

Peace and the Unconditioned: Nibbāna as the Supreme Pacification

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Abstract

This article argues that early Buddhist discourse in the Sutta Piṭaka construes peace not as mere emotional calm or social quietism but as the pacification (upasama) that culminates in nibbāna, the unconditioned. Reading key formulae “nibbānam paramam sukham,” “stilling of all formations” (sabbasaṅkhārasamatho), and epithets such as santi (peace) and khema (security) the study clarifies how “supreme happiness” denotes qualitative freedom from affliction rather than hedonic pleasure. It maps the semantic field of peace within the soteriological sequence nibbidā virāga nirodha upasama/vimutti, and shows how the path functions as a technology of pacification: ethical discipline (sīla) removes remorse and fear, concentration (samādhi/jhāna) stills the hindrances and unifies attention, and insight (vipassanā) discloses anicca–dukkha anattā, deconstructing craving and clinging. The article addresses common misreadings (nihilism, quietism) and proposes that the Nikāyas present peace as the non-arising of stress grounded in dependent origination’s cessation, with practical implications for contemplative training and communal concord.

Keywords: nibbāna; upasama; santi; khema; Sutta Piṭaka; jhāna; vipassanā; dependent origination; sabbasaṅkhārasamatho.

INTRODUCTION

“Peace” is one of the most resonant yet least carefully defined concepts in Buddhist studies. In popular discourse, it is often moralized as if “peace” were simply the recommendation to be nice, tolerant, or nonviolent or psychologized, reduced to a mood of calm. Both moves risk obscuring the distinctive sense in which the early discourses (Sutta Piṭaka) speak of peace as a technical, soteriological achievement: the pacification (upasama) of defilements and formations culminating in nibbāna, the unconditioned. When “peace” is flattened into ethics alone, its liberative depth is diluted; when it is reduced to soothing affect, its radicality is domesticated. The Nikāyas resist both errors by locating peace at the end of a precise causal arc nibbidā (disenchantment) virāga (dispassion) nirodha (cessation) upasama/vimutti (pacification/release) while also showing how ethical and contemplative disciplines conduce to this end. This study clarifies that arc by attending to the conceptual and lexical field in which “peace” is named: nibbāna, upasama, santi, khema, amata, and siva, with attention to the contrast between soteriological peace and social concord terms such as samagga and saṃgaha. The scope is limited to the Pāli Sutta Piṭaka (DN, MN, SN, AN, Sn, Ud, Dh). The aim is not to survey later scholastic developments or cross-cultural receptions but to listen closely to the idiom and logic of the early discourses themselves. Where helpful,

minimal comparative notes will register continuities with Abhidhamma or commentarial formulae, but without letting later systematizations retroject anachronistic meanings onto the Nikāyas.

Methodologically, the paper proceeds by close reading of key passages and stock formulae, coupled with doctrinal analysis that brings to light their interconnections. Because many crucial claims occur as refrains (“the stilling of all formations,” “supreme happiness”), attention to formulaic density, parallel occurrences, and term clusters is vital. The argument will unfold in three movements: (1) mapping the semantic field of peace; (2) parsing the evaluative claim “nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ” in light of epithets like *santi* and *khema*; and (3) showing how meditative technologies *jhāna* (*samatha*) and *vipassanā* cooperate to realize the cessation that constitutes ultimate peace. The guiding hypothesis is simple: when the Nikāyas call *nibbāna* “supreme happiness,” they do not mean a maximal pleasure-state but the absence of affliction and reactivity freedom made possible by the pacification of the fabricated. Clarifying this point rescues “peace” from moralistic and psychologistic reductions, while preserving its ethical and affective fruits as consequences rather than definitions of liberation.

Aim of the Article

This article aims to clarify how the Sutta Piṭaka presents “peace” as the pacification (*upasama*) that culminates in *nibbāna* the unconditioned and why this is termed “the supreme happiness” (*nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ*). It does so by disentangling soteriological peace from both (a) moralized readings that equate peace with mere social concord and (b) psychologized readings that reduce it to a pleasant mood. Through close textual analysis, the study maps the semantic field of key terms *nibbāna*, *upasama*, *santi*, *khema*, *amata*, *siva*, and *anupāda-parinibbāna* to show how each contributes to a non-reifying, practical account of liberation as the cessation of formations.

