

An Application of Mental Development in Theravāda Buddhism: A Study of Based on Rathavinīta Sutta



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ABSTRACT

The practice of meditation traditionally has played an important role in Buddhism. In the Rathavinīta Sutta of the Majjima Nikāya, it mentioned three trainings which were (1) purification corresponds to the morality (Sila Sikkhā) which is restrained in body and speech, (2) purification corresponds to the concentration (Samādhi Sikkhā) which is mental calm, (3) purification corresponds to the wisdom (Paññā Sikkhā) which is overcoming wrong views, and it was also mentioned seven stages of purification. These are an aspect of mental development which we can practice at any time and then all these are to eradicate mental impurities from our brain altogether. Before that stage, there are benefits of tranquility, peace of mind. The mental development is an important aspect of growth, embracing the various mental abilities. This study aims to improve an individual's mental deficiency and mental block and to overcome or decrease the defilements of five hindrance. Eventually, the pure mind is leading to attainment of Nibbāna.

Keywords: Mental development, Theravāda Buddhism, Rathavinīta Sutta

Introduction

Buddhism is nothing, but it is the Absolute Noble Truth. It is an intellectual approach to reality. However, the Buddha's realization of universal problems did not come through a purely intellectual or rational process but through mental development and purification.¹ Today Buddhist remains as a great civilizing force in the modern world. As a civilizing force, Buddhism awakens the self-respect and feeling of self-responsibility of countless people and stirs up the energy of many a nation. It fasters spiritual progress by appealing to thinking power of human being. In short Buddhism produce the feeling of self-reliance by teaching that the whole destiny of humanity lies in their own hands and that they possess the faculty of developing their own energy and insight in order to reach the high in order to reach the highest goal.²

Our minds are in direct relation to the seventh and last stage of this series, the Purification by knowledge and Vision, which is the knowledge of superabundance path. But this purification cannot be attained all at once, since the seven stages of purification from a causally related series in which one has to pass through the first six purifications before one can arrive at the seventh.³ Purification of Virtue implies the purity obtained through abstinence from bodily and verbal misconduct as well as from wrong livelihood. Purification of mind is the purity resulting from cleansing the mind of attachment, a versing, inertia, restlessness and conflict, and from securing it against their influx. Purification of view is brought about by dispelling the distortion of wrong view. Leading to the mental development and to attainment of Nibbāna unfolds in sevenfold, the paths of practice known as the Sevenfold of Purification.⁴ The seven stages of purification occur in the Rathavinita Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya, where they form the subject of a discussion between the monks Ven-sāriputta and Ven-Puṇṇa (Mantāniputta). The Pāli of the Rathavinita Sutta does not offer much information on the individual implication of these seven purifications.

¹ Venerable Dr K Sri Dhammnanda, *What Buddhists Believe*, (Malaysia and Singapore: Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia, 1952- 2002), p. 84.

² *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³ Mahathera Sri Nanarama, *The Seven Stages of Purification and the Insight Knowledges*, (Kandy, Srilanka: TheHang, Secretary Buddhist Publication Society, 1983/1993), pp. 12-13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

What the discussion found in similar terms in these three discourses clearly shows, however, is that these seven purifications are successive stages required to reach the final goal.⁵

The way of Buddhism is overcoming the all of defilements based on mental development completely because Buddhism is mainly focused on mind. The mental development is an important aspect of growth, embracing the various mental abilities. It is the use of psychological methods when it is especially based on regular personal interaction which helps a person change and overcome problems in desired ways. Therefore, this research article aims to improve an individual mental deficiency and mental block and so this thesis is to remember the important of mind in the Buddhist conception of experience. The purpose of this article will be to study purification of mind, and mental development which are leading to attainment of Nibbāna.

Mental health in Buddhist Psychology

In Buddhism, Buddhist Psychology refers to traditional psychological techniques and applied philosophy of mind that have been used within Buddhism for the last 2600 years to help people liberate themselves from suffering (dukkha). Buddhism, at its core, is not just a religion in the same way as any of the other global, theistic and spiritual traditions. The following is a short account of the psychology of early Buddhist teachings. The survey is confined to the Pāli Canon, which consists of the earliest teachings of the Buddha, and which is also called Pāli Buddhism that Consists of Three Baskets.

1. Sutta Piṭaka (Basket of Suttas), which consists of the discourses delivered by Buddha within the forty-five years of his life spent preaching, and sometimes by those of his disciples.

2. Vinaya Piṭaka (Basket of Discipline), which consists of monastic rules for monks and nuns.

3. Abhidhamma Piṭaka (Basket of Abhidhamma), which contains a philosophical and psychological analysis of Buddha's teaching.⁶

⁵ Analayo. "The Seven Stage of Purification in Comparative Perspective", Journal of the centre for Buddhist Studies. Vol. 3, No. 1 2005, p. 126.

