

Means of Abandoning Restlessness and Remorse in the Pāli Tipiṭaka

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of restlessness (uddhacca) and remorse (kukkucca) from the perspective of Theravāda Buddhism, focusing on their roles as unwholesome mental factors (cetasikas) that disrupt mental clarity and spiritual progress. Within the Theravāda framework, the mind (nāma) is composed of consciousness (citta) and its associated mental factors. While consciousness itself merely knows the objects, it is the mental factors that shape one's actions—whether wholesome or unwholesome. Restlessness can manifest as both physical and mental agitation, whereas remorse is primarily a mental affliction that causes distress and impedes happiness. This paper examines these two hindrances as they are discussed in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and other canonical texts, identifying them as hindrances (nīvarana), fetters (samyojana), and defilements (kilesa). The study also analyzes their characteristics, functions, and the profound impact they have on an individual's mind. Finally, the paper discusses the means of temporarily abandoning these mental states through tranquility meditation and the ultimate eradication of these defilements by the attainment of noble paths and fruitions, as described in the Pāli Tipiṭaka.

Keywords: Abandonment; Restlessness, Remorse; Pāli Tipiṭaka

Introduction

Everyone often tends to feel distracted or restless from time to time, however some people have manifestation of this mental state in a form of uneasiness or which is so called agitation. We can see many people pacing, wringing hands, or feeling that they cannot sit or focus on everything. All these behaviors are the symptoms of physical restlessness coming from mental

diseases. On the other hand, there are some people feeling regret or repentance of their actions and behaviors, such as prisoners showing penitence of their own crimes; however, all these reactions are from the mental commitment of nature of a human being.

According to the Buddha's teachings, all living beings are composed of five aggregates, which can be summed up in two things: mind and matter. Of them, mind can be categorized into two: consciousness (*citta*), and mental factors (*cetasikas*). The characteristic of consciousness is to know objectives and the mode of consciousness looks like pure water; there is no color or there is no brand on it just as the nature of liquids in sciences. When a color of yellow or red phenomena is mixed into water, the water turns to be yellow or red water. As this example, the consciousness becomes good or bad due to being accompanied by wholesome mental factors or unwholesome mental ones.

In our daily life, we normally judge others based on their good or bad actions; therefore, it would be interesting for the researcher to examine the mental factors which govern every human being. Generally, it could be said that a person of restless behavior is not bad, and a person who feels regret is good since he can look back what he has done or undone as good experiences. However, in accordance with the Buddha's teachings, those two kinds of mental states are unwholesome mental factors; they can hinder one from his spiritual progress in this very life and make him unable to be peaceful and happy. For this reason, the ways to limit or abandon these unwholesome mental states are needed as the most important point of this paper.

2. The Concept of Restlessness

A) The Definition of Restlessness

The restlessness is general rendered for Pāli word 'uddhacca.' It is defined in the Concise Pāli English dictionary as 'distraction, flurry, or haughtiness'.¹ In the translation of *Dhammasaṅgani*, A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics of the Fourth Century B.C, it is defined that: 'What on that occasion is excitement? That excitement of mind which is disquietude, agitation of heart, turmoil of mind - this is excitement that there then is.'²

Furthermore, Ashin Janakabhivamsa, in his work of Abhidhamma in Daily Life, explains the definition of *uddhacca* that, "Uddhacca is the inability to concentrate on any object steadfastly. Although distraction is *akusala*, of

¹ A.P. Buddhadatta Mahāthera, *Concise Pāli-English Dictionary*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsiādass, 1997), p. 66.

² Caroline A. F. Rhays Davids, *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics of the Fourth Century B.C.*, M.A. Trans. (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1900), p. 283.

unwholesome nature, it does no evil deeds effectively, it has no power to throw one into hell, (the four woeful worlds), as greed, hatred and delusion do.”³

B) Characteristics of Restlessness

Restlessness (*uddhacca*) has the characteristics of disquietude as water whipped up by the wind. Its function is to make the mind unsteady as wind makes a banner ripple. It is manifested as turmoil. Its proximate cause is unwise attention to mental disquiet.⁴

Restlessness is so called four defining states in *Abhidhamma*: characteristic, function, manifestation, and proximate cause. All *Abhidhamma* terms can be defined in this way as analytical method to understand and get to know the intrinsic nature of it. All unwholesome mental factors are accompanied by three main unwholesome roots of consciousness: greed, hatred, and delusion. Among them, there are two rooted in delusion consciousness: One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, associated with doubt, and one consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, associated with restlessness.

