

Moha - Avijjā

Delusion or Ignorance - The Most Severe Defilement

The main purpose of all Buddhist doctrines is to point out the arising of dissatisfaction and the cessation of dissatisfaction. In other words, the Buddha's attempt was to describe the path of happiness or liberation. Liberation or happiness of beings completely depends on purifying one's mind. Purifying one's mind depends on reducing greed, anger and delusion. When delusion ceases, greed and anger gradually overcome. There are several synonyms for ignorance in Buddhism like *avijjā*, *moha*, *micchāditti*, *andhakāra* etc. Ignorance is the main root for all defilements. That is why the Buddha says ignorance is the most severe defilement (*avijjā paramam malam*) among all other defilements.

One day, announcing the monks the Buddha says; *Bhikkhus, there are world interstices, vacant and abysmal regions of blinding darkness and gloom, where the light of the sun and moon, so powerful and mighty, does not reach.*”

When this was said, a certain bhikkhu said to the Blessed One: “That darkness, venerable sir, is indeed great; that darkness is indeed very great. But is there, venerable sir, any other darkness greater and more frightful than that one?”

“There is, bhikkhu.”

“But what, venerable sir, is that darkness greater and more frightful than that one?”

“Those ascetics and brahmins, bhikkhu, who do not understand as it really is: ‘This is suffering’; who do not understand as it really is: ‘This is the origin of suffering’; who do not understand as it really is: ‘This is the cessation of suffering’; who do not understand as it really is: ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering’—they delight in volitional formations that lead to birth, in volitional formations that lead to aging, in volitional formations that lead to death, in volitional formations that lead to sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. Delighting in such volitional formations, they generate volitional formations that lead to birth, generate volitional formations that lead to aging, generate volitional formations that lead to death, generate volitional formations that lead to sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. Having generated such volitional formations, they tumble into the darkness of birth, tumble into the darkness of aging, tumble into the darkness of death, tumble into the darkness of sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. They are not freed from birth, aging, and death; not freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair; not freed from suffering, I say.

There are two causes of ignorance which are bad association and unwise reflection. The causes of wisdom which is the opposite of ignorance are good association and wise reflection. The more one who listens to what the Buddha taught wisely, the more he overcomes ignorance and suffering.

Ignorance or delusion can be divided into two which are unknowing of the Karmic law and unknowing of arising & cessation of suffering. The Karmic law is that, whatever we do with intention physically, verbally or mentally we will receive the same results. When mind is polluted, results are evil or negative. Also, if the mind is pure, the results are fruitful. Unknowing of the suffering means thinking that suffering arises according to external things. Also thinking that our experiences we receive through six senses is permanent, satisfactory and egoless. Greed (covetousness) and anger (ill will) arise because of ignorance, unknowing of the nature of the five aggregates which are corporeality, feelings, perception, consciousness and mental formations. The reality of our life is that arising and ceasing of five aggregates which arise together and cease together at the moment according to conditions.

Reducing defilements such as greed, anger, jealousy etc. entirely depends on reducing delusion which is the main cause of all negative mental states. According to Buddhism, reducing delusion depends on inspiring wisdom. Therefore, all the Buddhist doctrines focus on achieving wisdom. Also, Buddhism always encourages us to develop wisdom to the maximum level on the path of liberation as much as we can. The more someone develops wisdom, the more he or she reduces ignorance. The more someone reduces ignorance, the more he or she overcomes greed, lust and anger. The more someone reduces these negative thoughts, the more he or she has achieved the supreme bliss of happiness.

Wisdom – *Paññā* - පඤ්ඤා

Wisdom or intelligence, which mainly helps us to overcome suffering (or dissatisfaction) and attain liberation from defilements, is highly valued and praised in Buddhism. **The level of our happiness depends on the level of our wisdom.** Our real success depends on how much we have achieved wisdom. Because of that, wisdom has been compared to a gem (*paññā narānam ratanam* - පඤ්ඤා නරානං රතනං) in Buddhism saying "Wisdom is the priceless gem of men". Wisdom purifies one's mind (*paññāya parisujhāti* - පඤ්ඤාය පරිසුජ්ඣති). There is no other bright light like wisdom (*Natthi paññā sama ābhā* - නත්ථි පඤ්ඤා සමා ආභා). Wisdom is used in several terms in Pali language such as *Sammā Ditti* (සම්මා දිට්ඨි), *Āloka* (ආලෝක), *Ñnanā* (ඤ්ඤා), *Cakkhu* (චක්ඛු), *Paññā* (පඤ්ඤා), *Vijjā* (විජ්ජා), *Amoha* (අමෝහ). Wisdom should be developed 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. 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 will be able to see the reality of the world and understand how suffering doesn't arise and what is the path for real happiness.