More specifically, the article seeks to:

1. Parse the evaluative claim “nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ,” arguing that “happiness” here denotes qualitative freedom from affliction rather than hedonic intensity.
2. Explain how epithets such as *santi* (peace) and *khema* (security) indicate the phenomenology of the unconditioned while avoiding metaphysical substantialization.
3. Analyze the stock cessation formula *sabbasaṅkhārasamatho*, *sabbūpadhipaṭinissaggo* and clarify levels of *saṅkhāra* (kammic, cognitive, affective) implicated in pacification.
4. Articulate the braided role of *jhāna* (*samatha*) and *vipassanā* in realizing irreversible release (*vimutti*), showing their interdependence rather than rivalry.
5. Situate “peace” within dependent origination as the non-arising of stress when craving is uprooted, emphasizing experiential, practice-grounded readings.
6. Distinguish soteriological peace from social harmony while acknowledging the ethical and communal fruits of the path.

By meeting these aims, the article offers a precise, text-led account of why early Buddhism calls *nibbāna* “supreme peace,” and how practitioners and scholars can understand and operationalize this claim without moralistic, psychologistic, or ontological distortions.

Key terms and semantic field

The Nikāyas name the unconditioned and its realization through a family of terms whose resonances overlap yet remain distinguishable. *Nibbāna* (lit. “extinguishing”) marks the cessation of the fires of greed, hate, and delusion, and by extension the ending of suffering (*dukkha*). *Upasama* denotes pacification or

calming, often paired with *samatā* (evenness) and *passaddhi* (tranquility), indicating not a mere mood but the resolution of agitation at its causal roots. *Santi*, typically rendered “peace,” highlights quiescence; *khema* (security, safety, a safe ground) evokes a haven free from danger, contrasting vividly with the “wilderness” of craving. *Amata* (“deathless”) is an epithet of the unconditioned, emphasizing immunity to decay and the cycle of birth and death; *siva* (auspicious, bliss) gestures to well-being free from the liability of change. Finally, *anupādā-parinibbāna* (“final nibbāna without remainder of clinging”) names the arahant’s passing away, distinguishing the present-life realization of unbinding from the final dissolution of the five aggregates.

These terms cohere around two poles: the ontological-experiential status of the unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*), and the phenomenology of its approach and attainment. *Upasama* and *santi* describe the experiential texture of cessation: nonreactivity, stilling, coolness; *khema* and *amata* describe its existential status: safety and deathlessness; *Siva* captures its evaluative valence: truly auspicious/blissful. To read these as mere synonyms for “calm” risks psychologizing liberation; to treat them as metaphysical reifications risks mistaking a pragmatic soteriology for speculative ontology. The *Nikāyas* steer a middle course by using epithets that index what is removed (affliction, danger, death) and what thereby appears (security, coolness, auspicious well-being), while vigilantly avoiding positive essence-talk that would smuggle in a substantialized self.

It is equally important to distinguish soteriological “peace” from social concord vocabulary. *Samagga* (harmonious, united) and *saṃgaha* (assistance, inclusion) concern communal concord, a major ethical concern in texts that warn against schism and praise amicability. Such concord is both fruit and condition of practice, but it is not identical with the *upasama* that culminates in *nibbāna*. Social harmony can coexist with defilements; liberative peace ends them. Conflating the two produces a moralized reading in which “peace” is a social program rather than a soteriological consummation. The *Nikāyas*, instead, show how the training *sīla*, *saṃādhi*, and *paññā* yield both interpersonal concord and unconditioned peace, with careful lexical choices helping readers keep the levels conceptually distinct.

Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ”: parsing the formula

The refrain “*nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ*” often translated “*nibbāna* is the supreme happiness” appears in verse collections such as the *Dhammapada* and *Sutta Nipāta*, and reverberates conceptually throughout the *Nikāyas*. Its function is evaluative and corrective: evaluative, because it ranks *nibbāna* above all conditioned satisfactions; corrective, because it redefines “happiness” (*sukha*) against hedonic or worldly metrics. The question is what “*paramaṃ*” (“supreme,” “highest”) modifies and how *sukha* is to be understood. If read naively, the phrase could suggest that *nibbāna* is a maximal pleasure-state. Still, the discourses repeatedly describe it in terms of cessation, cooling, and the ending of the fires. This lexicon points to the absence of affliction rather than to heightened sensation.

