

Mindfulness (සතිපට්ඨාන)

The Only Path to Liberation

(Vibhaṅga Sutta) - (Saṃyutta Nikāya, Satipatthāna Saṃyutta, 326p)

Mindfulness is a main teaching in Buddhism like the heart of Buddhism. All Buddhist doctrines which belong to the ultimate truth for liberation can be included in Mindfulness. According to Vibhaṅga Sutta in Satipatthāna Saṃyutta (SN), the Buddha explains three stages of mindfulness which is a main teaching in Buddhism for inner peace. Those three stages are;

1. Mindfulness (*Satipatthāna*)
2. Mindfulness Meditation (*Satipatthānabhāvanā*)
3. The path that leads to mindfulness meditation. (*Satipatthānabhāvanāgāmini paṭipadaṃ*)

If someone can understand these three stages, it is very easy to cleanse the path of liberation and practice mindfulness and gain the results maximumly for the purification of mind.

The Buddha always advices us to make a refuge within us. The reason is that if we depend on outside world, our happiness is decided by the outside world, that means any time it can be changed it. Practicing mindfulness is the way how we can make a refuge within us. Here we are always aware of our body and mind. No one can make us suffering. And no one can steal our inner peace. It means our happiness is in our control. Then we don't need to wait seeking happiness from the outside material world.

All Buddhist doctrines that the Buddha has explained in 45 years of his ministry focus on how to achieve happiness. That means nothing else, but getting rid of suffering. That's why the Buddha says in the past and in the present, I explain only two things which are suffering and the cessation of suffering. The main purpose of all beings is to be happy. Although they do everything in the name of happiness, unfortunately, they mostly live unhappily, or their hopes end with sorrow. The main reason for this situation is though we do everything to overcome illness, death and separation, those things themselves cause us to create suffering again and 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. Mindfulness which is praised and recommended many times in Buddhism is one of the most important doctrines that we should practice for liberation. Especially, Vibhaṅga Sutta in Saṃyutta Nikāya describes mindfulness in three stages which are very important to know by everyone who likes to practice mindfulness in the proper way to achieve liberation.

Buddhism explains the reasons we suffer. Birth is suffering. Decay is suffering. Sickness is suffering. Death is suffering... Finally, Buddhism concludes all sufferings in five aggregates. In short, arising of the five aggregates is suffering (*Saṅkhittena pañcupādānakkhandā dukkhā*). The path of getting rid of suffering depends on understanding and releasing the grasping of the five

aggregates. Practicing mindfulness is the path that leads to the liberation from the suffering of the five aggregates.

Mindfulness guides us how to live in the present moment. When we spend our life, we mostly live in the past or future. Unfortunately, we don't know that we live in the past or future because of ignorance and lack of mindfulness. We have lost the chance of seeing the beauty of the present experience. By practicing mindfulness, we train our mind not to go to the past or future without awareness, but to live in the present moment seeing the world reality. Our success or happiness and how far we have overcome suffering depend on how much we have practiced mindfulness. By practicing mindfulness, we train our mind to be aware of our mind and body. Mindfulness is the best friend who brings real happiness. Mind with mindfulness is the best friend. Similarly, mind without mindfulness is the worst enemy. We should be clever enough to live with the best friend getting rid of the worst enemy.

The importance of practicing mindfulness is always emphasized among Buddhist doctrines. Mindfulness is the seventh factor of the Noble Eightfold Path; it is the third faculty (or indriya) of The Five Spiritual Faculties; and it is also the first faculty of The Seven Enlightenment Faculties. Therefore, we can understand how important it is in Buddhism. Mindfulness in Buddhism relates to wisdom which is the understanding of impermanence.

All Buddhist teachings can be included into one topic that is mindfulness. Our spiritual success and real happiness depend on how far we have practiced mindfulness in our lives. Practicing Buddhism means practicing mental culture. Practicing mental culture means practicing mindfulness. Also, practicing mindfulness means practicing happiness. Finally, we can say very clearly practicing all teachings of the Buddha means practicing mindfulness. The entire dispensation of the Buddha depends on practicing mindfulness. Hence mindfulness is highly praised in Buddhism.

That is why Buddhism illustrates the one and only way;

for the purification of beings (*Sattānaṃ visuddhiyā*),
 for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation (*sokapariddavānaṃ samatikkhamāya*),
 for the destruction of pain and grief (*dukkhadomanassānaṃ attamgamaya*),
 for the gaining of wisdom (*ñāyassa adhiḡamāya*)
 for the attaining or realization of Nibbana or enlightenment (*nibbānassa sacchikiriyāya*)
 which is practicing the fourfold mindfulness.