According to Buddhism, four factors help us to overcome ignorance developing 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 samsevo* - සප්පුරිස සංසෙවෝ)
2. Listening to the Buddha's Message
(*Saddhamma savanam* - සද්ධම්ම සවණං)

3. Wise Reflection (*Yoniso manasikāro* - යෝනිසෝ මනසිකාරෝ)
 4. Practicing the Buddha's message (*Dhammānudhamma patipatti* - ධම්මානුධම්මපටිපත්ති)

When we associate noble friends, we can listen to the sublime truth which helps us to purify our mind. Listening to this noble message, we go forward practicing the message with wise reflection which plays a main role in the path of enlightenment.

In our lives, if we make sure that no defilements (taints) arise in our thinking, but increase wholesome thoughts, it 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 පුබ්බිංගමා ධම්මා*). Also, mind is chief (*මනෝ සෙව්ඨා*) and mind-made are mental conditions (*මනෝමයා*). By practicing the spiritual path, wise investigation guides us in the correct path preserving the mind.

According to Buddhism, all unwholesome thoughts can be divided into three. They are;

1. Desire (*Lobha* - ලෝභ)
2. Anger (*Dosa* - දෝස)
3. Delusion (*Moha* - මෝහ)

These are the main unwholesome mental states (defilements) which disturb our peace of mind. If we have more unwholesome emotions, it means we have more suffering. If we have less defilements, it means we have less suffering. If someone needs to live with more happiness, he has to reduce these defilements. Desire means the attachment as lust, craving or greed. Anger means conflict as ill will. Delusion means unknowing of the world reality or ignorance of impermanence. Among those three defilements, ignorance is the worst unwholesome state.

Our success in the path of liberation depends on how far we have reduced these three unwholesome thoughts. We can see two levels on the path of reducing defilements. First level is the surface level. Here to reduce greed, lust or attachment, we can practice generosity and contemplate on impurity of body parts. Also, the path of reducing anger or hatred is to practice loving kindness and virtue. Though we can reduce greed and anger using these techniques, it is a temporary solution. The second level is the deeper level. It is the ultimate and permanent solution. In the second level, our vision is completely changed into the correct way that helps us to eradicate defilements completely. The path of eradication of all defilements entirely is that practicing mindfulness and mindful meditation.

To reflect on this wisely, we should have enough knowledge through listening to the Buddha's Message. The very first level of wisdom of Buddhism is that understanding the Karmic law (*කර්මඵල න්‍යාය*). The karmic law means what we do with intention physically verbally or mentally has results according to volition. If someone does something with a wicked mind, suffering follows him. Also, if the mind is pure, results are fruitful. If someone has this understanding listening to the dhamma, he tries to overcome evil actions which consists with unwholesome thoughts (*sabba pāpassa akaranam*). And he tries to do good deeds which consist with wholesome thoughts as much as he can (*kusalassa*

upasampadā). Here he practices three meritorious deeds which are generosity virtue and meditation as much as he can. As the results of these activities he lives happily in this life and he is ready to go to a blissful life as soon as he dies. However, he is still in the Sansaric journey since he hasn't eradicated ignorance completely yet. That is why Buddhism points out the second level of wisdom which guides us to overcome ignorance entirely.

The second level of wisdom is the understanding the dependent origination which is the exact process of existence of beings. The supreme Buddha says that I proclaim the liberation to those who know the path and who see the path. What path is that? It is the understanding of the cessation of suffering. In this second level, we go deeper to reduce defilements permanently. Here, knowledge, reflection and practice are very important. We have attachment and anger because of unknowing of experience. The nature of all our experience is instant. The experience that we receive with our senses arises and ceases at the moment according to conditions. When conditions are together, the experiences as forms, sounds, smell, taste, touch, mental formations arise at the moment. The experience doesn't come to the present from the past. And it doesn't go to the future from the present. **Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) will not come to (the future) occurrence.** (*Ahutvā sambutam hutvā na bhavissati* - අනුන්වා සම්භවං හුන්වා න භවිස්සති). When conditions separate, the experience ceases without anything remaining. This is the reality that we experience every moment. However, because of our ignorance we think that the experience remains after experience. We live in the ceased experience every time we think of something. This is the main cause of suffering. If we have this knowledge about the cause of suffering, we reflect on it again and again in our daily life. And also, we try to eradicate defilements permanently by practicing the path leading to the cessation from suffering. understand this reality we have to practice three disciplines which are virtue (*sila* - සීල), concentration (*samādhi* - සමාධි) and wisdom (*paññā* - පඤ්ඤා).

