

# *Jarā Sutta - The Discourse of Old Age*

*(Samyutta.Nikāya.1)*

## The Invaluable Gem of Man - (*Paññā Narānam Ratanam*) -Wisdom

Once upon a time when the Buddha was at the Jetha's grove in Savasti, a deity came to the Buddha at a night and asked some questions saying a stanza

*“Kiṃsu yāva jarā sādhu, kiṃsu sādhu patiṭṭhitam;  
Kiṃsu narānaṃ ratanaṃ, kiṃsu chorehi dūharan”ti.*

What is good until old age? What is good when established?  
What is the precious gem (treasure) of humans? What is hard for thieves to steal?”

Then the Buddha answered his questions thus;

*“Sīlam yāva jarā sādhu, saddhā sādhu patiṭṭhitā;  
Paññā narānaṃ ratanaṃ, puññaṃ chorehi dūharan”ti.*

“Virtue is good until old age; Confidence is good when established;  
Wisdom is the precious gem of humans; Merit is hard for thieves to steal.”

Here the Blessed One emphasizes the importance of four things which are virtue, confidence, wisdom and merits in this discourse. Virtue or discipline in speech and behavior is very useful for a successful life. When someone practice virtue he has no regrets. Also, he is respected in society. Confidence in the triple gem (The Buddha, Dhamma and Sanga) helps to have a peaceful life. Wisdom completely eradicates delusion which is the main cause of suffering. Merit that someone did is never can be stolen by anyone. It follows us like a shadow. Here it is very important to realize what wisdom is since wisdom is highly praised in Buddhism.

The Dhamma that the Buddha explained is well expounded (*Svākkhāto*), directly visible (*Sanditthiko*), immediately effective (*Akālika*), calling one to come and see (*Ehipassiko*), leading onwards (*Opanaiko*), to be personally realized by the wise (*Paccattam Veditabbo Viññuhi*). To achieve final bliss of liberation, we have to listen to the Buddha's message with good attention for our knowledge and follow it honestly as much as we can.

Wisdom or intelligence, which mainly helps us to overcome suffering and attain liberation from defilements, is highly praised in Buddhism. Wisdom is understanding the world reality as it is. The main cause whether we are happy is the level of our wisdom. Our real success depends on how much we have achieved wisdom. Hence, wisdom has been compared to a gem (*Paññā naranam ratanam*). Wisdom brings purification (*Paññāya parisujjhati*). There is no other bright light like wisdom (*Natthi paññā samā ābhā*). Wisdom is used in several terms in Pali language such as *Sammā Ditti* (සමමා දිට්ඨි), *Paññā* (පඤ්ඤා), *Amoha* (අමෝච). Wisdom should be increased from the beginning till the end to the maximum level of the path of enlightenment.

Therefore Buddhism always guides us to gain wisdom through all kinds of advices that the supreme Buddha explained in his entire life. At the very beginning of his first sermon, Dhammacakka Sutta the Buddha declared his experience about gaining wisdom "Eye arose in me (*Cakkhum Udapādi*), knowledge arose in me (*Ñānam Udapādi*), wisdom arose in me (*Panna Udapāda*), science arose in me (*Vijja Udapādi*), light arose in me (*Aloko Udapādi*)". The Buddha explains here his wisdom that he gained when he is enlightened.

The way, that we think not to arise defilements (taints) and increase wholesome thoughts, is wise reflection. Protecting our mind from negative thoughts that are evil which disturb our peace of mind, we develop the mind to the maximum level with high spiritual progress. Mental condition is the main reason which decides whether we are happy. Mind is the forerunner of all mental conditions (මනෝ පුබ්බංගමා ධම්මා). Also mind is chief (මනෝ ජෙට්ඨා) and mind-made are mental conditions (මනෝමයා). By practicing the spiritual path, wise investigation guides us in the correct path preserving the mind.