Mindfulness, Mindful Meditation and the path of Mindful Meditation

Satipaṭṭhāna, Satipaṭṭhāna Bhāvanā and Satipaṭṭhānabhāvanāgāmini patipadā

When we discuss mindfulness, we can see that a lot of people discuss it everywhere in the current society. Mostly they say mindfulness is that living in the present moment. Actually, this is not an exact definition for mindfulness according to Buddhism. Mindfulness is not just living in the present moment. Mindfulness, which leads to overcome all sufferings completely, has a wide meaning in Buddhism. According to Vibhaṅga Sutta in Satipaṭṭhāna Samyutta of Samyutta

Nikāya, he who wants to know and practice mindfulness should know three things about mindfulness.

“Satipaṭṭhānañca vo, bhikkhave, desessāmi satipaṭṭhānabhāvanañca satipaṭṭhānabhāvanāgāminiñca paṭipadaṃ ”

They are Mindfulness, mindful meditation and the path of mindful meditation. Mindfulness means keeping our attention in four areas as body, feelings, consciousness and mental formations. Mindful meditation means reflecting on the impermanence of the body, feelings, consciousness and mental formations as arising and ceasing (*Katamā ca, bhikkhave, satipaṭṭhānabhāvanā? Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu samudayadhammānupassī kāyasmim viharati, vayadhammānupassī kāyasmim viharati, samudayavayadhammānupassī kāyasmim viharati,...*). The path to mindful meditation means (*Katamā ca, bhikkhave, satipaṭṭhānabhāvanāgāminī paṭipadā? Ayameva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo...*) understanding the noble eightfold path which consists with the four noble truths. The Noble Eightfold Path is,

Right Understanding	(<i>Sammā ditṭhi</i>)
Right Thoughts	(<i>Sammā saṃkappa</i>)
Right Speech	(<i>Sammā vācā</i>)
Right Action	(<i>Sammā kammantha</i>)
Right Livelihood	(<i>Sammā ājiva</i>)
Right Effort	(<i>Sammā vāyāma</i>)
Right Mindfulness	(<i>Sammā sati</i>)
Right Concentration	(<i>Sammā samādhi</i>)

The Buddha always emphasizes the importance vision to his disciples at the beginning of practice. That's why the Buddha says I proclaim the liberation for those who know the path who see the path. Vision is first, then mission (practice). Mission without vision is blind. Also, vision without mission is useless. Buddhist vision is understanding the dependent origination which is the eternal theory of arising and ceasing of suffering.

The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta deals with the fourfold development of 'Sati', mindfulness and 'Paṭṭhāna', establishment or practice. So 'Satipaṭṭhāna' means establishment of mindfulness. The main purpose of practicing mindfulness is to investigate what happens to our mind and body and finally understand whole life. If we can clearly understand the process of our life as it is, we can overcome all sufferings that we worry about in our day-to-day life and in the whole Sansāric journey.

Here it is said the four types of areas where we practice mindfulness. They are;

- The Contemplation (or mindfulness) of the body (*Kāyānupassanā*)
- The Contemplation (or mindfulness) of sensation or feelings (*Vedanānupassanā*)
- The Contemplation (or mindfulness) of mind (*Cittānupassanā*)
- The Contemplation (or mindfulness) of mind-objects (*Dhammānupassanā*)

According to practicing mindfulness in these four areas, we develop our attention and awareness about our body and mind. And we practice our attention to live in the present moment consciously. We mostly suffer because of the past or the future. If we lose our attention with mindfulness about the present, it means we lose our happiness. That is why Buddhism emphasizes here the importance of developing mindfulness.

• The Contemplation of Body

When we practice mindfulness in the field of the body, we develop it in six areas. They are;

- Mindfulness of breathing (*Ānāpānasati*).

When someone breathes, he does it consciously.

- Mindfulness of the four postures (*Iriyāpatha*)

When someone is walking, he knows he is **walking**. When someone is standing, he knows he is **standing**. When someone is sitting, he knows, he is **sitting**. When someone is lying down, he knows he is **lying down**.

- Mindfulness of clear awareness (*Sampajañña*)

When someone does everything from waking up to going to bed, he does all of them mindfully and wisely.

- Mindfulness or reflection on the repulsive: Parts of the body (*Patikkulamanasikāra*)

Here, the meditator considers all his (32) body parts such as hair, nail, teeth, skin are impure.

- Mindfulness of the four elements (*Dhātumanasikāra*)

Here, the meditator further pays attention to four elements like earth (*Paṭhavi*), water (*Āpo*), fire (*Tejo*) and air (*Vāyo*).

- Mindfulness of the Nine Charnel- Ground (*Navasīvathika*)

Here, the meditator recollects a dead body, what happens to the body after death (from moment of death to a skeleton). While he is investigating his own body according to above areas, he sees the arising and ceasing of the body.

