

Arahant

By: Professor Angraj Chaudhary

Arahant means one who has attained *nibbāna*. How does he attain *nibbāna*? By annihilating all his desires and cravings, he attains *nibbāna*. In other words, when he is free from all desires, he attains *nibbāna*. When he attains this state, he is not subject to rebirth.

For annihilating desires and cravings, he has to walk on the Noble Eightfold Path which consists of *sīla* (moral precepts), *samādhi* (concentration) and *paññā* (insight wisdom). Without observing moral precepts, one cannot get rid of the defilements which do not let one's mind concentrate because they keep on agitating and troubling him. A virtuous man can easily control his mind and with his concentrated mind, he can see reality as it is. When he begins to see reality as it is, he discovers that the objects, he longs for in this world and to which he is attached are not permanent. When he realizes this at the experiential level, he develops wisdom, becomes free from ignorance and is not attached to the objects of the world.

In this way, he achieves a very high state in life—a state free from attachments. A qualitative change takes place in him. The more he walks on the Noble Eightfold Path and develops wisdom (*paññā*), the more he sees reality as it is and becomes free from attachments that bind him to the cycle of birth and death.

Why is he called an *arahant*? Because he kills his mental enemies—*rāga* (craving), *dosa* (aversion) and *moha* (ignorance)—by observing moral precepts. As he does not kill, does not steal, does not commit adultery, so he becomes free from craving and aversion. As he does not tell lies, so he becomes free from fear and greed which prompt him to do so. In this way, the word *arahant* becomes meaningful in so far as he kills the enemies of craving, aversion and ignorance.

Also, because he destroys the spokes (*ara*—spoke of a wheel) of the wheel of birth and death, so he is called an *arahant*. The spokes of the wheel of birth and death are created by various defilements of the mind. One who has abandoned all *kilesas* (defilements) such as greed (*lobho*), hate (*doso*),

delusion (*moha*), conceit (*māna*), speculative views (*micchā diṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), mental torpor (*thīna*), restlessness (*uddhacca*), shamelessness (*ahirika*), lack of moral dread (*anotappa*), and cut all *ganṭhas* (*kāya ganṭha*—the bodily tie) of covetousness (*abhijjhā*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*), clinging to rites and rituals (*sīlabbataparāmāsa*) and dogmatical fanaticism (*idaṃ saccābhinivesa*) is an *arahant*. In other words, one who is free from all *āsavas* (taints), is an arahant. *Āsavas* are four, namely *kāmāsava* (taint of sense-desire), *bhavāsava* (taint of desiring eternal existence), *avijjāsava* (taint of ignorance) and *diṭṭhāsava* (taint of wrong views).

Simply put, one who is no longer subject to rebirth and death is an *arahant*.

An *arahant* is an *ariya-puggala* (noble one) because he has now entered the lineage of the noble ones. Even if one has realized *nibbāna* for a short moment, he has entered the stream that flows towards arahantship. He is no longer a *puthujjana* (worldling).

Why is he called an *ariya-puggala*? Because his consciousness is not like that of a worldling (*puthujjana*) but it changes to that of a matured one, that of a noble one. And it changes very quickly when he enters the lineage of the noble ones. This change is called *gotrabhū* (change of lineage).

Ariya-puggalas are eight in number considered from the path and fruit points of view. The first is called *sotāpanna*. A *sotāpanna* is one who has got rid of three fetters, namely *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* (belief in a permanent self or belief in a permanent soul), *vicikicchā* (doubt in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha) and *sīlabbataparāmāsa* (belief in the efficacy of rites and rituals for one's purification).

There are two stages of every *ariya-puggala*. For example, in the case of a *sotāpanna*, the first stage is when he is realizing the path of stream-winning (*sotāpatti-magga*) and the second stage is when he is realizing the fruition of stream-winning (*sotāpatti-phala*). In the case of a *sakadāgāmī*, the first stage is when he is realizing the path of once-return (*sakadāgām-magga*) and the second stage is when he is realizing the fruition of once-return (*sakadāgāmī-phala*). In the case of an *anāgāmī*, the first stage is when he is realizing the path of non-return (*anāgāmī-magga*) and the second stage is when he is realizing the fruition of non-return (*anāgāmī-phala*). In the case of an *arahant*, the first stage is when he is realizing the path of holiness (*arahatta-magga*) and the second is when he is realizing the fruition of holiness (*arahatta-phala*).

One who becomes *sotāpanna* can be born in this world for seven times at the most. He will not be born for the eighth time. There are three kinds of *sotāpannas*. They are known as *sattakhattuparama* (one with seven rebirths at the most), *kolaṅkola* (one who passes from one noble family to another) and *ekabījī* (one who is to be born only once). A *sotāpanna* is not subject to rebirth in lower worlds like hell (*niraya*), animal realm (*tiracchāna*), the ghost plane (*petayoni*) and the demon world (*asura*). He is firmly established in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha and is destined to attain full enlightenment.