“*Paramaṃ*” in context signals qualitative superiority rather than quantitative intensity. It asserts that whatever we ordinarily take for happiness is inferior because it remains conditioned, unstable, and hence inseparable from loss and fear. The *Nikāyas* map this instability in the threefold analysis of suffering (pain-pain, change-pain, formation-pain) and then offer *nibbāna* as the only *sukha* that is not vulnerable to reversal. Thus, *sukha* here is better glossed as “well-being” or “freedom from affliction.” This aligns with stock definitions of the goal as “the stilling of all formations, relinquishment of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation”, terms that negate reactivity rather than posit a positive affective peak.

The refrain also has pedagogical force. By calling the end of craving “happiness,” the discourses leverage a natural desire for well-being toward renunciation. They neither denigrate happiness nor sanctify suffering; they recalibrate the field so that renunciation is seen as the only reliable delight. In practice, this reframing underwrites the path’s gradual strategy: taste the finer sukha of virtue and collectedness, and from there, come to value the even purer sukha of non-clinging. Parsing the formula in this way prevents two distortions: (1) sentimentalizing Buddhism as the pursuit of pleasant feeling, and (2) caricaturing it as anti-joy. Instead, “nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ” locates unshakeable well-being precisely where reactivity ends, preserving the evaluative warmth of “happiness” while emptying it of hedonic presuppositions.

Epithets of the unconditioned: santi and khema

Among the many names for the goal, santi (“peace”) and khema (“security,” “safe ground”) illuminate complementary aspects of nibbāna without reifying it. Santi accents quiescence: the mind no longer shaken by greed (lobha), hate (dosa), and delusion (moha); the fires gone out, the fever cooled. This peace is not the fragile calm of suppression but the stability that flows from seeing clearly. In texts where upasama (pacification) and santi appear together, peace names the felt resolution that follows cessation: when formations are stilled, the agitation they sustained ceases, and the experiential corollary is quiet. Importantly, the discourses avoid defining santi as a state among states; they point to it by describing what has ended and by tracing the causal work of ethics, concentration, and insight that remove the conditions for turmoil.

Khema adds a different hue: safety. Its imagery is spatial: the arrival at a secure place, freedom from danger, a refuge no longer exposed to the assaults of craving, aversion, and wrong view. While Santi is phenomenological, Khema is axiological-existential: it says what kind of “place” one stands in once bondage has ceased. The contrast is often implicit: samsaric experience is a wilderness or battlefield; nibbāna is safe ground. This does not posit a metaphysical locus but signals that the liabilities attached to conditioned identity, fear, loss, and death no longer apply when clinging ends. Thus, Khema expresses the unthreatened quality of release: not simply calm, but invulnerability to the round.

These epithets jointly guard against two misunderstandings. First, they prevent the goal from being reduced to a mood: santi is not mere serenity training; it presupposes the pacification that insight secures. Second, they prevent substantialization: by describing nibbāna via absence of danger (khema) and the cooling of fires (santi/upasama), the texts avoid hypostatizing a positive essence called “Peace.” The rhetoric is apophatic and pragmatic: say what has ceased and what therefore is no longer present, and let the reader infer the flavor. In practice, these names guide orientation: aim not at producing a particular feeling, but at ending the causes of disturbance; seek not metaphysical shelter, but the unassailable safety that follows the end of appropriation. In this way, Santi and Khema indicate the phenomenology of the unconditioned without reifying it.

Nibbāna as cessation of formations

If “peace” refers to the felt aspect of release, the answer to what makes peace possible is cessation. Nikāya texts reinforce this ambiguity: the goal of “the cessation of craving...the stilling of all formations (sabbasaṅkhārasamatho), the relinquishment of all acquisitions (sabbūpadhipaṭinissaggo), dispassion, cessation” is unmistakably negative in form, yet liberative in content. To understand this, one needs to explain saṅkhāra. In one sense, saṅkhāra are kammic formations, intentional activities that are future becoming. In another, they are cognitive-affective fabrications that constitute experience in the now:

perception biased one way, intentions fueled by craving, proliferations that fabricate “worlds,” and the “worlds” that render the present. Affective formations patterns of aversion, grasping, and delusion bind these levels together to constitute stress and ensure its continuity.

