

4: Visuddhimagga

Reading:

Bhikkhu Bodhi. Trans. *The numerical discourses of the Buddha : a translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications , 2012.

Galmangoda, Sumanapala. *An Introduction to Theravada Abhidhamma*. Singapore: Buddhist Research Society, 1997.

Visuddhimagga

Part I – Sila (Ch1, Ch2)

Sila is the foundation of meditation

Ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*) (Ch2)

Part II – Samādhi: 40 subjects in Visuddhimagga

10 kasiṇa (Ch4, 5)

10 meditations on corpses (Ch6 Asubha)

6 Recollections (Ch7)

Mindfulness of Death (Ch8)

Mindfulness of Body

Mindfulness of Breathing

Recollection of Peace

4 divine abidings (Ch9)

4 arupa jhanas (Ch10)

Perception of the loathsomeness of food (Ch11)

Analysis of the four elements (Ch11)

A meditator can select any one or combination of these 40 meditation subjects, according to his or her own character. For example, *Kasiṇa* concentration is very suitable for those with sensual desire, restlessness of mind, or inclination toward anger, hatred or ill will. For those whose habits are intellectual thought, devotion or delusion, Mindfulness of Breathing (*ānāpānasati*) and Recollection of Buddha's virtues (*buddhanussati*) are most suitable.

Part III – paññā Ch14-Ch23

Cetovimutti and paññāvimutti

There are two aspects liberation mentioned in many Early Buddhist discourses as *cetovimutti* (liberation of mind) and *paññāvimutti* (liberation of wisdom). The former refers to *samatha* and the latter to *vipassanā*.

Samatha brings the tentative abandoning of lust and results in liberation of mind. *Vipassanā* brings the abandoning of ignorance and results in liberation by wisdom (A2:31). Jointly, "liberation of mind" and "liberation by wisdom" constitute arahantship, the final goal (Bodhi, Introduction to AN).

First of all, we have to get concentration of the mind; that is, release of the mind; it means that mind should be freed from defilements; mind should be calm and quite in order to get wisdom or insight. This is called *cetovimutti*.

Although we get the *cetovimutti* by oppressing defilements or calming them down, we cannot uproot them without knowledge or understanding. Only through wisdom we can completely destroy them. This is called *paññāvimutti*.

In both aspects, *vimutti* is the same; it means enlightenment or arahantship. Ven. Mahādeva presented the five points regarding the arahantship: (1) there may be arahants who don't know that they are arahants; (2) arahantship can be changed anytime; (3) arahants may have ignorance; (4) arahantship cannot be obtained without other's guidance; (5) arahants may commit some offences.

These are the five points of Mahāsaṅghika against Theravādin arahantship. In the Kathāvatthu, Theravādins asked where the Buddha had said thus. The Mahāsaṅghika answered with a quotation from the 5th chapter of the Aṅguttaranikāya:

Samayavimuttassa bhikkhuno parihānāya pañca dhammā samvattanti (AN5:149-50)

(There are five things for the downfall of arahants who has got released temporally).

Here the term *samayavimutta*¹ refers to the *cetovimutta-arahants*. They have oppressed the defilements only through trances but not through wisdom. They can oppress all the defilements temporally through trances. However, unlike the *paññāvimutta-arahants*, they can get defilements again. Mahāsaṅghika did not criticize all the arahants but only the temporal arahants.

These two aspects (*cetovimutti* and *paññāvimutti*) of the Early Buddhism have developed in the Abhidhamma as *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditations.

Threefold Training (*tisikkhā*)

There are three main stages of spiritual development recommended in Early Buddhism: *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom).

Morality is the restraint of external (physical and verbal) behaviors of the person. Without it we cannot come to the *samatha* stage, a mental restraint. **The mind cannot be restrained without the restraint of body. As a gradual step, we must restrain our physical and verbal behaviors first.**

First the five precepts must be observed for the restraint of body. Then, we can go to the concentration (*samādhi*) and insight (*paññā*).

Here the insight means to see things as they are. We cannot see things as they are if we are not restrained mentally and physically.

If we are not mentally restrained, we see things according to our desires of greed and hatred; such desires should be calmed down through concentration. Therefore, both ways (*sīla* and *samādhi*) must be followed in order to get wisdom (*paññā*). Otherwise, we see things in duality.

It is a step by step development. As the defilements in our mind have been accumulated little by little, we also develop our mind step by step to eliminate them.

¹ *Samayavimuttassa bhikkhuno*, explained in Manorathapūraṇī (Aṅguttara Nikāya-aṭṭhakathā): "One who is liberated in mind through a mundane liberation, a tentative liberation, through the suppression of the defilements in absorption."

