian Brahmins of his day, he bypassed the question of whether an extinguished fire continues to exist or not, and focused instead on the impossibility of defining a fire that doesn't burn: thus his statement that the person who has gone totally "Out" can't be described.

However, when teaching his own disciples, the Buddha used nirvana more as an image of freedom. Apparently, all Indians at the time saw burning fire as agitated, dependent, and trapped, both clinging and being stuck to its fuel as it burned. To ignite a fire, one had to "seize" it. When fire let go of its fuel, it was "freed," released from its agitation, dependence, and entrapment--calm and unconfined. This is why Pali poetry repeatedly uses the image of extinguished fire as a metaphor for freedom. In fact, this metaphor is part of a pattern of fire imagery that involves two other related terms as well. Upadana, or clinging, also refers to the sustenance a fire takes from its fuel. Khandha means not only one of the five "heaps" (form, feeling, perception, thought processes, and consciousness) that define all conditioned experience, but also the trunk of a tree. Just as fire goes out when it stops clinging and taking sustenance from wood, so the mind is freed when it stops clinging to the khandhas.

Thus the image underlying nirvana is one of freedom. The Pali commentaries support this point by tracing the word nirvana to its verbal root, which means "unbinding."

What kind of unbinding? The texts describe two levels. One is the unbinding in this lifetime, symbolized by a fire that has gone out but whose embers are still warm. This stands for the enlightened arahant, who is conscious of sights and sounds, sensitive to pleasure and pain, but freed from passion, aversion, and delusion. The second level of unbinding--symbolized by a fire so totally out that its embers have grown cold--is

what the arahant experiences after this life. All input from the senses cools away and he/she is totally freed from even the subtlest stresses and limitations of existence in space and time.

The Buddha insists that this level is indescribable, even in terms of existence or nonexistence, because words work only for things that have limits. All he really says about it--apart from images and metaphors--is that one can have foretastes of the experience in this lifetime, and that it's the ultimate happiness, something truly worth knowing.

So the next time you watch a fire going out, see it not as a case of annihilation, but as a lesson in how freedom is to be found in letting go. v