The term “stilling of formations” does not refer to extinguishing processes of perception, intention, and the like. It does refer to the cessation of the afflictive mode of appropriation-driven perception and intention. This stilling is described in the meditative context in contrast to the unifying and clearing of the mind. Here, the mind is fully focused and ceases feeding the hindrances of intention and craving. It ceases the construction of the world of feeling built up through craving and distorted views. Doctrinally, cessation (nirodha) is a counterpart to the dependent origination. Remove the condition (craving), and the downstream formations remain unfueled. “Relinquishment of all acquisitions” (upadhi) reaffirms the same point. Identity constructions are built up through layers. When nothing is claimed as “mine,” the formations that construct identity and the associated constructions all fall still.

The language of cessation could be misinterpreted as implying nihilism. The Nikāyas counter this by pairing it with epithets of security and well-being: what ceases is affliction, not meaningfulness; what ends is bondage, not sensitivity. Indeed, the arahant’s ongoing life displays alertness, compassion, and skilful means precisely because conduct is no longer mediated by self-centred fabrication. The practical import is decisive: the path does not aim to engineer a special state but to uproot the activity of clinging that renders any state precarious. Peace is the natural consequence of that uprooting. By refining attention (samādhi) and cultivating insight (paññā), practitioners learn to recognize how formations proliferate around craving and cut them at the root. The stilling of formations is thus both description and instruction: identify the causal knot; stop tightening it; let peace appear where fabrication has run out of fuel.

Two pathways to peace: jhāna and vipassanā

Early Buddhism presents two intimately linked technologies for pacification: samatha-jhāna (calming/unification) and vipassanā (insight). Jhāna functions as strategic seclusion from the hindrances—sensual desire, ill will, sloth-torpor, restlessness-remorse, and doubt by unifying attention on a skilful object. This unification yields immediate passaddhi (tranquillity) and, later, upekkhā (equanimity), a felt peace born of collectedness. Crucially, this is a “temporary pacification”: hindrances are suppressed, not yet uprooted. Nevertheless, the peace of jhāna is not merely instrumental; it embodies a taste of nonreactivity that educates affect and reveals the possibility of stability independent of grasping.

Vipassanā interrogates the fabric of experience itself. By seeing the five aggregates, sense bases, or dependent processes as impermanent (anicca), unsatisfactory (dukkha), and not-self (anattā), the practitioner grows disenchanted (nibbidā). Disenchantment matures into virāga (fading of passion), culminating in nirodha (cessation). The peace here is an irreversible release (vimutti) because the cognitive-affective conditions that sustained reactivity have been understood and abandoned. Insight does not add a new experience; it subtracts delusion from experience, unveiling the freedom occluded by appropriation.

Interdependence is the key: stabilised attention enables insight’s penetrating seeing; insight, in turn, consummates tranquillity by removing its enemies at the root. Without jhāna, insight lacks the stability and pliancy to sustain nonreactive investigation; without insight, jhāna risks becoming a refined dwelling that still rests on appropriation. The Nikāyas present multiple entry points; some emphasise serenity first, others insight; many interweave them, but the maturation is convergent: unification supports seeing; seeing ends clinging; the ending of clinging reveals a peace deeper than calm, a safety and coolness no

longer vulnerable to reversal. Practically, this means training in ethical restraint to lighten remorse, cultivating collectedness to quiet gross agitation, and applying discerning attention to expose impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self wherever the mind would settle. The tandem of jhāna and vipassanā is not two paths but one braided method: it pacifies by quieting the mind and by understanding the mind's fabrications until the very project of grasping loses its plausibility and ceases.

Dependent origination and the ending of dukkha

The grammar of peace in the Nikāyas is the grammar of conditionality. Dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda) traces how suffering arises from interlocked conditions: ignorance conditions formations; formations condition consciousness; and so forth, through contact, feeling, craving (taṇhā), clinging (upādāna), becoming (bhava), birth (jāti), and the whole mass of dukkha. Peace enters the picture when this chain is interrupted, most pivotally at the point of craving. When taṇhā is cut, the sequence upādāna bhava jāti halts; without appropriation, there is no becoming into an identity that must age, sicken, and die in the sense of selfhood the mind fabricates moment by moment. The Nikāyas often present this not as metaphysical speculation but as practice instruction: attend to feeling; see its conditioned rise and fall; do not leap from feeling to craving; let the link fail to ignite.