According to *Abhidhamma*, the mental factor of restlessness is found in all twelve unwholesome *cittas*, but in other eleven *cittas*, its force is relatively weak and its function is secondary. However, in the last types of consciousness, restlessness becomes the chief factors; thus that last type alone is described as the consciousness associated with restlessness.⁵

C) Functions of Restlessness

Restlessness is a state of agitation and over-excitement. Some people live in this mental state in the whole life without knowing how to free themselves from it. Constant activity can channel the restlessness at the expense of neither confronting it nor settling it. Because restlessness is uncomfortable, so it can be difficult to pay attention to any object. Paradoxically, restlessness itself is sometimes a symptom of not being able to be present for discomfort. Patience, discipline, and courage are needed to sit still and face it.

Restlessness can manifest as scattered or persistent thinking. It is present whenever we are caught in distraction. There may be an inability to focus – the mind recoils from being directed anywhere, or it jumps from one thing to the next, incapable of settling. This is sometimes called monkey mind. The restless mind focuses on one thing and immediately reaches out for the next,

³ Ashin Janakabhivamsa, *Abhidhamma in Daily Life*, (Bayan Lepas, Penang: Inward Path Publisher, 2004), p. 20.

⁴ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma: Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha*, Ed., (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1999), p. 83.

⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi, p. 38.

never satisfied with anything, so as a swinging monkey grasps one branch and immediately reaches for the next.

3. The Concept of Remorse

A) The Definition of Remorse

Literally, the word ‘remorse’ is representative of *Pāli* word ‘*kukkucca*’. It is defined in the Buddhist Dictionary as ‘wrongly performance, scruples, remorse, uneasiness of conscience, and worry’. It is one of the karmically unwholesome (*akusala*) mental faculties.⁶

And the concept of *kukkucca* found in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, is defined as worry as: “What is worry? Consciousness of what is lawful in something that is unlawful; consciousness of what is unlawful in something that is lawful; consciousness of what is moral in something that is immoral – all sort of worries, fidgeting, over-scrupulousness, remorse of conscience, mental scarifying – These are what is called worry.”⁷

Furthermore, the commentary of *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* gives the function of remorse that: ‘a contemptible act is *kukata*, and the state of a displeased mind, produced by making such act its object is ‘worry’ or ‘*kukkucca*’.⁸

B) Characteristics of Remorse

The characteristic of remorse is given by the commentator of *Dhammasaṅgani* that ‘It has repentance as characteristic, sorrow at deeds of commission and omission as function, regret as manifestation, deeds of commission and omission as proximate cause, and it should be regarded as a state of bondage.’⁹

Furthermore, in *Visuddhimagga*, a similar definition of the characteristics of remorse is given, thus: ‘It has subsequent regret as its characteristic; its function is to sorrow about what has and what has not been done. It is manifested as remorse; it is proximate cause of what has and what has not been done. It should be regarded as slavery.’¹⁰

Additionally, Bhikkhu Bodhi, in his work of ‘A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma’, describes the functions of remorse that, “*Kukkucca* is worry or remorse after having done wrong. Its characteristic is subsequent regret. Its

⁶ Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, (Singapore: Singapore Buddhist Meditation Centre, 1987), p. 88.

⁷ Caroline A. F. Rhayss Davids, p. 313.

⁸ Maung Tin, *The Expositor (Atthasālinī)*, M.A. Trans., (London: Pali Text Society, 1920), p. 343.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

¹⁰ Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, Trans., (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2011), p., p. 478.

function is to sorrow at what has and what has not been done. It is manifested as remorse. Its proximate cause is what has and what has not been done (i.e. wrongs of commission and omission).”¹¹

C) Functions of Remorse

According to psychological perspective, emotions are generally regarded in the mind of a person as aspects of his personality that interfere with the development of a spiritual life, as unwholesome states ethically undesirable, and roadblocks to be cleared in the battleground between reason and emotion. In keeping with this, perspective emotions are described as state of agitation or imbalance.¹²

In the emergence of pathological guilt, *kukkucca*, which can be rendered as uneasiness of conscience, remorse or worries, is considered a hindrance to spiritual development. It is associated with a hateful and discontented consciousness which is similar to the Freudian super-ego consisting of aggressive elements. Among people who are disappointed with the way that they have lived in the past, some successfully change into better and productive persons, but others who take a more unrewarding line display a complex admixture of fear, hatred, and guilt.¹³

4. Effects of Restlessness and Remorse on Human Beings.

These two types of mental factors are so called unwholesome mental factors in accordance with *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. However, they are also named hindrance (*nīvarana*), fetters (*saṃyojana*), and defilements (*kilesa*) in Theravāda Buddhist texts.

