

AWAKENING OF SPIRITUAL AWARENESS (ARYA-MARGA)

The path or noble way (arya-marga) of Hinayana Buddhism consists of four degrees of sanctity, which the spiritual pilgrim can progressively attain on his path to nirvana. These four degrees are:

Srotapanna: entering the stream. The stream into which the follower of Buddhist doctrine has entered is, precisely, the one that separates "this shore" from samsara, from "the other shore" of nirvana. According to Buddhism, which approves the round of existences (samsara) or sequence of rebirths that a being fulfills within the various modes or degrees of existence (gati), until it has attained liberation and entered into nirvana, it is said that he who has <entered the stream> achieves this deliverance from the illusory ego, in all safety, "in the time of seven lives."

Sakridagamin: the one who returns only once. Designation of those who, by way of the noble path, have attained the second degree of sanctity. In them only scant remains of the illusory ego (samyojana) subsist and they have only to be reborn once more before reaching nirvana.

Anagamin: the one who does not return. The noble who has reached this third level of achievement does not return to rebirth in the world but will reach the final state of nirvana in a realm of great purity, what has been called the "pure land". This indicates that the candidate for nirvana has freed himself from the illusory ego and the karmic causes that force men to be reborn: concupiscence or attraction, hatred or repulsion and illusion or ignorance.

Árhat: holy (nirvana in life). The one who has reached the highest degree, the one with the most to learn, by the noble path of Hinayana Buddhism. This level of achievement indicates that the initiate, once he has extinguished all the pitches (asrava) and maculae (klesa) that form the illusory ego and that has the certain knowledge that they will not reappear in future, obtains the fruit of nirvana in life (sopadhisesa-nirvana). The arhat reaches the fullness of posthumous nirvana (nirupadhisesa-nirvana) immediately after this life.

Posthumous Nirvana. In nirvana in life or "with residue" (sopadhisesa-nirvana) the liberated one is not yet entirely exempt from suffering, because the individual remains the object of empirical perception. With death, the liberated one enters into complete nirvana or "without residue" (nirupadhisesa-nirvana), with what disappears from empirical existence and thus ends all possible pain or suffering.