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THE WAYS TO LIBERATION IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM: A STUDY

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Abstract:-This paper will study Theravada Buddhist Meditation and the different types of methods which lead to liberation, *Nibbana*. The objective is to explore to the how Buddhist meditation leads to spiritual liberation and how meditative experience assists in understanding the meaning of *Nibbana*. The heart of Buddhist doctrines is that practical experience is more important than theoretical and intellectual appreciation. This paper will mainly investigate the following statements. First this study will discuss the concept of spiritual liberation and the primary objective of meditation. Secondly it will explore the methods of Theravada Buddhist meditation and the progress of insight. Lastly, it will analyze how the meditation leads one to realize the absolute peace of *Nibbana*.

Keywords:Noble Eightfold Path, Mindfulness, Meditation, Objective, *Nibbana*, Liberation

INTRODUCTION

This study mainly emphasizes the practical exercise of applying the method of “Four Foundation of Mindfulness of Meditation,” and “Noble Eightfold Path” also known as “insight” (*vipassana*) meditation. The method, originally prescribed by the Buddha, is the path of the progress of insight (*vipassana-nana*). However, an exegetic work done by the commentator, Buddhaghosa, who lived in the fifth century A.D., describes the method of mindfulness with systematic, elaborative narrative, and comprehensive comments in more detail He carefully analyzes the mindfulness method with categories, similes, stages and clear perspectives. Some of the important texts are *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification) and *Mahavagga-atthakatha* (the commentary of *Mahastipatthana-sutta*). These texts are very important for meditators to understand the right way for their spiritual path. The methods of mindfulness meditation which lead to liberation will be discussed in this paper.

Buddhist mostly prefer to say that they wish to attain *Nibbana* instead of understanding what *Nibbana* really means. And so, often they state one can attain *Nibbana* through the practice of meditation. The state of *Nibbana*, the essence of which signifies deathlessness, the end of suffering, and liberation from bondage, is the highest goal for Buddhist. They think that *Nibbana* is within the reach of all. However, it is difficult for them to explain the essence of *Nibbana* philosophically. Most Buddhist will explain that *Nibbana* is “ultimate reality” and they might say that it is difficult to describe the essence of *Nibbana* for those who have not yet attained the state of *Nibbana*. Enlightened beings can understand what *Nibbana* is through their insight wisdom. Since Buddhists know of the benefits of meditation generated by insight wisdom in individuals, they make their efforts towards the practice of meditation. This is how Buddhist approach their spiritual path. Based on their attitude toward the teachings of the Buddha, they affirm that *vipassan* (insight) meditation is a gateway to

reach *Nibbana*.

The Method towards Nibbana, Liberation

Regarding the doctrine of *Nibban*, there is a connection between insight and *Nibbana*. In this context, *Nibbana* can be translated as freedom, or liberation. Meditation methods can be connected to the method of the “Noble Eightfold Path” and the method of the “Four Foundations of Mindfulness” as well. As a matter of fact, the *Dhamma* given by the Buddha can be divided into two aspects: the doctrine and the practice.

The Principal formulation of the doctrine is the four Noble Truths;
The principal formulation of the practice is the Noble Eightfold path. The two, however, are closely interwoven: for, as we shall see, the Noble Eightfold Path is the forth of the Four Noble Truths, while the first step of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right View, Means understanding the Four Noble Truths.

In the “Noble Eightfold Path,” Right View is the first factor of the path and the essential guide for all other factors of the path. The active counterpart of right view also is linked to right conduct with the ideal of moral and spiritual excellence in body, speech, and mind. Right Mindfulness is the seventh factor of the path, that is, awareness of every single moment in body, speech, and thought. The power of mindfulness is to generate insight knowledge and obtain liberation from suffering.

Mindfulness meditation makes possible the progress of insight during intensive meditation. The progress of insight consists of different levels of liberation. However, according to the *Nibbandhatu Sutta, Kh-N*, there are mainly two levels of liberation. They are: (1) psychological level of liberation (*saupadisesa-nibbanadhatu*) and biological level of liberation (*anupadisesa-nibbanadhatu*). *Saupadisesa-nibbanadhatu* here means *Nibbana* element with the remainder of the phenomena of conditioned existence, while *Anupadisesa-nibbanadhatu* is *Nibbana* element without any remainder of conditioned existence.

Psychological liberation is a kind of spiritual liberation that means liberation from mental destruction due to craving (*tanha*) or desire (*samudaya*). For instance, when craving or desire together with ignorance (*avijja*) are eliminated, one can remove the mental defilements, such as unhappiness, worry, sorrow, sadness and other mental sufferings. Psychological liberation directly refers to the spiritual liberation, which is linked to mind. When one's mind is released from defilements (*Kilesas*), such as lust (*raga*), craving (*tanha*) and ignorance (*avijja*), one can psychologically liberate oneself from mental suffering which involves the mental factors of unhappiness, depression and so on.