A *sotāpanna* has got four characteristic qualities: he has unshakable faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha and he observes all the four kinds of morality assiduously i.e., *pātimokkha saṃvara sīla* (restraint with regard to the Disciplinary code), *indriyasamvara sīla* (restraint of the senses), *ājīvapārisuddhi sīla* (purification of livelihood) and *paccaya sannisita sīla* (morality with regard to the four requisites of a bhikkhu).

When he commits any wrong, he cannot hide it. Other characteristics of a *sotāpanna* are that he cannot commit six heinous crimes i.e., he cannot kill his father, his mother, an *arahant*, cannot cause a schism in the Saṅgha, cannot wound a Buddha and cannot uphold wrong views i.e., he cannot go to a teacher other than a teacher who teaches Buddha's teachings.

A *sakadāgāmī* becomes nearly free from two fetters namely *kāmacchanda* (sensuous craving) and *vyāpāda* (ill-will).

The third type of *ariya-puggala* is called *anāgāmī* (non-returner) because he is not going to be born in this world again. He will be born in some *Brahma* world and will attain *nibbāna* there. An *anāgāmī* (non-returner) is completely free from the five lower fetters mentioned in the cases of the first two *ariya-puggalas*.

The last kind of *ariya-puggala* is called an *arahant* who becomes free from the five higher fetters namely *rūpa-rāga* (craving for existence in fine material *loka*) and *arūpa-rāga* (craving for immaterial existence), *māna* (conceit), *uddhacca* (restlessness) and *avijjā* (ignorance).

The consciousness of an *arahant* is called *kiriya citta* which means karmically inoperative consciousness. His consciousness is neither karmically wholesome

nor unwholesome, nor is it result producing. His consciousness (*citta*) functions independently of *karma*. The actions performed by him are like fried seeds which do not germinate and produce results. He does not create any *kamma saṅkhāra*.

Not only monks and nuns who have renounced home can become *arahant* but also lay men and lay women can become *arahant*. But there is a condition. As soon as a lay man or a woman becomes an *arahant*, he or she has either to renounce home and become a *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhuni* or attain *parinibbāna* soon.

An *arahant* has completed his journey. In other words, he is not going to be born again i.e., he will not come into the cycle of birth and death. As he has annihilated his desires, there will be no suffering for him, no sorrow because he has rooted out the cause of suffering and sorrow. He has cut all the ten fetters that bind one to the wheel of birth and death.

As he is free from all kinds of desires, he does not accumulate anything. He does not even have the results of wholesome actions that he does. His consciousness is called *kiriya citta* as mentioned above, which is like fried seeds incapable of germination. He always strives mindfully with all his sense organs under his full control. He has no trace of pride in him.

An *arahant* has been compared to an *Indakhila* (firm post) not shaken by different kinds of winds and gales of different philosophical views. Like the leaf of a lotus, he is not sullied by different kinds of worldly taints.

As an *arahant* is free from aversion and hatred, so he lives happily even among those who are hateful. It is, therefore, said that wherever *arahants* live, in a village, in a forest or on a hill, that place becomes delightful.

As he has attained the highest goal of life called *nibbāna*, he is a true *Brāhmaṇa*. As his three kinds of actions, physical, vocal and mental are pure and wholesome, as he does not cling to sensual pleasures like water on a lotus leaf or like a mustard seed on the point of a needle, as he knows the right path from the wrong one, as he practices four *Brahmaviharas*, as he is free from all kinds of stains and shines like the moon, he is called an *arahant*.

Questions:

1. Define *arahant*. Why is a person called an *arahant*? What are the enemies (*ari*—enemy) that an *arahant* kills?
2. An *arahant* is called an *ariya-puggala*. Why? What is the meaning of *ariya*?
3. What is the first stage of an *ariya-puggala*? Why is he called a *sotāpanna*?
4. What does *sota* stand for in *sotāpanna*?
5. Do you think that the word *sota* is very appropriate here? If yes, why? Explain.
6. How many fetters (*saṃyojanas*) does a *sotāpanna* break and what are they?
7. How many kinds of *sotāpannas* are there and what are their characteristics?
8. Who is called a *sakadāgāmī*? What is the meaning of *sakadāgāmī*?
9. How many fetters does a *sakadāgāmī* break and what are their names?
10. Who is an *anāgāmī*? Why is a person called so? Write some of the characteristics of an *anāgāmī*.
11. How many fetters does an *anāgāmī* break and what are they?
12. Explain the fetters that an *anāgāmī* breaks.
13. What are the characteristics of an *arahant*? Name the fetters that an *arahant* breaks.
14. What is *nibbāna*? Explain in detail.