### ***Sila* = Virtue or Morality**

*Sila*, virtue means discipline in our speech and behavior. The more we have good discipline the more we have confidence in our behavior. Then wise people don't blame us. Here, Buddhism often emphasizes the importance of practicing five precepts; abstaining from killing life, abstaining from stealing, abstaining from sexual misconduct, abstaining from intoxicating drinks and drugs. Living according to the five precepts is the foundation of moral conduct. Practicing this path leads to overcome fear and hatred. Also, virtue helps us to have a blissful life hereafter.

### ***Saddhā* = Confidence in the triple gem**

*Saddhā* means the confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. Here we trust in the Buddha's enlightenment. The Supreme Buddha realized and proclaimed the path of liberation with the understanding of the dependent origination. Also, we are confident in what the Buddha taught. The Buddha's message is that not to do evil, do good and purifying one's mind. When someone has confidence in the Buddha and Dhamma, he is pleasant with Sangha who practice this path. This confidence is a strong establishment in our spiritual life.

### ***Puñña* = Merit**

With the understanding of what the Buddha explained, first, we can understand the Karmic law. Here the wise person tries to keep his mind pure and practice three meritorious deeds as much as he can. They are generosity (*Dāna*), morality (*Sīla*) and meditation (*Bhāvanā*). The Buddha points out that doing merits means achieving happiness. Keeping mind with merits always is like a refuge of mind. The person who is with wise reflection always tries to do merits for the benefits of his life like longevity, good complexion, health and happiness. These results of merit can't be stolen by anyone. This merit follows practitioner as the shadow.

## ***Paññā = Wisdom***

According to Buddhism, four factors help us to develop wisdom. Presenting these four qualities, Buddhism encourages us to practice the path of purification as much as we can. Those four factors are;

1. Association with a good friend who explains the Buddha's real message  
(*Sappurisa sansevo*-සජ්ජුරිස සංසේවෝ)
2. Listening to the Buddha's Message  
(*Saddhamma savanam*-සද්ධම්ම සවණං)
3. Wise Reflection  
(*Yoniso manasikāro*-යෝනියෝ මනසිකාරෝ)
4. Practicing the message  
(*Dhammānudhamma patipatti*-ධම්මානුධම්මපටිපත්ති)

When we associate with a noble friend, we can listen to the sublime truth that a Buddha emphasized. Listening to this noble message, we go forward practicing the message with wise reflection. Here, wise reflection plays a main role in the path of enlightenment.

In the discourse of *Sabbāsava* (MN.1), further the Buddha explains the importance in practicing wise reflection. "The destruction of the defilements is for the one who knows and sees, not for the one who does not know and see. Who knows and sees what? It is wise reflection and unwise reflection. **When one contemplates wisely, unrisen defilements don't arise and arisen defilements decrease. When one contemplates unwisely, unrisen defilements arise and arisen defilements increase.**

Wisdom in Buddhism is divided into two; the understanding of Karmic law and the understanding of impermanence. As much as we have this understanding, we are able to see the world reality how suffering doesn't arise and what the path of real happiness. The Buddha has pointed out two paths which are the heavenly path (*Sagga magga* = සත්මමත්ත) and the enlightenment (deliverance / liberation) path (*Mokkhamagga* = මොක්ඛමත්ත) to the world kindly. Representing the Karmic law the Buddha explained the heavenly path. Also explaining the dependent origination the Buddha pointed out the deliverance path. According to listeners' courage, dedication and wisdom, they are able to go forward on these paths. The heavenly path describes how to be reborn in the human realm and heavenly realm. Enlightenment path describes how to achieve enlightenment going away from the circle of rebirth. The Right Understanding that we receive through listening to the Dhamma increases the understanding of both paths above.