• **The Contemplation of Feelings (or sensation)**

Here, someone feeling a pleasant feeling knows that he feels a pleasant feeling, feeling a painful feeling he knows that he feels a painful feeling, feeling a feeling that is neither painful nor pleasant he knows that he feels a feeling that is neither painful nor pleasant.

While he is investigating his whole feelings in this way, he sees the arising and ceasing of all feelings.

• **The Contemplation of Mind**

Here, the meditator considers his own mind whether it is lustful or not, hating or not, deluded or undeluded, contracted or distracted, developed or undeveloped, surpassed or unsurpassed, concentrated or unconcentrated, liberated or unliberated.

While he is investigating his mind process according to above areas, he sees arising and ceasing of mind.

• **The Contemplation of Mind-objects**

- The five hindrances (sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and scruples, skeptical doubt)

- The five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formation, consciousness)

- The six internal and external sense bases (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind – sight, sound, smell, taste, touching, mind-objects)

- The seven factors of enlightenment (Mindfulness, Keen investigation, Energy, Rapture, Tranquility, Concentration, Equanimity)

- The Four Noble Truths

1. The unsatisfactoriness (*Dukkha Sacca*),

2. The cause of unsatisfactoriness (*Samudaya Sacca*),

3. The cessation of unsatisfactoriness (*Nirodha Sacca*),

4. The path that leads to cessation of unsatisfactoriness (*Magga Sacca*)

While he is investigating his whole mind objects according to the above areas as unwholesome and wholesome, he reflects the arising and ceasing of his mind objects.

As the result of practicing mindfulness by using Buddhist teachings, we don't stop only concentrating our mind. With the concentrated mind, we reflect on the world reality as impermanent seeing arising and ceasing of our mind and body. Here it is very important to understand the dependent origination. Our entire life is the five aggregates which arise at the moment with conditions and cease when conditions cease.

If we have any experience through our six senses, five aggregates arise together at the moment. Five aggregates are forms (*Rūpa*-රූප), feelings (*Vedanā*-වේදනා), perception (*Saññā*-සංකල්පනා), mental formations (*Saṅkhāra*-සංඛාර) and mind (*Viññāṇa*-විඤ්ඤාණ). These five aggregates arise together at the moment when the conditions are together, and they instantly cease when the conditions separate. These five things appear behind any kind of experiences in our life, but they are invisible, and have to be known with insight. The nature of these five aggregates is arising and ceasing. At the moment of ceasing everything ceases without leaving anything remaining. The most valuable and interesting explanation in Buddhism is impermanence. It is said in Buddhism; **Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) will not come to (the future) occurrence** (*Ahutvā sambhūtaṃ hutvā na bhavissati*). This is the nature of impermanence that Buddhism illustrates. If something is impermanent (*Anicca*), it is suffering (*Dukkha*). If something is suffering, it is out of our control (*Anatta*). If someone can realize these three characteristics as the worldly reality, he is able to overcome suffering.

When we see this reality, we understand, there is nothing to grasp or reject. We comprehend our life as a conditioned process. There is no particular certain being or person, it is only a process which always arises and ceases. With this true understanding we can gradually overcome suffering. Little by little we go forward on the path of liberation from suffering and unsatisfactoriness. By practicing tranquility (*Samatha*) and insight (*Vipassanā*) meditation with discipline (*Sīla*) in speech and behavior, we reach the final bliss of liberation, full enlightenment. Here it is clear that mindfulness is the foundation of all doctrines. Living in mindfulness is like living in the field of the Buddha. It means we are away from suffering such as decay, death and rebirth. Whenever we are away from mindfulness, then we are in the field of the Mara. It means we are not away from suffering such as sorrow, lamentation, grief, pain, decay, sickness, death and rebirth.

As the result of practicing mindfulness, the five spiritual faculties are going to be filled. They are confidence, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

The Supreme Buddha often encourages us to make a refuge that none can disturb. Here the Buddha kindly emphasizes the path to make a refuge as practicing mindfulness. Living in mindfulness is like living in the field of the Buddha. The purpose of practicing mindfulness is to make an unshakable mind that none can disturb.

Dwell with yourselves as an island, with yourselves as a refuge, with no other refuge;
dwell with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as a refuge, with no other refuge.

*Atta dīpā bhikkhave viharatha atta saraṇā na añña saraṇā,
Dhamma dīpā bhikkhave viharatha dhamma saraṇā na añña saraṇā.*

References: -

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| Satipaṭṭhāna saṃyutta | - Saṃyutta Nikaya |
| Satipaṭṭhānakatha | - Patisambhidamagga |
| Mahasatipaṭṭhāna Sutta | - Digha Nikaya |
| Satipaṭṭhāna Vibhaṅga | - Vibhaṅgappakarana |



May the Triple Gem Bless you!

The Annual Monastic Retreat Conducted by The Bhāvanā Society,

West Virginia – 2023 (23rd Friday)