In this experiential reading, “peace” is the non-arising of stress where a link would otherwise form. The practitioner notices a pleasant feeling and, instead of grasping, sees its impermanence; a painful feeling, and instead of aversion, allows it to be known without resistance. Each such moment is a micro-cessation, a local upasama. Over time, insight into conditionality undermines ignorance, so that craving cannot mobilize clinging with its old inevitability. This is why the texts tie liberation to seeing: when conditions are seen, reactivity loses its seeming necessity. Peace is not manufactured; it is what remains when the mind ceases to construct stress.

This account avoids two pitfalls. First, it does not require suppressing life's flux; dependent origination is honored, not denied. Second, it avoids nihilism by showing that what ends is not functionality but the afflicted mode of functioning, specifically, appropriation and the selfing it sustains. Practical consequences follow: training attention at the junctions of the chain (feeling craving, contact feeling) turns doctrine into method. Peace becomes intelligible as a series of non-arisings that culminate in an irreversible freedom from reactivity. In this light, nibbāna is not an additional link but the terminating absence of the afflicted sequence a cool clearing where the fire would have caught and did not.

Ethical and communal implications

While nibbāna's peace is unconditioned, the path to it is eminently conditioned and ethical. Sīla (moral discipline) supports pacification in at least three ways. First, it reduces the hindrances upstream by removing remorse and fear: when conduct is blameless, the mind is less agitated by self-reproach and dread of consequences. Second, it simplifies life, pruning stimuli that inflame craving and aversion; restraint of the senses, right livelihood, and truthfulness stabilize the field in which samādhi can take root. Third, it trains empathy and non-harm, softening the affective habits that otherwise fuel internal and external conflict. Ethical conduct thus functions as a “peace-technology,” not as moral ornament but as causal scaffolding for serenity and insight.

Peace also externalizes as harmlessness (ahiṃsā) and concord. The same insight that undermines appropriation loosens the grip of views that breed factionalism. The discourses stress the danger of saṅghabheda (schism) and praise the six principles of cordiality; they commend speech that is timely,

truthful, gentle, and beneficial. Such communal teachings are not ancillary: they are the social expression of inner pacification. A mind trained in non-clinging does not need to win, control, or dominate; it can disagree without aggression, correct without contempt, and act decisively without reactivity. Compassionate activity becomes lighter because it is not an ego-project; generosity and patience are sustainable because they are not siphoned into identity maintenance.

At the same time, it is important not to collapse soteriological peace into a social program. The Nikāyas maintain a clear distinction: interpersonal harmony is a crucial condition and fruit, yet it does not in itself equal the unconditioned. One can achieve consensus and still be bound by craving; conversely, one can be inwardly free in a contentious environment. The practical lesson is double: build ethical and communal conditions that ease agitation, and aim beyond them toward the cessation that ends reactivity at its root. In doing so, the tradition offers a realistic account of “peace work”: cultivate virtue to quiet the waters; unify and clarify the mind; see through fabrication; act in the world from the freedom that remains when clinging is gone.

Addressing common misunderstandings

Three persistent misreadings obscure the Nikāya presentation of peace. First, nihilism: because the goal is described in negative terms cessation, relinquishment, the ending of formations some infer that Buddhism aims at non-existence or the extinction of experience. The texts refute this by pairing cessation with epithets of safety and well-being (khema, santi, siva). What ceases is affliction and appropriation, not awareness or meaningful responsiveness. The liberated person is depicted as having alert, compassionate, and skilled qualities incompatible with a doctrine of annihilation.

Second, quietism: the emphasis on tranquillity and nonreactivity is sometimes construed as a withdrawal from ethical engagement. Yet the Nikāyas repeatedly connect pacification with harmlessness, generosity, and wise speech. Peace does not mean passivity; it implies action unbound by craving and ill will. A calm mind can be decisive precisely because it is not driven by fear or compulsion. The training sequence *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā* is a regimen for responsible agency, not an escape hatch from the world’s demands.

Third, reification: because “peace” is praised in superlatives (“supreme happiness,” “deathless”), readers may covertly substantialize it as a metaphysical essence or eternal self. The discourses guard against this by speaking apophatically “the stilling of formations,” “relinquishment of acquisitions”, and by insisting on not-self even in refined attainments. *Nibbāna* is not a thing possessed; it is the ending of the project of possession. The safest way to speak of it is functionally: where clinging ceases, danger ceases; where fabrications are stilled, reactivity ends; the remainder is called “peace.”

