

Wisdom - *Paññā* - පඤ්ඤා

The Priceless Gem of Men

(*Paññā Narānam Ratanam*)

Wisdom or Insight, which mainly helps us to overcome suffering and attain liberation from defilements, is highly praised in Buddhism. 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 (පඤ්ඤා නරානං රතන). Wisdom brings purification (පඤ්ඤාය පරිසුඡ්ඤානි). There is no other bright light like wisdom (නන්ථි පඤ්ඤා සමා ආහා). Wisdom is used in several terms in Pali language such as *Sammā Ditti* (සම්මා දිට්ඨි), *paññā* (පඤ්ඤා), *Amoha* (අමෝහ). 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 advice 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 (*Paññā Udapādi*), 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 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.

The Buddha points out four kinds of lights in this world. They are;

1. The light of the moon (*Candāloko*)
2. The light of the sun (*Sūriyāloko*)
3. The light of fire (*Aggāloko*)
4. The light of wisdom (*Paññāloko*)

Among these four lights, wisdom is the most valuable light which directly causes to overcome suffering. The opposite of wisdom is ignorance (or delusion) which is the main cause of suffering and **the most severe defilement** (*Avijjā paramam malam*). In this situation, wisdom is highly admired in Buddhism. Also, all Buddhist doctrines what the Buddha taught for 45 years focus on giving wisdom. The more someone develops wisdom the more he or she reduces ignorance. He who develops wisdom to the maximum level, reduces ignorance completely and overcome suffering and the Sansaric circle as well.

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*-සප්පුරිස සංසේවෝ)
2. Listening to the Buddha's Message (*Saddhamma savanam*- සද්ධම්ම සවණං)
3. Wise Reflection (*Yoniso manasikāro*- යෝනිසෝ මනසිකාරෝ)
4. Practicing the message (*Dhammānudhamma patipatti*-ධම්මානුධම්මපටිපත්ති)

When we associate 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 attends wisely, unrisen defilements don't arise and arisen defilements increase. When one attends unwisely, unrisen defilements arise and arisen defilements are abandoned.

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 සෙට්ඨා) and mind-made are mental conditions (මනෝමයා). By practicing the spiritual path, wise investigation guides us in the correct path preserving the mind.

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* = සග්ගමග්ග) and the enlightenment (deliverance / liberation) path (*Mokkhamagga* = මොක්ඛමග්ග) 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 realms. Enlightenment path describes how to achieve enlightenment breaking 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 (කර්මඵල න්‍යාය), the dependent origination (පටිච්ච සමුප්පාදය), impermanence (අනිත්‍යතාව), the noble eightfold path (ආර්ය අෂ්ටාංගික මාර්ගය), the four-noble truth (චතුරාර්ය සත්‍යය), the three disciplines (ත්‍රිශික්ෂාව) and the three characteristics (ත්‍රිලක්ෂණ). 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 - සමථ and insight - විපස්සනා) meditation are the other two steps.

The supreme Buddha points out "*I don't see any other important quality like (සෝචිසෝ චනසිකාර) 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.

With the understanding of what the Buddha explained, first, we come across the Karmic law. Then the intelligent person tries to keep his mind pure and practice the three meritorious deeds as much as he can. They are generosity (*Dāna*), morality (*Seela*) and meditation (*Bhāvanā*). The Buddha points out that doing merits means achieving happiness. Keeping mind with merits always is like a refuge to the 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.

Further, it is important to know how we apply wise reflection in our day to day life. For an example, 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 someone doesn't have a mind, we never say he is a person. We tell it is a dead body. When we practice wise investigation, if we are able to reflect on his mind as well as his physical body, as soon as we remember a person, we can overcome 50 percent of defilements that are arisen by ignorance of reality. Further, if we can practice loving kindness meditation towards 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 sufferings. 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, metal 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. More than 75 percent of our time in our, life we live in the past. 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 the past is not the fault or cause of suffering. The fault is unknowing that mind goes to the past. Because of this misconception, we experience the past like present. For an example, if somebody has blamed you, when you think about it unwisely and

unmindfully, you are blamed again. That person has blamed you once, but you are blamed again and again because of this delusion non-mindfulness. Also when one of your close relatives died, you worry thinking about his life, as it happens 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. (අනුන්වා සම්භූතං භුන්වා න භවිස්සති). It means if we experience something now, it didn't happen in the past in the same way like now.

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

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

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

When 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 full 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 in the past or the future, we have a real awareness that now I read my mind. Likewise, we practice to see the past and the future with full awareness about the present.

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

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| 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 a right understanding about the path listening to the Buddha's message, we are ready to practice other steps gradually. Day by day we go forward in this path wisely seeing the reality which is impermanence. 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 our 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 the Buddha asks us to develop another step that is insight meditation for permanent happiness. Here, with the concentrated mind, we reflect on all kinds of things that are mental and physical on three characteristics of existence (ත්‍රිලක්ෂණ). They are;

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

We reflect on these three characteristics of existence (ත්‍රිලක්ෂණ) again and again. 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 the real happiness increasing defilements. Final experience of this effort 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 dissatisfaction, sorrow, lamentations and all kinds of sufferings 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!)

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