According to the *Abhidhamma*, peace and happiness are linked to an inner peaceful state of mind. For enlightened beings, after attaining the state of *Nibbana* in this very life, the supreme peace and happiness are experienced, called *saupadisesa-nibbana* in Pali, that is, liberation from mental suffering. In the *Mangala sutta*, the statement has been recorded that since enlightened beings (*Arahats*) have freed themselves from craving or desire together with ignorance, they can never again be touched by fear and anxiety. Though eight worldly conditions (*Loka-dhamma*), such as Gain (*labha*) or Loss (*alabha*) Honor (*yasa*) or Dishonor (*ayasa*); Praise (*pasamsa*) or Blame (*ninda*), and Happiness (*sukha*) or sufferings (*dukkha*), reach them, their mind is not shaken at all. They are sorrowless, stainless and safe. In Buddhism, this kind of psychological freedom can be named “Psychological Liberation.”

“Biological Liberation” takes place, when enlightened beings enter the state of absolute *Nibbana*. Meanwhile, the process of the mind and body of enlightened beings, these co-called identities of *Arahants*, totally stops and its *kammic* force comes to an end. After that, the round of their rebirths is broken from them. This kind of state is known as *Anupadisesa Nibbana* (*Nibbana* without remaining), or “Biological Liberation.” It is understood that after the enlightened beings have attained the absolute peace of *Nibbana*, there is no residue of the elements of conditioned

existence. The process of the mental and physical phenomena no longer exists, but only the deathless element and absolute peace exist. This kind of state is said to be the Unborn, Unmade, Unbecome, Unconditioned.

In this regard, the spiritual liberation is fundamentally free from craving and ignorance that cause the whole mass of suffering, such as rebirth, aging, sickness, death, sorrow, lamentation and all kinds of mental and physical sufferings. If there is no craving for worldly pleasure, no clinging to existences (rebirth), and no ignorance about daily activities, there is no suffering for beings. In Buddhism, the realization of the absolute cessation of suffering is considered to be the attainment of *Nibbana*.

The Purpose of Buddhist Meditation

In general, the practice of meditation has many objectives based on the different traditional backgrounds of religious attitudes. For some traditions, meditation is to develop a peaceful mind, while for others, it is to cure physical diseases through mind power; for still others it is to obtain psychic power; and for others it may be to attain something else. Since the traditions are different from each other, their objectives in meditation are different from one.

However, the primary purpose of Buddhist meditation is, specifically, to purify the mind and to attain *Nibbana*.(266) In addition, the meditation is undertaken through the practice of tranquility meditation in order to develop concentration and a peaceful state of mind; while the practice of insight meditation is undertaken to develop the intuitive insight into the impermanence of, the misery or the unsatisfactoriness of, and the impersonality of all mental and physical phenomena of existence. The components of existence are the five groups of aggregates.

To be more specific, Theravada Buddhist meditation emphasizes that vipassana meditation, also called mindfulness meditation is the essential way to attain *Nibbana*, by purifying the mind.(268) Without purifying the mind. It is difficult to understand what *Nibbana* is. Yet there is an issue which arises in Buddhist meditation. How does one understand the connection between the state of the purification of mind and the state of the realization of *Nibbana*? To purify the mind is to help oneself understand things clearly, such as the process of phenomena including mind and body and ultimate realities including *citta* (consciousness) *cetasika* (mental factors), *rupa* (matter), and *Nibbana*. One sees that these things truly exist. Buddhism stresses how important concentration, also known as “Purification of mind,” is to develop insight wisdom which leads one to realize the nature of *Nibbana*. In the *Samadhi Sutta*, the Buddha addressed this matter as follows.

Bhikkus, develop concentration. A *bhikkhu* who is concentrated understands things as they really are. And what does he understand as it really is? The origin and passing away of form; the origin and passing away of feeling; the origin and passing away of perception; the origin and passing away of consciousness.

To understand what the Buddha means in this text, one needs to apply mindfulness meditation, using the method of the “Four Foundations of Mindfulness.” At the beginning of the practice, one will come to know the distinctive realities: mind and body. Regarding the “mind,” this study will recognize two functions of mind: the function of consciousness (*citta*) and the function of mental factors (*cetasika*). As a matter of fact, the meditators are able to know the distinctive realities, their distinctive functions through mindfulness meditation.