⁶ W.G. Indunil Philip Shantha. Psychology of Buddhism and Healing Method of Japanese self-Reflection. (Zhejiang, China: Zhejiang University, 2019), p. 337.

Mental health is a level of psychological well-being, or an absence of a mental disorder; it is the psychological state of someone who is functioning at a satisfactory level of emotional and behavioral adjustment. From the perspective of positive psychology or holism, mental health may include an individual's ability to enjoy life, and create a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience. According to World Health Organization mental health includes subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, intergenerational dependence, and self-actualization of one's intellectual and emotional potential, among others. Further states that the well-being of an individual is encompassed in the realization of their abilities, coping with normal stresses of life, productive work and contribution to their community? However, cultural differences, subjective assessments, and competing professional theories all affect how "mental health" is defined.⁷

The Three Training of Mental Development

Buddhism always focus on wisdom base and value-oriented education which lead of right understanding about anything. This emphasis on mental development is not surprising if we remember the importance of the role of the mind in experience in Buddhism. The Buddha has said that the mind is the source of all mental states, that all mental states are fashioned by the mind. It is also said that the mind is the source of all virtues, of all qualities. In order to attain these virtues, one must discipline the mind. Mind is the key to changing the nature of our experience. In the same way if we had to purify the whole universe of greed, anger and delusion, it would be a very difficult task. Simply by purifying our own mind of greed, anger and delusion it is as if the whole universe were purified of these defilements. That is why in Buddhism we focus upon the mind as the key to achieving a change in the way we experience life, in the way we relate to other people.⁸ Not understanding the Four Noble Truths, we continue to roam in the endless sea births and deaths (Saṃsāra). Offering to Buddha is unmatched when Buddha said to Ananda: "Whenever the bhikkhu, bhikkhuni, layman or lay woman abides by the Dhamma, lives uprightly in the Dhamma,

⁷ Phra Soravit Aphipanyo. "Mental Health in Awareness in Buddhism", Asia Pacific Journal of Religions and Cultures. Vol. 1, No. 1, (2017): p. 67.

⁸ Peter D. Santina. Mental Development: Fundamentals of Buddhism. (Australia: Buddha Dhamma Association, 1996-2012), p. 3.

walks in the way of the Dhamma, is by such a one the Tathāgata is respected, venerated, worshipped and honored in the highest degree.” Great is the gain of concentration when it is fully developed by virtuous conduct, great is the wisdom when it is fully developed by concentration. Utterly free from the pain of lust, becoming, and ignorance is the mind that is fully developed in wisdom.⁹ There are three kinds of training (sikkhā) in Buddhism, namely: the training in morality (sila), in concentration (samādhi) and in wisdom (paññā).

Seven stages of Purification

Instead of adopting the scheme of the four noble truths, the Visuddhimagga takes the seven purifications as its point of reference. These seven purifications stem from the Rathavināta-sutta, found similarly in its parallels. Yet, whereas the four noble truths are a central aspect of the early Buddhist teachings, in the Pāli canon the seven purifications occur, besides the Rathavināta-sutta, only in one other discourse, the Dasuttara-sutta of the Dīgha-nikāya. In this other occurrence, the seven purifications are part of a set of altogether nine purifications. The same is also the case for the parallel to the Dasuttara-sutta.¹⁰ In the case of the progress of insight, the scheme of the seven purifications adopted by Buddhaghosa has become a paradigm within which Theravāda vipassanā meditation operates. Even though this scheme is rather marginal in the discourses, and the set of seven stages is moreover also incomplete, modern day Theravāda meditation traditions that differ considerably from each other on how the path of insight should be developed, or what degree of concentration is required in order to progress to awakening, unanimously adopt this scheme of purifications as the basic framework for practice.¹¹

Purification of Virtue (Sīla Visuddhi)

The goal of this stage of purification of conduct is to prepare for and attain the next stage of purification of mind. Purity of one's conduct is the most significant first step in one's spiritual journey towards the final goal of attaining Nibbana. Unless one's moral conduct is pure, during meditation the mind is likely to be preoccupied with remorse

⁹ Sayalay Susila. *walking on the Buddhist Path: The Threefold Training*. (Malaysia: Bodhi Heart Sanctuary, Penang, 2012), p. 4.

¹⁰ Anālayo. “The Treatise on the Path to Liberation and the Visuddhimagga”, *Fuyan Buddhist Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (January, 15, 2009), p. 9.

