

## WHAT IS NIRVANA?

*Although many Buddhists understand that the ultimate goal of the Buddhist life is the attainment of Nibbana, yet they do not feel certain as to what it really is. Even the Buddha himself very often refused to describe or define Nibbana.*

*This article compares the qualities of Nibbana with those of various natural phenomena such as the lotus, cool water, space and the great ocean. For worldlings like us, it is not important to attempt to know what Nibbana is; important is to strive hard to attain it by understanding the Four Noble Truths and practising the Noble Eightfold Path or Sila, Samadhi and Panna (Morality, Concentration and Wisdom). It is only through the practice of this path that we can ultimately attain Nibbana the Summum Bonum of Buddhism.*

*The Buddha's reply when asked to make a positive affirmation on Nibbana, was always 'NIBBANA IS '*

*Ed.*

### **Milinda's questions**

As a lotus is unsoiled by water, even so, Nirvana is unsoiled by defilements. This is the one special quality of a lotus that is present in Nirvana.

As cool water is a means of allaying fever, even so, Nirvana, which is cool, is the means of allaying the fever of all the defilements. Again, as water is a means of quenching the thirst of men and beasts when they are exhausted, frightened, thirsty and overcome by heat, even so is Nirvana a means of dispelling the craving for sense pleasures and the craving for more and continued becoming. These are the two special qualities of water that are present in Nirvana.

As an antidote is the salvation of beings who are afflicted by poison, even so, Nirvana is the salvation of beings who are afflicted by the defilements. Again, an antidote puts an end to disease; even so, Nirvana puts an end to all sorrows. And again, an antidote is life-giving nectar,

even so Nirvana is a life giving nectar. These are the three special qualities of an antidote that are present in Nirvana.

As the great ocean is empty of corpses, even so, Nirvana is empty of the corpses of defilements. Again, the great ocean is vast, unbounded and not filled by all the rivers that flow into it; even so is Nirvana vast, unbounded and not filled by the beings who attain it. And again, the great ocean is the home of great creatures; even so, Nirvana is the home of Noble Ones, great beings who are stainless, their defilements destroyed, who have attained the powers and become masters of their own minds. And finally, the great ocean is blossoming with countless, abundant and quite pure corals of knowledge and freedom. These are the four special qualities of the great ocean that are present in Nirvana. As food is the sustainer of the lifespan of all beings, even so, Nirvana, when it is realized, is the sustainer of the lifespan by driving out old age and dying. Again, food is the giver of the strength of the psychic powers in all beings; it is the producer of beauty in all beings. Even so, Nirvana, when realized, is the producer of special qualities in all beings. And again, food is the calmer of distress in all beings; even so, Nirvana, when realized, is the calmer of the distress of the defilements in all beings. And finally, food is the remover of the weakness of exhaustion in all beings; even so, Nirvana, when realized is the remover of all the weakness of exhaustion in all beings due to sorrow. These are the five special qualities of food that are present in Nirvana.

As space is not born, does not age or die, does not cease here or arise there, is hard to define, cannot be stolen by thieves, is supported by nothing, is the realm of birds, without obstruction and unending - even so, Nirvana is not born, does not age or die, does not cease here or arise there, is hard to define, cannot be stolen by thieves, is supported by nothing in the realm of the Noble Ones, without obstruction and unending. These are the eleven special qualities of space that are present in Nirvana.

As a precious gem is the granter of desires, even so is Nirvana the granter of desires. As a precious gem gives delight, even so does Nirvana give delight. As a precious gem is rich in lustre even so is Nirvana. These are the three special qualities of a precious gem that are present in Nirvana.

As red sandalwood is hard to obtain, even so Nirvana is hard to obtain. Again, red sandalwood is unequalled for its lovely perfume; even so is Nirvana unequalled for its lovely perfume. Yet again, red sandalwood is praised by good men; even so is Nirvana praised by the Noble Ones.

These are the three special qualities of red sandalwood that are present in Nirvana.

As the skimming of ghee has a beautiful colour, even so, Nirvana has the colour of special qualities. The skimming of ghee has a sweet smell of virtues. Again, the skimming of ghee is flavourful. These are the three special qualities of the skimming of ghee that are present in Nirvana.

As a mountain peak is lofty, even so, Nirvana is lofty; as a mountain peak is unshakeable; as mountain peak is difficult to climb even so is Nirvana difficult for the defilements to climb. And again, as no seed can take root on a mountain peak, even so, no defilements can take root in Nirvana. Finally, as a mountain peak has neither like nor dislike, even so, Nirvana has neither like nor dislike. These are the five special qualities of a mountain peak that are present in Nirvana.