In this regard, if one wishes to distinguish the function of *citta* (consciousness) and *cetasika* (mental states), one can start meditation applying the various methods of meditations such as mindfulness meditation and tranquility meditation. In *Theravada* Buddhist meditation, the most commonly used methods are *anapan-sati* (awareness of inhaling and exhaling) as well as *kayagata-sati* (awareness of the bodily actions or the abdominal movement of rising and falling). During the practice, in order to get a meditative level of full awareness of the object, one needs to get a closer look at the object and continuously observe it without speculating, thinking, analyzing, or expecting. Since one's concentrative power is able to get a close look at the object, one will overcome mental and physical distractions that arise from moment to moment. In Buddhism, peaceful mind and penetrative mind are known as *Samadhi* (concentration). The concentrated mind leads to the “Purification of the Mind (*cittavisuddhi*). One's mind should be purified from all mental defilements

in order to realize the original state of the mind, and actually all reality, including both the nature of mind and the nature of matter.

The Fundamental Methods of Buddhist Meditation

As has been mentioned, there are two basic types of meditations: (1) tranquility meditation and (2) insight meditation. *Kammatthana* literally means “workplace.” To what does the workplace prefer? The workplace is the mind for the meditator who wants to develop the spiritual attainment in the field of contemplation. It is the workplace for the meditator to develop the special meditative attainments. Yet in Buddhist practice the word “*bhavana*” has been often used. *Bhavana* literally means mental development. Within the Buddhist context, the word “meditation” derives from the Pali word “*bhavana*”. There are two types of *bhavana*: (1) *samatha-bhavana* (tranquility meditation) and (2) *Vipassna-bhavana* (insight meditation). They are the same as the two types of *kammatthana* (meditations). Of them, only insight meditation is a distinctively Buddhist Form of meditation. The other forms of meditation are found in non-Buddhist schools of meditation also. The other forms of meditation here refer to *samatha* meditation.

Regarding *samatha* (tranquility) meditation, the word “*samatha*” denotes quietness of mind and eradication of mental distractions. The word “*samatha*” (concentration) is similar in meaning to *samatha* (tranquility). Technically, *Samadhi* is often defined in Buddhist texts as *ekaggata* (one-pointness of mind). It mostly appears in *jhana* meditation. There are eight meditative attainments in this highly developed concentration: *rupajana* (the form-material-sphere) and *arupa-jhana* (the four immaterial-sphere).

The word *vipassana* is often translated as insight. *Vipassana* meditation is the direct meditative approach to phenomena which is directly linked to the three characteristics: *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness or suffering), and *anatta* (non-self or insubstantiality). According to the *Abhidhamm*, insight wisdom is a function of *panna* (wisdom) which is one of the fifty-two types of *cetasika* (mental states). Its essential function is to direct the mind toward uncovering the true nature of things.

What is the difference between *samatha* meditation and *vipassana* meditation? In the texts, the specific definition for *samatha* meditation is the following: the function of *samatha* meditation is to tranquilize or settle down one's restless mind. *Samatha* here refers to *samadhi* [meditative concentration]. The various manifestations of mind such as sensual thoughts, thoughts of ill will, or skeptical thoughts (hindrances) are tranquilized during the practice. In this context, *samatha* is synonymous with *Samadhi*. For the word “*vipassana*”, the definition is this: the function of *vipassana* is to see the dhamma as they truly are in diverse ways, in relation to *anicca* [impermanence], *dukkha* [suffering or unsatisfactoriness], and *anatta* [non-self or insubstantiality]. In this context, *vipassana* is synonymous with wisdom. Thus it is understood that insight knowledge is the function of wisdom that appears as wisdom in the *Abhidhamma*.

In Buddhist writings, the word “*vipassana*” very often appears in relation to Buddhist meditation. Therefore, one might pose the question: “What is insight-wisdom?” Insight-wisdom is the intuitive sense of experience that is able to realize the truth of impermanency of suffering, of impersonality or in other words the insubstantial nature of physical and mental phenomena of existence. According to Buddhist perspective, insight wisdom is not the result of mere intellectual understanding, but it is a kind of realization that links to direct meditative observation of one's own physical and mental process. The initial observation of the physical and mental phenomena with insight wisdom can lead one to attain *Nibbana*. In this theoretical context, Buddhists point out the fact that since the experience of *Nibbana* is pertinent to meditative practice, it is impossible to understand *Nibbanic* nature merely through intellectual speculation. “Realization of *Nibbana*” refers to realization of the process of path and fruition knowledge. That process is accomplished through supramundane wisdom at attainment of full enlightenment. The “experience of *Nibbana*” has the function of discovery. For the true essence of *Nibbana* arises with the attainment of the state of absolute peace; at that time, one experiences seeing the process of all phenomena that have totally ceased and absolute peace comes to exist.

