

Vitakkasaṅḥāna sutta

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The Removal of Distracting Thoughts

(Majjhima Nikāya – 20)

The main purpose of all beings is to be happy. Although they do all things in the name of happiness, unfortunately, they mostly live with unsatisfactoriness, or their hopes end with sorrow. The main reason for this situation is even though we do something to overcome illness, death and separation, those things themselves cause us to create suffering again. Here, the supreme Buddha always preaches us how to overcome suffering truly and live with real happiness. If we can listen to his message and practice it in our lives, we can get rid of suffering and achieve real happiness in this life itself. Every word that the Buddha says guides us how to overcome unsatisfactoriness or suffering. Specially, among Buddhist teachings mindfulness which is appreciated by many times is one of the most important doctrines that we should practice for liberation.

The main reason whether we are happy or not is that the way how we think. If our mind is polluted with greed, anger and delusion, we have no happiness, because those negative thoughts disturb our peace of mind. Also, if our mind is purified from unwholesome thoughts: greed, anger and delusion, we are happy. If someone wants to be happy, he has to purify his mind from evil thoughts as much as he can. Further he should generate positive thoughts like generosity, loving kindness and wisdom. Wholesome thoughts: generosity, loving kindness and wisdom increase our peace of mind.

Buddhism always points out the way to decrease unwholesome thoughts. In this discourse: Vitakkasaṅḥāna Sutta, the Buddha has pointed out five techniques how to overcome evil thoughts. Here the Buddha said:

Adhi-citta-manu-yuttena, bhikkhave, bhikkhunā pañca nimittāni kālena kālaṃ manasi kātabbāni.

When someone is pursuing the higher mind, he should give attention to five signs from time to time. What are the five?

1. *Bhikkhunā tamhā nimittā aññaṃ nimittaṃ manasi kātabbaṃ kusalūpasamhitam.*

(Giving attention to another sign)

Here, when someone is giving attention to some sign, and owing to that sign there arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion, then he should give attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome. When he gives attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome, then any evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion are abandoned in him and subside. With the abandoning of them his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. Just as a skilled carpenter or his apprentice might knock out, remove, and extract a coarse peg by means of a fine one, so too...when a bhikkhu gives attention to some other sign connected with

what is wholesome...his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. Western phycologists describe this term as thought displacement.

2. *Tena, bhikkhave, bhikkhunā tesam vitakkānaṃ ādīnavo upapa-rikkhi-tabbo:*

(Examine the danger in evil thoughts)

If, while he is giving attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome, there still arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion, then he should examine the danger in those thoughts thus: ‘These thoughts are unwholesome, they are reprehensible, they result in suffering.’ When he examines the danger in those thoughts, then any evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion are abandoned in him and subside. With the abandoning of them his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. Just as a man or a woman, young, youthful, and fond of ornaments, would be horrified, humiliated, and disgusted if the carcass of a snake or a dog or a human being were hung around his or her neck, so too...when a bhikkhu examines the danger in those thoughts...his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. Western phycologists describe this term as aversion therapy.

3. *Tena, bhikkhave, bhikkhunā tesam vitakkānaṃ asatī-ama-nasikāro āpajjitabbo.*

(No reminding evil thoughts)

If, while he is examining the danger in those thoughts, there still arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion, then he should try to ignore it or not paying attention those thoughts and should not give attention to them. When he tries to ignore or not paying attention those thoughts and does not give attention to them, then any evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion are abandoned in him and subside. With the abandoning of them his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. Just as a man with good eyes who did not want to see forms that had come within range of sight would either shut his eyes or look away, so too...when a bhikkhu tries to ignore those thoughts and does not give attention to them ... his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. Also, Western phycologists describe this term as sublimation.

4. *Tena, bhikkhave, bhikkhunā tesam vitakkānaṃ vitak-ka-saṅ-khā-ra-saṅ-ṭhānaṃ*

manasikātabbaṃ. (giving attention to stilling the thought-formation of those thoughts)

If, while he is trying to not to remind those thoughts and is not giving attention to them, there still arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion, then he should give attention to stilling the thought-formation of those thoughts. When he gives attention to stilling the thought-formation of those thoughts, then any evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion are abandoned in him and subside. With the

abandoning of them his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. Just as a man walking fast might consider: ‘Why am I walking fast? What if I walk slowly?’ and he would walk slowly; then he might consider: ‘Why am I walking slowly? What if I stand?’ and he would stand; then he might consider: ‘Why am I standing? What if I sit?’ and he would sit; then he might consider: ‘Why am I sitting? What if I lie down?’ and he would lie down. By doing so he would substitute for each grosser posture one that was subtler. So too...when a bhikkhu gives attention to stilling the thought-formation of those thoughts...his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. Western psychologists describe this term as thought analysis.