¹¹ *Ibid*, pp. 11-12.

and guilt about one's unwholesome verbal and physical actions. Such remorse and guilt can hinder proper development and progress of concentration and insight. Purification of conduct is to abstain from unwholesome verbal and physical actions as well as from wrong livelihood. In the Noble Eightfold Path these are represented by right speech (*sammā vācā*), right action (*sammā kammanta*) and right livelihood (*sammā ājiva*). For male (*upasakā*) and female (*upasikā*) lay meditators, it involves the minimum of strict adherence to the observation of the five precepts of morality (*pañcha sila*) during one's day to day life.¹²

Purification of Mind (Citta Visuddhi)

During the early part of the methodical practice, as long as the meditator's mind is not yet fully purified, wandering thoughts arising by his thinking of objects of sense desire, etc., will also appear intermittently between thoughts of noticing (the objects of meditation). Sometimes the meditator (the beginner) will perceive the occurrence (of these interruptions) and sometimes he will not. But even if he perceives them, it will be only after a short time has lapsed after their appearance. For, then, the momentary concentration of his mind is still very tender and weak. So, these wandering thoughts continue to hinder his mind while it is occupied in developing the practice of noticing. Hence these wandering thoughts are called hindering thoughts.¹³ Purification of mind or mental purification are translations of the Pāli word *cittavisuddhi*. The preeminent element of *cittavisuddhi* is *citta* or mind. When one cultivates strong concentration by means of tranquility or insight meditation, the mind is no longer distracted by thoughts and other hindrances. Such pure concentration, continuously focused on an object for either tranquility or insight, is considered mental purification. A mind associated with such concentration is also purified of hindrances due to the power of the concentration. There are three types of concentration that entail purification of mind: access or neighborhood concentration (*upacārasamādhī*), absorption concentration (*appanāsamādhī*), and momentary concentration (*khaṇikasamādhī*).¹⁴

¹² Ari Ubeyse Kara. *Seven Stages of Purification (Satta Visuddhi) in Therada Buddhism*. (Nepal: Lumbini Gyan Prabha School, 2018), p. 2.

¹³ Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw. *The Progress of Insight through the stages of Purification*. Tr. By Nyanaponika Thera, (Kandy, Ceylon: Forest Hermigage, 1965), p. 3.

¹⁴ Mahāsi Sayadaw. *Manual of Insight*, tr. Vipassanā Mettā Foundation Translation Committee, (Yangon, Myanmar: Chanmayay Myaing Meditation Center, 2016), p. 45.

Purification of View (Ditthi Visuddhi)

The third stage of purification is Purification of View (ditthi-visuddhi). When yogis penetrate into the true nature of mental and physical phenomena, they do not take them to be a person or a being, a soul or a self. Then they have purified their view, or have attained Purification of View (ditthi-visuddhi). This purification of view is attributed to the first insight, the insight into the discernment of mental and physical phenomena (nāma-rūpa-pariccheda-ñāna). When yogis experience the specific characteristics of body and mind (mental and physical phenomena), it means that they realize nāma and rūpa. If they experience hardness and softness of the body without being conscious of the bodily form, they realize the specific characteristics of the earth element (petal- dhātu). This is the Insight Knowledge of Discerning Mental and Physical Phenomena (nāma-rūpa- pariccheda-ñāna). Then, they do not identify hardness or softness with a person, a being, a self or a soul but just a natural process of physical phenomena. Thus, they purify their view by removing the wrong idea of a person, a being, a self or a soul (sakkāya-ditthi or attaditthi) regarding this hardness or softness. So, yogis no longer have wrong view. They then attain Purification of View, (ditthi-visuddhi).¹⁵

Purification of Overcoming doubt (Kaṅkhāvitaraṇa Visuddhi)

The fourth is Purification by Overcoming Doubt (Kankhavitarana visuddhi). Kaṅkhā means doubt, visuddhi means purification by overcoming doubt. When a meditator has attained the second stage of insight knowledge, Knowledge of Cause and Effect (Paccayapariggahanā), he no longer has doubts about his past existence. Thus, he overcomes doubt. This is purification by overcoming doubt. To attain this knowledge, he has to observe every intention, wish or want before every action or movement. All actions are preceded by intention, wishing or wanting. That is why we have to be mindful of every intention before every action or movement. When we have an intention to lift our foot, we should note it as intending, intending, then lifting, lifting. When we have an intention to bend our arm, we should note intending, intending, then bending, bending. While we are eating, we have an intention to open our mouth to take food, then first of all, we should note intending,

¹⁵ Ashin Janakābhivamsa. *The Process of Insight Meditation*. (USA, Luvretia Ave: Tathāgata Meditation Center, 2015), p. 103.

intending, then opening, opening. In the act of opening the mouth, the intention is the cause, and the opening of the mouth is the effect.¹⁶

Purification of knowledge and vision of what the path and no-path (Maggāmagga Ñānadassana Visuddhi)