The Final Realization of *Nibbana*

In terms of the realization of *Nibbana*, Buddhists bring up an abundance of positive and direct affirmations supporting the view of the attainment of *Nibbana* based on practice. Yet the emphatic language that they use is still negatives, such as absolute cessation, no birth and no death. Therefore, the Buddha emphasized *samma-ditthi* (right understanding). It takes an important and crucial role in the spiritual path. Right understanding involves insight wisdom that sees things truly as they exist. From the point of view of the Path, realization initially refers to *sammaditthi* (right understanding). The Buddha emphasizes how important right understanding is for liberation.

As matter of fact, *samma-ditthi* (right understanding) and *sama-sati* (right mindfulness) are essential for the realization of *Nibbana*. Basically, they make one's insight mature. When the meditator continues to observe mindfully on the object of *nama-rupa* (mind and body) his or her insight grows steadily and shows its intrinsic nature in clarity. The meditator comes to perceive more distinctly the arising and passing away of the process of mind and body; the meditator knows each object that arises at the moment and disappears immediately and the meditator realizes that the previous occurrence is one thing and the succeeding occurrence is another. Thus his or her right understanding can attain insight wisdom which able to lead one to realize *Nibbana*.

Regarding with attaining *Nibbana*, one must make a great effort in the practice of this meditation. Otherwise, the practice may be discouraging to the meditator, especially when one sees no progress in the practice. Skepticism or doubt about the practice will arise, For this reason, one needs to understand whether or not one's *parami* (spiritual perfection) is mature. That is important as well. And even if one's *parami* is mature enough, without effort one cannot attain *Nibbana* either. Therefore, one should make an effort to practice meditation vigorously and also to know whether or not one's *parami* is mature enough; then one can know whether or not one can attain enlightenment in this very life or in future lives.

In Theravada Texts, moreover, the notion of enlightenment is emphasized as eradication of *kilesas* (defilements) and liberation from *samsaric* sufferings. So long as has not attained insight wisdom through meditation, one sees things in an illusory manner due to ignorance. *Vipassana* meditation really helps one peel off layer after layer of ignorance until meditators anc gain insight wisdom; at that time they realize the true nature of reality and attain enlightenment, entry into *Nibbana*. According to the *Mahali Sutta*, Di-N, there are four levels of enlightenment. The enlightenment levels are based upon enlightened individuals. Among the enlightened individuals, the first stage of enlightened beings is a *Sotapanna* individual. A Stream-Enterer has cut off the three *samyojanas* (fettors): false view (*ditthi-samyojana*), skeptical doubt (*vicikiccha-samyojana*), and adherence to rites and rituals (*silabbataparamasa-samyojana*). "According to the commentaries, he also cuts off envy and avarice. He has freed himself as well from all degrees of defilements strong enough to lead to rebirth in the woeful planes." In addition, he has unshakable confidence or belief in the Buddha, *Dhamma*, and *Sangha*, and unbroken *sila* (the five precepts) with the scrupulous attitude in morality; he is free from the rebirth in any of the four woeful realms (*apaya*) and he will not be reborn more than seven times in the human world and celestial worlds.

The second stage of enlightened being is a *Sakadagami* individual. A Once-Returner reduces his greed, hatred, and delusion and will return to the sensual-sphere world only one more time. The third stage of enlightened being is an *Anagami* individual. A Non-Returner has totally abandoned sensual lust and ill will and he will not return to this sensuous world (human and celestial world). Regarding this level, in canonical texts such as in the *Mahali Sutta*, Di-N Vol. I, it is stated that a Non-Returner has abandoned the five lower fettors; he takes a spontaneous rebirth in a higher world (Brahma world) and he will attain enlightenment in that world. The final stage of enlightened being is an Arahant individual. The *Arahant* totally abandons all *samyojana* (fettors), all *kilesa* (defilements), and all *asava* (cankers, taints) through the extinction of mental corruption; he has realized by his own insight and path and fruition wisdom (enlightenment); and he will not be reborn in any existence. He enters the state of the absolute peace of *Nibbana*. Thus, he is named as a "fully enlightened one."

CONCLUSION

The functions of wisdom take place accordingly, until the supra-mundane Path and Fruition wisdom fully realize the state of *Nibbana* as their object. That is not to say that *Nibbana* is finally nothing, but that it goes beyond the mundane level that involves the process of rising and passing away of all phenomena. However, at the level of *Nibbana* this kind of process completely stops and goes into the state of the absolute peace. With the cessation of that process the yogis have the experience of absolute transcendental peace and supramundane bliss in the state of *Nibbana*. Thus the conclusion comes to this study that practicing the four mindfulness meditations and Noble eightfold Path rightly is our own spiritual work; the realization of *Nibbana* will arise by means of wisdom. Noble eightfold Path is the only way which leads to *Nibbana*, liberation.

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