5. *Tena, bhikkhave, bhikkhunā -dan-tebhi-danta-mā-dhāya jivhāya tāluṃ āhacca cetasā cittaṃ abhi-nig-gaṇ-hi-tabbam abhi-nip-pī-ḷetab-baṃ abhisan-tāpetab-baṃ.*
(beat down, constrain, and crush mind with mind.)

If, while he is giving attention to stilling the thought-formation of those thoughts, there still arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion, then, with his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, he should beat down, constrain, and crush mind with mind. When, with his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, he beats down, constrains, and crushes mind with mind, then any evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion are abandoned in him and subside. With the abandoning of them his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. Just as a strong man might seize a weaker man by the head or shoulders and beat him down, constrain him, and crush him, so too...when, with his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, a bhikkhu beats down, constrains, and crushes mind with mind...his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. And, Western psychologists describe this term as will power.

Bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu is giving attention to some sign, and owing to that sign there arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion, then when he gives attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome, any such evil unwholesome thoughts are abandoned in him and subside, and with the abandoning of them his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. When he examines the danger in those thoughts...When he tries to forget those thoughts and does not give attention to them...When he gives attention to stilling the thought-formation of those thoughts...When, with his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, he beats down, constrains, and crushes mind with mind, any such evil unwholesome thoughts are abandoned in him...and his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. This bhikkhu is then called a master of the courses of thought. He will think whatever thought he wishes to think and he will not think any thought that he does not wish to think. He has severed craving, flung off the fetters, and with the complete penetration of conceit he has made an end of suffering.

When the Blessed One said these five techniques to overcome defilements, the monks were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words.

Before we follow any kinds of techniques that given above, we should know the process of our lives as it is, according to what the Buddha said. When our eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind contact with external objects such as forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, mental formations, the experience arises at the moment. Simultaneously, five aggregates arise when a sense contacts with an object and mind. Five aggregates are: matter (*Rupa* - රූප), feelings (*Vedanā* - වේදනා), perception (*Saññā* - සංකීර්ණ), mental formations (*Sankhāra* - සංඛාර) and consciousness (*Viññāna* - විඤ්ඤාණ). These five aggregates are the bottom line of all our experiences which we receive through our senses. The nature of these five aggregates is they weren't here before the experience. And also, they don't remain after the experience.

As a result of the union of the five aggregates, when factors are together, we have experiences through our senses such as eye, ear, nose, tongue, body. When factors (or conditions) are separated, the experience ceases. The highest intelligence in Buddhism is the intelligence that "Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) will not come to (the future) occurrence" (*Ahutvā sambhutam hutvā na bhavissati* - අනුත්වා සම්භූතං හුත්වා න භවිස්සති). If we can understand this ultimate truth practicing insight meditation, that is the only way to get rid of suffering. This is the main teaching that the Buddha realized, discovered and preached to the world to get rid of suffering. The Buddha has explained this theory in various ways in his teachings like this;

When this is, that is (*Asmim sati idam hoti*)

This arising, that arises (*Imassa Uppādā idam uppajjati*)

When this is not, that is not (*Asmin asati idam na hoti*)

This ceasing, that ceases (*Imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati*)

Understanding of Buddhism depends on how far we have understood this theory, the dependent origination. If someone has clear knowledge, he is knowledgeable about suffering. Understanding of suffering causes us to understand the four noble truths. If someone knows suffering as lack of knowledge of this theory, listening to what the Buddha taught he tries to understand the dependent origination, five aggregates and four noble truths as much as he can. And also he always tries to practice the path to get rid of suffering. Here he has to practice three disciplines.

May all beings be well, happy, prosperous and peaceful!

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May The Triple Gem Bless You!

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(Tuesday Dhamma Discussion of Los Angeles Buddhist Vihara in Pasadena - 08/16/2016)