Purity of Knowledge and Vision of what is Path and Not-Path (Maggāmagga-ñānadassana- visuddhi) denotes the attainment of knowledge or insight into the Right path and Wrong path. That means it is the understanding that distinguishes the difference between the direct path and the misleading path. The practical method is known as comprehension by groups (kalāpa-sammasana) which is the contemplation on body and mind in their Three Universal Characteristics (anicca, dukkha and anattā). Here, the knowledge of Arising and Passing away of mental and material phenomena (udaya-vaya) occurs in two phases: undeveloped phase and mature phase.¹⁷ In the undeveloped phase, the Ten Imperfections of Insight (dasa vipassanā-upakkilesa) occur. These Ten Defilements of Insight, forming the Not-Path, which mislead insight, impede the progress in meditation. The realization of these imperfections is the purification by knowledge and vision of Right Path, and the avoidance of the imperfections leads to the attainment of true insight. Besides this, three kinds of mundane full-understanding are attained and a part of the Eighteen Principal Insights is attained by means of full-understanding as abandoning.¹⁸

Purification by knowledge and vision of the way (patipadāñānadassana Visuddhi)

Patipadāñānadassanavisuddhi is the sixth 'Purity'. This term is collectively applied to the nine kinds of Insight beginning with the knowledge as regards the arising and passing away of conditioned things, and ending with the knowledge of adaptation that occurs in the Path thought- moment immediately preceding the gotrabhū moment.¹⁹ When the meditator steers clear of the ten imperfections of insight and returns to his mental noting,

¹⁶ Venerable Chanmyay Sayadaw U Janakabhivamsa. *Vipassana Meditation Lectures on Insight Meditation*. (Yongan: Chanmayay Yeiktha Meditation Center, 1997), p. 33.

¹⁷ S Galmangoda. *An Analytical and Creative study of the Buddhist Theory and Practice of Psycho-Therapy*. (Balapitiya, Sri Lanka: University of Kelaniya, 2017), p. 67.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁹ Nārada Thera. *Abhidhammattha Sangaha of Anuruddhācariya*. (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Vāḷirārāma, 1978), p. 377.

he completes Purification by Knowledge and Vision of What is Path and Not- Path. He then enters the mature phase of the Knowledge of Arising and Passing Away. With this he begins the last of the mundane purifications, Purification by Knowledge and Vision of the Way. The “way” signifies the practice or the process of arriving at the goal. The understanding, knowledge, or illumination relating to the process of arrival is the Knowledge and Vision of the Way. The purification or elimination of defilements by means of that knowledge is Purification by Knowledge and Vision of the Way. It is at this point that there begins to unfold the series of full-fledged insight knowledges which will climax in the attainment of the supramundane paths.²⁰

Purification by Knowledge and Vision (Ñānadassana Visuddhi)

The purification of vision regarding intuitive wisdom (ñānadassana-visuddhi): The seventh visuddhi refers to Sotāpatti-ñāṇa, the first knowledge of the Path - Ñānadassana visuddhi. Ñānadassana-visuddhi is the name given to the contemplative knowledge, a mental state of wisdom found in Path-Consciousness. It is called ‘purity’ because it is completely free from all stains or defilements, resulting from the wisdom and without meditation wisdom wanes. Knowing this twofold path of gain realization of the four Truths as the Buddha mentioned, from meditation arises and loss, let one conduct oneself that wisdom may increase. This emphatically states that meditation is essential in achieving wisdom which is the ultimate goal of the Buddhist way of life.²¹

Conclusion

In Buddhism, we practice three kinds of trainings to develop body and mind, which are an abridge model or summary of the disciple’s training. Mental Development based on concentrated meditation (Samatha bhāvanā) and insight meditation (Vipassanā bhāvanā). These are part of mental development which we can practice at any time and any place. The practice of meditation traditionally has played an important role in Buddhism. We practice three kinds of training to development. There are Sīla sikkhā (the first

²⁰ Ven. Matara Sri Nanarama, *The Seven Stages of Purification & The Insight Knowledges*, op. cit., pp. 82-83.

²¹ Bhiddhu Ratna jyoti, *Buddhist Meditation: Theory and Practice in Pāli Canon*. (Thailand: International Buddhist College, 2015), p. 63.

purification corresponds to the morality), Samādhī sikkhā (the second purification corresponds to the concentration), Paññā Sikkhā (the last five purifications correspond to the wisdom). From the meditation calming and training mind meanings, it is mental development which has two principal benefits. Firstly, it leads to mental and physical well-being, comfort, joy, calm, tranquility. Secondly, it turns the mind into an instrument capable of seeing things as they really are. It prepares the mind to attain wisdom. That is the purity of morality, the purity of mind, the purity of views and the purity of liberation.

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