To reflect on wisely, we should have enough knowledge through listening to the Buddha's Message. Especially, we may have knowledge about the Karmic law (*Kamma*), the dependent origination (*Paticca samuppāda*), impermanence (*Anicca*), the noble eightfold path (ආර්ය අෂ්ටාංගික මාර්ගය), the four-noble truth (*Catusacca*), three disciplines (*Tisikkha*) and three characteristics (*Tilakkhana*). When we experience about the world through our six senses, we are able to reflect on our experience through the Buddha's message. Knowledge is the first step of the path of liberation. Wise reflection and practice of (tranquility - *Samatha* and insight - *Vipassanā*) meditation are other two steps.

The supreme Buddha points out "*I don't see any other important quality like (සෝචිසෝ මනසිකාර) wise reflection which helps to decrease defilements and develop spiritual faculties.*" The wise reflection or wise investigation is related to mindfulness (*Sati-සති*) and wisdom (*Paññā-පඤ්ඤා*). Reflection or attention that is always together with mind is a thought. This can be wholesome or unwholesome. Unwholesome attention creates negative thoughts, words and behaviors. It brings suffering. Wholesome attention creates positive thoughts, words, and behaviors bringing happiness.

In our day to day life, if we suffer it means we have lost our wise reflection. We have sufferings, mistakes, tears, lamentations because of unwise reflection. If we can keep wise reflection every moment developing mindfulness, we are able to overcome all kinds of mental disturbances. Our main goal in our lives is happiness. As much as we like to live happily, we have to develop wise reflection continuously and promptly.

Further, it is important to know how we apply wise reflection in our day to day life. For examples, when we meet a person, we mostly think about his physical body, and we forget that he or she has a mind. Truly we meet a person in the world because he or she has a mind. If somebody doesn't have a mind, we never say he is a person. We tell it is a dead body. When we practice wise investigation, as soon as we remember a person, if we are able to reflect on his mind as well as his physical body, we can overcome 50 percent defilements that are arisen by ignorance of reality. Further, if we can practice loving kindness meditation about the people, our mind is always ready to forgive anybody. The highest level of practicing loving kindness is looking at others like our only son or daughter. If we have this kind of attitude, it means we have overcome a lot of problems, stress, anger, jealousy form our mind. It sounds that we have overcome a lot of suffering. On the other hand, as soon as we see a person, if we can understand that person as a result of five aggregates (forms, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and mind), our mind is in the highest level which is completely free from suffering.

When we investigate our mind, we mostly live thinking about past experiences. we mostly live in the past in our life. When we think about our past experiences, unconsciously, our mind goes to the past and we live in the past. Unfortunately, we don't know this nature because of ignorance. Thinking about past is not the fault or cause of suffering. The fault is unawareness that mind goes to the past. Because of this misconception, we experience the past like present. For examples, if somebody has blamed you, when you think about it, you are again blamed. That person has blamed once, but you are blamed again and again because of this delusion. Also when one of your close relatives dies, you worry thinking about his life, as it is happening now. We mostly suffer living in the past. To overcome this false impression, we have to live with wise investigation. That is why the supreme Buddha emphasized the importance of practicing wise reflection.

We usually experience through our senses such as eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. When objects such as forms, sounds, smell, taste reach senses, we experience about the

world. The nature of this experience is arising at the moment and instantly ceasing at once. Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) will not come to (the future) occurrence. (අනුත්ථා සම්භූතං නුත්ථා න භවිස්සති). It means if we experience something now, it was not happened in the past in the same way like now.

The Buddha explains the theory in his main teaching that in the dependent origination like this;

"This, this being - this comes to be" (*Asmim sati idam hoti*)

With the arising of this – this arises" (*Imassa uppada idam uppajjati*)

This not being – this doesn't come to be (*Asmim asati idam na hoti*)

With the cessation of this – this ceases" (*Imassa nirodha idam nirujjati*)

Also present experience doesn't go to the future in the same way. If somebody can understand this reality, he is ready to give up extremes about the past and the future. Also he tries to live in the present moment seeing arising and ceasing wisely with fully awareness.