Accordingly, restlessness (*uddhacca*) and remorse (*kukkucca*) are the defilements of our mind; both of them are just like front side and back side of a coin. However, remorse of mind can arise because of former wrong doing actions or undone good deeds while restlessness takes instantly place to hinder a person from concentration, causing him unable to see clearly the nature as it really is. Additionally, they both are often seen going together in the group of five hindrances, causing agitating effect on the mind as described in the *Samyuttanikāya* that as one who tries to see his own face in a bowl filled with water which is being stirred by wind, he is unable to see the reflection of his own face properly due to the effect of rippling waves.¹⁴ In the same way, restlessness and remorse,

¹¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Opcit.* p. 84.

¹² Rune Johansson, *The Psychology of Nirvana*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1969), p. 24.

¹³ J. C. Flugel, *Man, Morals and Society*: A Psycho-Analytical Study (London: Duckworth & Co., 1945), p. 197.

¹⁴ A III 232.

when arising, stir the mind, making it agitated and unsettle on any subject. Being controlled by such a mind, one is unable to see things as they really are.

The mind occupied by restlessness and remorse is also described as slavery in *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* of *Dīgha-nikāya*. If a slave is unable to decide what he or she would like to do or where to go for his/ her freedom is controlled by the owner, one whose mind filled with restlessness and remorse is losing one's freedom as his mind is dependent on externals.¹⁵

Restlessness and remorse, in the group of five hindrances, are compared with five metals that make gold impure as thus,

There are five impurities impaired of gold by which it is not pliant and wieldy, lacks radiance, is brittle and cannot be wrought well. What are these five impurities? They are iron, copper, tin, lead, and silver...Similarly, there are five impurities of the mind impaired by which the mind is not pliant and wieldy, lacks radiant lucidity and firmness, and cannot concentrate well upon the eradication of the taints (*āsava*). What are these five impurities? They are: sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and skeptical doubt. But if the mind is freed of these five impurities, it will be pliant and wieldy, will have radiant lucidity and firmness, and will concentrate well upon the eradication of the taints. To whatever state realizable by the higher mental faculties one may direct the mind one's will. In each case, acquire the capacity of realization, if the (other) conditions are fulfilled.¹⁶

In a similar way, because of the influence of restlessness and remorse arising in the mind, one is unable to recognize one's own benefit or that of others. He is even unable to keep in mind what has been memorized for a long time.¹⁷

More importantly, *uddhacca-kukkucca* is said to be the most serious obstacle for the stages of meditative attainment, as the Buddha in the *Ānguttara-Nikāya* says:

- Bhikkhus, without having abandoned six things, one is incapable of entering and dwelling in the first *jhāna*. What six? Sensual desire, ill will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and remorse, doubt; and one has not clearly seen with correct wisdom, as it really is, the danger in sensual pleasures. Without having abandoned these six things, one is incapable of entering and dwelling in the first *jhāna*.
- Bhikkhus, having abandoned six things, one is capable of entering and dwelling in the first *jhāna*. What six? Sensual desire ...; one has clearly seen with correct wisdom, as it really is the danger in sensual pleasures. Having

¹⁵ D I 72.

¹⁶ A V 23.

¹⁷ S V 123.

abandoned these six things, one is capable of entering and dwelling in the first *jhāna*.¹⁸

5. Means of the Abandonment of Restlessness and Remorse

Herein, the paper goes to describe how to abandon these two mental hindrances by means of concentration and wisdom (*samādhi* and *paññā*). On the other hand, it could be said by means of absorption (*jhāna*) and the path and fruitions (*magga* and *phala*).