When we investigate our own mind, it is clear that we mostly think about our past experiences than the present and the future. 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 without our knowledge resulting we live in the past again. Unfortunately, we don't know this nature of our mind because of ignorance. Thinking about past is not the fault or cause of suffering, but the fault is that the mind goes to the past unknowingly. Because of this misconception, we experience the past like present. For an example, you continue to think of an incident that someone blamed you in the past, you are blamed again and again as long as you think about this incident without mindfulness. That person has blamed you once, but you are blamed again and again because of this ignorance. Also, when one of your close relatives dies, you worry thinking about him, as he or she is still alive. 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. The highest wise reflection is seeing the dependent origination. Understanding of the dependent origination means understanding of the Dhamma. Also understanding of the Dhamma is the way to see the Buddha. That is why Buddhism says;

He who sees the Dependent Origination sees the Dhamma. He who sees the Dhamma sees the Dependent Origination (*Yo paticcasamuppādam passati so dhamma passati, Yo dhamma passati, so paticcasamuppādam passati*)

He who sees the Dhamma sees the Buddha. He who sees the Buddha sees the Dhamma (*Yo dhamma passati so mam passati Yo mam passati so dhamma passati*)

Seeing the Dependent Origination is the real path to see the Dhamma and the Buddha as well.

We usually experience through our senses such as eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. When objects such as forms, sounds, smell, taste reach our senses, we experience about the world. The nature of this experience is arising at the moment and ceasing instantly. If anyone 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 mean that we forget our past or future. We may have a 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 should 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 make this experience permanent, mindfulness should be practiced. On the path of liberation achieving wisdom, practicing mindfulness is the firm foundation which is the safe field. That is why the Buddha has highly praised the importance of practicing mindfulness as **the one and only way** (*Ekāyano ayam bhikkhave maggo*);

For the purification of beings (*sattānam visuddhiyā*),

For the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation (*sokapariddavānam samatikkhamāya*),

For the destruction of pain and grief (*dukkhadomanassānam attamgamāya*),

For the gaining of knowledge (*ñāyassa adigamāya*)

For the attaining (or realization) of Nibbana (or enlightenment) (*nibbānassa saccikiriyāya*)
which is practicing the fourfold mindfulness (*yadidam cattāro satipatthānā*).

As much as we have right understanding about the path listening to the Buddha's message, we are 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

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 Buddhism explains us to develop another step that is insight meditation for permanent happiness. Here, with the concentrated mind, we reflect on the three characteristics (*Tilakkhana*) of existence of all kinds of things mental and physical. They are;

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

We reflect again and again on these three characteristics of existence (*Tilakkhana* - 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* - විරිය), 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 decreasing defilements. Finally, we are able to live in the present moment with full awareness seeing arising and ceasing without any desirable attachment or destruction. It means we have overcome dissatisfaction.

*“Yena mohena mūlhāse, sattā gacchanti duggatim;
Taṃ moham sammadaññāya, pajahanti vipassino;
Pahāya na punāyanti, imaṃ lokaṃ kudācānan”ti.*

Beings confused by delusion. Go to rebirth in a bad bourn.
But having rightly understood delusion, those with insight abandon it.
By abandoning it they never come. Back to this world again.

*Atta deepā bhikkhave viharatha atta saranā na anna saranā,
Dhamma deepā bhikkhave dhamma saranā na anna saranā.* (Attadeepa Sutta)

Dwell with yourself as an island as a refuge with no other refuge!
Dwell with the Dhamma as an island as a refuge with no other refuge!

Oh! All conditions are impermanent,
their nature is to arise and cease
having arisen, they cease;
their stilling is true bliss.”

Actually, if we can practice mindfulness with right understanding and reflecting on impermanence as the Buddha stated, all other qualities such as confidence, energy, concentration and wisdom also increase gradually. Therefore, we should always try to be mindful about our mind and body. Practicing mindfulness means that we are on the path of liberation from all sufferings.

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