Those three stages are interconnected so that we cannot skip any stage. We cannot directly go into insight meditation. There are some people who have got the enlightenment at once; it means they have already achieved morality and concentration stages in their previous lives.

The Buddha has said that the final wisdom can be achieved by gradual activities (*anupubbakiriya*), gradual training (*anupubbāsikkhā*), and gradual practice (*anupubbapaṭipadā*).

Ven. Buddhaghosa explains the *Visuddhimagga* based on these three aspects: *sīla*, *citta*, and *paññā*. Under the *citta*, he explains *samatha* meditation; under the *paññā*, he explains *vipassanā* meditation.

Dhutaṅga (Ascetic Practices)

There is another aspect explained in the *Visuddhimagga* between morality and concentration; it is called *dhutaṅga*. This is mostly neglected.

For the lay people, there are five, eight, or ten precepts for their morality. For the monks and nuns, there are ten precepts, *sāmaṇera sīla*, and *upasampadā sīla*. These precepts are observed temporally because we break them all the time. Whenever we break the precepts, we have to observe them again and again. After a long period of observing the precepts, if one is confirmed that he is never break a precept, it is called *dhutaṅga*. Now, it becomes a permanent principle in his life. When observation of the precepts becomes a habit, it becomes one of the main principles of our life. After three years of observation, we may have three principles out of ten precepts. In such a way we have to build up the main principles or the permanent principles of life.

Thus, observing the moral precepts is the first step and the second step is to build up the main principles of life by moral training. That is called *dhutaṅga*.

This *dhutaṅga* practice will be very beneficial for the development of the *citta* (*samatha*). The concentration or one-pointedness of mind cannot be established on the changing principles. Thus, both aspects, moral precepts and life-principles, should be considered as the foundation of developing *samatha* meditation.

Dhutaṅga means the limb of morality which helps us to destroy defilements or oppress the defilements. If one person is accustomed to a particular practice permanently, every time he is aware of it; then defilements related to that particular practice will never arise. Then he is confirmed in morality; it is called *paṭiṭṭhāya*.

The moral rules are essential for our daily life and beneficial temporally; but, we have to try our best to transfer them into the permanent principles of life. Then only we can develop the *samatha* meditation.

Samatha

The term *samatha* means pacification or settling down.

We have to develop *samatha* meditation to lower down of greed (*lobha*) and hatred (*dosa*). Delusion (*moha*) is a relative effect of greed and hatred.

Forty subjects of meditation

There are forty subjects of meditation recommended in the *Visuddhimagga*. The principle is that in order to reduce something we have to practice something opposite to it.

Meditation on the negative aspect of life (*asubha-bhāvanā*) is recommended for the greedy characters. If you are hateful character, you have to develop the loving kindness (*mettā*) meditation. If the delusion is higher, we have to practice in-and-out breathing to calm down or settle down our mind on the particular aspect. Even we can concentrate on looking at the Buddha image to settle down our deluded mind. Likewise, one who wants to develop the *samatha* meditation has to select the suitable subject according to one's own character.

The in-and-out breathing and the *mettā* meditation are common to all. Therefore, we can practice them at the beginning.

In fact, if we go through all the forty subjects of meditation, there is one principle. If we have such a permanent concept in life, our mind is always concentrating on that concept. It is the principle.

Recollection

If a child have a mother concept in his mind, it is really helpful for him to escape dangerous situation. Although we don't understand the deep meaning of the Buddha's qualities, we can practice our concentration with them.

Two Aspects: Compassion and Wisdom

According to the modern scientific experiment of the human brain, there are two spheres in the human brain. The right side of human brain is related to the emotional signs and the left part is related to the intellectual signs.

In the Buddhist folk literature, we can find a similar understanding of human personality: a mother with hunger went to her son's house in order to get some food; then the son measured two portions of rice and gave to her. Then the mother thought that when she was feeding her son, she did not measure. The mother feeds her child emotionally through her heart; but the son treats his mother intellectually by measuring.

Ven. Buddhaghosa said(?) that he is worshipping the Buddha who has cooled down his heart by compassion and who has destroyed the darkness of ignorance through insight (wisdom).

Compassion is related to the emotional aspect of the human personality and wisdom to the intellectual aspect of the human personality.

Emotion can be developed up to the highest level which is called compassion (*karuṇā*); intellect can be developed up to the greatest insight called wisdom (*paññā*). These are two pillars of Buddhism. The Buddhist arts and architectures are outcome of these two aspects of human ability.