5.1 Abandonment by Means of Absorption Factors

The Buddha taught us how to abandon these hindrances of mental illness by the way of tranquility meditation with factors of absorption. The fundamental factor to cure these mental illnesses should be counted wise attention (*yonisomanasikāra*) as a primary requisite. The second requirement is listening well to the teaching (*saddhammassavana*), and the third is having a good friend (*kalyāna-mitta*), whether a good meditation instructor or a person who can teach the way to practice meditation. Above all, a person who is going to practice absorption, the purification of morality is the first fundamental requirement.¹⁹ After fulfilling of moral precepts, one can practice suitable meditation objects by his or her characteristic or temperament; for a lay person, five or eights precepts are primary requisite while monks and ordained person must preserve related rules and regulations (*vinaya*) laid down by the *Buddha*.

One-pointedness of mind or concentration is the most powerful medicine for the diseases of restlessness and remorse. The right concentration can be attained by two ways; they are tranquility meditation and insight meditation. In the tranquility meditation, one can abandon hindrances including restlessness and remorse as long as he can maintain the state of absorption; it can prevent those of mental hindrances. However, it can be temporary when the concentration of absorption releases these hindrances and come into one's mind to fill up the vacancy. Therefore, it is stated in the *Samyutta Nikāya* of *Jāgara-Sutta* thus, "Five are asleep when others are awake; five are awake when others sleep. By five things one gathers dust, by five things one is purified."²⁰ And regarding this, the *Majjhima Nikāya* says:

Your reverence, in regard to the first meditation, five factors are abandoned, five are possessed: if a monk has entered on the first meditation, desire for sense pleasure is abandoned, malevolence is abandoned, sloth and torpor are abandoned, restlessness and worry are abandoned, and doubt is

¹⁸ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha (Aṅguttara-Nikāya)*, Trans., (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012), pp. 972-973.

¹⁹ MN I 6.

²⁰ SN I 6.

abandoned, but there is initial thought and discursive thought, rapture and joy and one-pointedness of mind. Thus, your reverence, in regard to the first meditation, five factors are abandoned five factors are possessed.²¹

Briefly, it can be said that at the first stage of *jhāna*, *vitakka* is able to temporarily abandon *thina* and *middha*; meanwhile one who is in the second *jhāna* can use *vicāra* to abandon skeptical doubt (*vicikicca*). At the stage of the third *jhāna*, the hindrance of ill-will (*vyāpāda*) is temporarily removed by *pīti*, and the one who is at the fourth stage of *jhāna* can be able to abandon the hindrances of *uddhacca* and *kukkucca* through *sukha* and *upekkhā*. Finally, *kāmacchanda* will be abandoned by one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*) at the highest stage of meditative attainment.

5.2 Abandonment by Means of Noble Paths

In this case, Noble Paths means *ariya-magga* and *phala*, which can be attained by the four noble persons: Stream-winner (*sotāpanna*), Once-returner (*sakadāmi*), Non-returner (*anāgāmi*), and Fully Enlightened One (*arahatta puggala*). How those of mental hindrances can be abandoned by the noble paths is briefly described in the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* as follows:

At the first sage, one develops the path of Stream-Attainment, eradicating false views and doubts, and escaping from going to woeful states, he becomes a Stream Winner, who is born seven times at most. However, Bhikkhu Bodhi, in reference to *Abhidhamma* commentaries, states that a stream-enterer is one who has entered the stream that leads irreversibly to *Nibbāna*, that is, the Noble Eightfold Path. A stream-enterer has cut off the three fetters of personality view, doubt, and adherence to rules and rituals; he has unshakable confidence in the *Buddha*, *Dhamma*, and *Samgha*; and he is free from the prospect of rebirth in any of the woeful realms. Of the four taints (*āsava*), he has eliminated the taint of wrong views, and of the fourteen unwholesome *cetasikas* he has eliminated wrong view and doubt, and also envy and avarice, according to the commentaries. He has freed himself from all degrees of defilements which lead to rebirth in the woeful planes. His conduct is marked by scrupulous observance of the five precepts such as abstinence from taking life, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and use of intoxicants.²²

One who attains the second stage of enlightenment is Once-Returner (*Sakadāgāmi*). Why he is called Once-Returner, the *Puggala-Paññatti* gives an explanation thus, ‘Here a person, having completely destroyed the three fetters, having weakened passions, hatred, and delusion, becomes a once-returner;

²¹ I. B. Horner, *The Connection of The Middle Length Saying*, Vol. I, Trans., (London: Pāli Text Society, 1954), pp. 29-31.