In this situation to get rid of this ignorance, wise reflection guides us to live in the present moment seeing world reality as impermanence. Our real happiness depends on how much we are clever to live in the present moment. Here, it doesn't sound that we forget our past or future. We may have good memory about the past and the future, but we don't run to the past and future without mindfulness. We see the past and future with full awareness. Buddhism never says to forget the past or the future. When we think about something the past or the future, we may have real awareness that now I read my mind. Here we practice to see the past and the future with full awareness about the present.

To be permanent this experience, we have to follow a path that is the noble eightfold path. It is,

1.	Right Understanding	( <i>Sammā ditthi</i> )	සම්මා දිට්ඨි
2.	Right Thoughts	( <i>Sammā samkappa</i> )	සම්මා සංකප්ප
3.	Right Speech	( <i>Sammā vācā</i> )	සම්මා වාචා
4.	Right Action	( <i>Sammā kammantha</i> )	සම්මා කම්මන්ත
5.	Right Livelihood	( <i>Sammā ājiva</i> )	සම්මා ආජීව
6.	Right Effort	( <i>Sammā vāyāma</i> )	සම්මා වායාම
7.	Right Mindfulness	( <i>Sammā sati</i> )	සම්මා සති
8.	Right Concentration	( <i>Sammā samādhi</i> )	සම්මා සමාධි

As much as we have right understanding about the path listening to the Buddha's message, we are gradually ready to practice other steps. Day by day we go forward in this path seeing the reality which is impermanence wisely. These eight steps consist of three disciplines those are virtue, tranquility (or concentration) and wisdom. With the understanding of The Noble Eightfold Path, we form self-discipline in our speech and behavior. Discipline helps us to go forward in the path of purification practicing meditation. In purification of the mind, we mainly use two

meditation techniques that are concentration or tranquility and insight. In the tranquility meditation, we keep our mind with a particular good thought. As a result of concentrated mind, we can live for a long time without suffering and stress, but it is not permanent and it can be changed. Here we practice and develop our awareness especially in mind and body. We practice to do all kinds of activities mindfully. Mindfulness is one of the most important qualities that we have to develop for purification of our mind.

Concentration is not enough to eradicate defilements completely. That is why Buddhism says us to develop another step that is insight meditation for permanent happiness. Here, with the concentrated mind, we reflect on three characteristics of existence of all kinds of things which are mental and physical. They are;

- |      |                    |                          |
|------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| i.   | Impermanence,      | ( <i>Anicca</i> -අනිච්ච) |
| ii.  | Unsatisfactoriness | ( <i>Dukkha</i> -දුක්ඛ)  |
| iii. | Selflessness       | ( <i>Anatta</i> -අනත්ත)  |

We do reflection again and again on these three characteristics of existence (ත්‍රිලක්ෂණ). As a result of practicing this world reality, we develop wisdom with the knowledge of impermanence. Simultaneously, we develop five qualities which are confidence (*Saddā*-සද්ධා), effort (*Viriya*-වීරිය), mindfulness (*Sati*-සති), concentration (*Samādhi*-සමාධි) and wisdom (*Paññā*-පඤ්ඤා). As the result of practicing The Noble Eightfold Path with mindfulness and wisdom, we gradually reach to the real happiness increasing defilements. Final experience of this is living in the present moment with full awareness seeing arising and ceasing without any desirable attachment or destruction. That is the highest goal of practicing the Buddha's message which is the world reality. Then we are able to overcome unsatisfactoriness, sorrow, lamentations and all kind of suffering completely in this life itself.



May the Triple Gem Bless you!

තෙරුවන් සරණයි!

May all beings be well happy and peaceful!

(සියලු සත්ත්වයෝ සුවපත් වෙත්වා!)

**(Tuesday Dhamma Discussion of Los Angeles Buddhist Vihara in Pasadena. 06/18/2019)**