In the *samatha* meditation system, we get both aspects too. The main aspects of the trance (*jhāna*) stages related to the form-sphere (*rūpāvacāra*) are as follows:

(1) *vitakka* (initial application)

} the intellectual aspects (1st)

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|--|-------|---|
| (2) <i>vicāra</i> (sustained application or investigation) | } | the emotional aspects (2 nd -3 rd) |
| (3) <i>pīti</i> (rapture/zest) | | |
| (4) <i>sukha</i> (happiness) | | |
| (5) <i>ekaggatā</i> (one-pointedness) | ----- | the result of both aspects (4 th) |

The first two factors refer to the intellectual aspects and the second two factors refer to the emotional aspects; then by mixing the two we get the result called one-pointedness of mind.

The initial application (*vitakka*) is to develop the mental image of one particular object in our mind. After that, we are concentrating not on the external object but on the internal image; it is called the sustained application (*vicāra*).

We cannot think of anything without the term that indicates the object. We are the slaves of the language. The human intellect is fully developed through language.

Thus, two intellectual factors (*vitakka* and *vicāra*) are the forerunners of the language. By giving up both of them, we enter the second *jhāna*.²

We are developing the emotional aspects in the second and the third *jhānas*. In the second *jhāna*, while feeling zest (*pīti*), we keep it without aid of the external object and the mental image. We keep our concentration by feeling.

In the third *jhāna*, we feel happy (*sukha*). Then we recognize that we are still attached to happy feelings.

So, in the fourth *jhāna*, we give them up and keep one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*) at the highest personality of concentration.

Thus, we develop our intellectual and emotional sides in order to give up them and keep one-pointedness of mind.

In the *samādhi*, there are two trances: material trances (*rūpajhāna*) and immaterial trances (*arūpajhāna*).

The five limbs of *rūpajhāna*: *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukha*, and *ekaggatā*. The fifth one is usually replaced by *upekkhā* (equanimity). All these *jhānas* are achieved by concentrating on the material subjects. But, the *arūpajhānas* are achieved by concentrating on the following immaterial subjects:

- (1) *ākāsa* (space; unlimited space)
- (2) *viññāṇa* (consciousness)
- (3) *ākīñcañña* (nothingness)
- (4) *nevasaññānāsaññā* (neither perception nor non-perception)

While he was in the *rūpajhāna*, he is bound with the external world. But, when he goes beyond it and enter the *arūpajhāna*, he cuts the bond of the external world.

We cannot absolutely say that there is no perception. Since its object is nothingness, it should be a very subtle kind of perception. It is so subtle that we cannot surely say that it is a perception. Therefore,

²According to the discourses, we give up both together; according to the *Abhidhamma* we give up one by one as I explained before: in the first *jhāna*, we get all the five qualities; in the second, only four except the first one; in the third, only three; in the fourth, only two; in the fifth, only one, the last one. Here we follow the discourses because it seems more natural way.

it is called neither perception nor non-perception. It is in between. It is a very subtle mixture state of mind.³ Now he is fully concentrates on himself. It is said that people who have developed these trances, if they do not fall from their trances, will be reborn in the Brahma worlds.

To Sum up

By *sīla* the external (verbal and physical) behaviors are restrained; by *samādhi* the internal behaviors are restrained. That means the person with *sīla* and *samādhi* is not bias to see things motivated by greed and hate.

The main purpose of Buddhism is to see things as they are. In order to see the reality as they are, we should be restrained from external and internal behaviors. The term *vipassanā* means to see things in a special way as they are in reality. That is the main goal of Buddhism but it cannot be done by an ordinary person because he has to develop those two aspects (virtues and concentration) first.

When we come in the *samādhi*, we are in the middle position without bias. But, it is not the permanent stage. We have achieved it by artificial efforts such as religious activities and concentrating meditation. When we lose our attention, we also lose the state of *samādhi*. This state of mind should be confirmed by insight; it means to try to see things as they are (*vipassanā*). That is why *samādhi* is not the permanent status. It should be confirmed by insight; by understanding the true nature of the world, his concentration is fully confirmed.

³ Such subtle matters in Buddhism are indicated by these two negations. When the Buddha was asked whether the same person is reborn or not, he answered: neither same person nor another person (*naca so naca añño*). In fact, there is a higher level of concentration called *saññāvedayitanirodhasamāpatti* (the extinction of both perception and feeling). When the Buddha transformed into that stage, the other ordinary monks thought that the Buddha had already passed away. It is a state between death and life.