²² Bhikkhu Bodhi, *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, Ed., (Onalaska: PTS Pariyatti Edition, 2000), p. 359.

coming back once only to this world, he makes an end of suffering. Such a person is said to be a once-returner.²³

Next, developing the path of never-returning, totally eradicating sensual desires and hatred, one becomes a Never-Returner, not returning to this sentient state. A non-returner has fully eradicated sensual lust and ill will, the fetters that bind to the sensuous world. He has also eradicated the taint of sensual desire and the unwholesome *cetasikas*, hatred and worry, as well as all greed taking a sensuous object. Thus, he will be spontaneously reborn in a fine-material realm and there attain the final *Nibbāna*. Significantly, while only non-returners are reborn in the Pure Abodes, there is no fixed determination that all non-returners are reborn there.

Finally, developing the path of the worthy and totally eradicating all defilements, one becomes a Worthy One, who is free from corruptions, and who is fit to receive the highest offerings in this world.

The five fetters abandoned by the first three paths are called the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya-samyojana*) because they bind beings to the lower world, the sensuous plane of existence. One who has eradicated them, the non-returner no longer returns to the sensuous plane, but he is still bound to the round of existence by the five higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya-samyojana*). With the attainment of the path of Arahantship, these five higher fetters are also eradicated: desire for fine-material existence, desire for immaterial existence, conceit, restlessness and ignorance. The fourth path also destroys the remaining two taints - the taint of attachment to existence and the taint of ignorance; for which reason the *Arahant* is called the 'destroyer of the taints (*khīnāsava*)'. The path of *Arahantship* eradicates the remaining unwholesome *cetasikas*, which are not abandoned by the earlier paths, such as delusion, shamelessness, and fearlessness of wrongdoing, restlessness, conceit, sloth and torpor.²⁴ Furthermore, it is said that for one developing the first *jhāna*, the hindrances are abandoned by way of suppression; for one developing concentration partaking of penetration, wrong views are abandoned by way of substitution of opposites; for one developing the supramundane path that leads to their destruction, defilements are abandoned by way of cutting off. At the moment of fruition, they are abandoned by way of tranquillization. And abandoned by deliverance is cessation.²⁵

In this case, the texts do not directly mention the abandonment of hindrances by the path and fruition, however, it can be seen that at the stage of *Sotāpanna*, a Stream-Winner is able to completely remove the hindrance of

²³ Bimala Charan Law, *Designation of Human Types (Puggala-Paññatti)*, Trans., (Great Britain: PTS, 2006), p. 25.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 362.

²⁵ Henepola Gunaratana, *A Critical Analysis of The Jhānas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation*, (Washington: The American University, 1980), p. 77.

doubt. The next stage of the sainthood (*Sakadāgāmi*) is unable to destroy any hindrance other than to make remorse (*kukkucca*), which is rooted in hated (*dosa*) weaken. It is absolutely removed by an *Anāgāmi* at the third stage of the sainthood. And the final stage is *Arahantship*, which can completely eradicate all defilements and hindrances, or higher fetters; restlessness or *uddhacca* is of course no longer able to arise in an *Arahatta*.

6. Conclusion

The Pāli Tipiṭaka offers profound insights into the means of abandoning restlessness and remorse, emphasizing the cultivation of mindfulness, ethical discipline, and wisdom as essential tools. The teachings demonstrate that these mental hindrances can be overcome through persistent practice, leading to greater mental clarity and stability. By applying the Buddha's methods, practitioners can develop a mind free from the agitation of restlessness and the burden of remorse, paving the way for deeper concentration and insight.

In conclusion, *uddhacca* and *kukkucca* are critical mental states that signify a mind unable to settle due to restlessness and remorse. These unwholesome factors frequently arise and have detrimental effects on an individual's peace, happiness, and spiritual growth. Theravāda Buddhism considers restlessness and remorse to be significant hindrances, fetters, and defilements that must be skillfully recognized, managed, and gradually eliminated to achieve mental tranquility and spiritual development. This paper has explored the Pāli Tipiṭaka's teachings on these mental factors, providing insights into their definitions, characteristics, and effects on the mind. Through the practice of tranquility meditation, one can temporarily overcome these unwholesome states, while the complete eradication of these defilements is possible through the realization of noble paths and fruitions. This process is essential for those seeking lasting peace and liberation from all mental afflictions.

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