Clarifying these points recalibrates expectations. The practice does not chase a superlative feeling but removes the conditions that make all feelings perilous. It does not command disengagement but refines engagement. It does not posit a hidden essence but frees experience from the distortions of appropriation. In this light, “*nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ*” is neither hedonism nor nihilism; it is a verdict about the only kind of well-being that cannot be overturned. Understanding this frames the path as a sober, practicable project: cultivate virtue, stabilize attention, penetrate conditionality, and let peace appear where clinging used to be.

Discussion of the article

Framing peace as the pacification (*upasama*) that culminates in *nibbāna* reframes familiar debates about Buddhist “happiness.” On this reading, the evaluative claim “*nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ*” neither

endorses hedonic maximalism nor a stoic flattening of affect; it identifies a quality of well-being inseparable from the ending of reactivity. The epithets *santi* (peace) and *khema* (security) are instructive precisely because they are apophatic and functional: they say what is no longer operative danger, agitation, appropriation, rather than posit a metaphysical essence named “Peace.” That rhetorical economy guards against reification and anchors discourse in practice.

The analysis also clarifies the much-debated relation of serenity and insight. By treating *jhāna* and *vipassanā* as a braided method, we avoid a false dichotomy that has skewed both scholarship and pedagogy. Collectedness yields immediate pacification (*passaddhi*, *upekkhā*), but only insight renders that peace irreversible by deconstructing the fabrications that reconstitute self and world. Conversely, insight without stability risks becoming reactive analysis. The *Nikāyas*’ pedagogy presents successively finer forms of *sukha* until clinging loses plausibility, thereby emerging as psychologically astute and practically reproducible.

A further payoff is ethical. When “peace” is grounded in the cessation of clinging, *sīla* is no longer mere social polish but a technology that removes remorse and fear, simplifying the field for *samādhi* and protecting communities from the centrifuge of factionalism. This rescues Buddhist ethics from caricatures of quietism: nonreactivity enables lucid, compassionate action because self-projects do not commandeer it. Two cautions remain. First, the paper’s canonical focus brackets commentarial and cross-traditional elaborations that could enrich or contest these readings; future work might trace how *Abhidhamma* or *Mahāyāna* developments reconstrue *santi* and *khema*. Second, the apophatic strategy risks opacity for modern readers; pedagogical translations must balance precision with existential accessibility. Even so, the central claim holds: in early Buddhism, peace is neither good nor manifest, but the durable well-being discovered when craving ends the only happiness that does not unravel.

Conclusion

This essay has argued that when the *Nikāyas* call *nibbāna* “the supreme happiness,” they are not valorizing a maximal pleasure-state but naming the well-being that follows the pacification (*upasama*) of formations: a peace (*santi*) that is simultaneously a safety (*khema*) and a freedom from the liabilities of appropriation. By parsing the formula “*nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ*,” surveying the epithets of the unconditioned, and situating them within the causal grammar of dependent origination, we have seen how early Buddhism reframes happiness as the absence of affliction rather than the presence of heightened sensation. The meditative tandem of *jhāna* and *vipassanā* operationalizes this reframing: collectedness quiets gross agitation; insight deconstructs the fabrications that sustain reactivity; together they terminate craving’s power to conscript the mind into suffering.

Ethically and communally, this account dignifies virtue as more than moral decorum: *sīla* is a technology of peace, removing remorse and fear while cultivating the dispositions that make concord plausible. Yet the distinction holds: social harmony, while precious, is not identical to the unconditioned; it is a conditioned support and a luminous fruit. Addressing nihilism, quietism, and reification further protects the doctrine’s centre of gravity: the path ends bondage, not life; it enables responsible engagement, not withdrawal; it avoids ontological hypostases by speaking in terms of function and cessation.

For contemporary practice, the implications are clear. Seek not primarily to feel peaceful, but to remove the causes of disturbance; train attention to recognize and release appropriation at its nascency; use the stability of *jhāna* to sharpen insight rather than to accumulate refined experiences. For scholarship, a disciplined lexical and doctrinal reading guards against moralizing and psychologizing reductions,

allowing the Sutta Piṭaka's own voice to set the terms. In sum, nibbāna is called "supreme happiness" because it is the peace of the unconditioned, the only happiness that cannot be undone, realized by the braided disciplines of serenity and insight that end clinging at the root.

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