

THE THREE PATHS LEADING TO NIBBĀNA

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Abstract

To the Buddhist people, these three paths, which I will discuss in this article, are not only the basic but also the highest state. Buddhist people regard that these are the essences which leading to the ultimate goal, *Nibbāna*, in their life. Therefore, I also hold that all and sundry should follow and practice these essences very well.

KEY WORDS: Generosity, *Dāna*, Morality, *Sīla* Mantel development *Bhāvanā*, Buddhism, *Nibbāna*.

Introduction

We couldn't say exactly, where is the start of our life, what time will end our days, or how we arrived here and when we will go back another. According to Buddhism we believe that we will go to the next world someday accordingly our action. Anyway, it is certain that we had been countless lives and had been lost innumerable lives. Therefore, Buddhist people use to look for the ways, which free from round of rebirth (*saṃsāra*) or liberation of suffering in their life. And also they believe that all things are linking up with past wholesome or unwholesome action (*kamma*), which they had been done in this life and in the innumerable lives. Hence they always try to follow and practice these three accordingly the Buddha's teaching in their time. The Buddha said,

“*Sabba pāpassa akaraṇam, kusalassa upasampadā,*

Sacittapariyodapanam, Etam Buddhana sasanam”, meaning, “*Not to do evil, to cultivate merit, to purify one's mind this is the teaching of the Buddhas*”.

This stanza point out these: Generosity (*Dāna*), Morality (*Sīla*) and Mantel development (*Bhāvana*) as three kinds of essences in Buddhism. From my point of view I consider that these are the greatest medicine, which can cure all diseases, which are suffering in all class of men and women, kings and

peasants, Brahmins and outcasts, bankers and beggars, holy men and robbers without making the slightest distinction between as well.

The Buddhist understanding of *Dāna* is closely linked to the Four Noble Truth, the basic teaching of the Buddha; the truth of suffering; the suffering arises from attachment and clinging (*lobha*); and that to end suffering one must get rid of its root, which is attachment and clinging in his mind, so Buddhist starts with giving, the act of Dana. Every act of giving is an act of cutting away attachment and clinging. No one can give anything unless he is generous and unselfish to some degree. So, by giving whatever he can, the Buddhist practices non-clinging, non-attachment and little by little he hopes to attain perfection.

The practice of Dana is within the reach of everyone, however poor might be. Even as he provides for his family, he does it with the awareness that such a deed if done with loving kindness, without any expectation of return, will help him to attain the goal of *Nibbāna*. He can give a morsel of food to a monk who comes every morning on his alms rounds. He has every opportunity to go up the ladder of life. Therefore, we should follow and practice these three systematically. By follow and practice these essences, which I will show in this article, you will become a person who completed to social ethic, moral ethic and higher spiritual progress and at the end of your life even you will attain the *Nibbāna* but it is depends on your actions which you had been done in the present and innumerable lives. So I also consider that these three essences are essential for all and encourage and stimulate to follow and practice to the Buddhist people and all.

First Essence of Buddhism- Generosity (*Dāna*)

As mentioned above, in Buddhism essentially there are three essences: Generosity (*Dāna*), Morality (*Sīla*) and mental development (*Bhāvanā*). These three are followed and practiced respectfully Buddhist people in their life. These three are indispensable for the Buddhist people in order to denote as good people and free from all kinds of suffering as well. They consider that their lives are damn all, unless they can follow and practice these three essences as far as they can in their life. And they believe that these three essences are the best place of refuge to them.

Monks, members of the Order of the Sangha, are those who dedicate their lives to the study or practice of the Buddha's way. For a Buddhist supporting the order of the Sangha is supporting the Buddha's

sāsana or system of the Buddha's teaching. Buddhist people consider that to a Buddhist to give Dana is to sow seeds of good merit and the Order of the Sangha is considered a fertile land on which such seeds should be sown. An act of giving is in fact even more meritorious when the recipient is good and virtuous and also does good deeds like learning and teaching the Buddha's way.

Myanmar Buddhist people love to do acts of *Dāna*; whether they rich or not invite monks to partake or alms food on all family occasions. Those who do not have the meals to do such an act can also gain merit by helping. That is why most Buddhist celebrations either at home or at the monastery never lack willing helpers. In this connection it is worth to speak that Myanmar Buddhist people are only one nation which wakes up with Generosity (*Dāna*), Morality (*Sīla*) and Mental development (*Bhāvanā*) in the world because of the Buddhist people use to offer some kind of food to the Buddha at the morning and middle day that is, before 12 O'clock. In their offering include at least candle, joss-stick, water, flowers, rice, curry, and a kind of fruit. Before start their offering they observe five even they will get more profit and start to make their offering to the Buddha.

In the same time, another meritorious deed, which they use to do, is to develop loving-kindness (*mettā-Bhāvanā*). It is a kind of mental developments by doing so they can get 11 kinds of results. Concerning this if I have any chance, I will discuss in the next. When their offering complete altogether they make sharing on their meritorious deed which they have done in the early morning to all beings and their relations, related to in present and past. In respect of Generosity or Dana, many scholars such as Rhys Davis define "giving, dealing out, gift; almsgiving, liberality, munificence; esp. a charitable gift to a *bhikkhu* or to the community of *bhikkhus*, in the *Pāli* English Dictionary. And *Nyanatiloka Mahathera* defines that in his Buddhist Dictionary as follow: *Dāna*-almsgiving, liberality, offering.

In other way, concerning the profit of *Dāna* the Buddha says that in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* as follow: "He, who gives alms, bestows a fourfold blessing; he helps to long life, good appearance, happiness and strength. Therefore long life, good appearance, happiness and strength will be his share, whether amongst heavenly beings or amongst men". "Five blessings accrue to the giver of alms: the affection of many, noble association, good reputation, self-confidence, and heavenly rebirth". Liberality, especially the offering of robes, food, etc., to the monks, is highly praised in all Buddhist countries of Southern Asia as a fundamental

virtue and as a means to suppress man's inborn greed and egoism. But as in any other good or bad action, so also in offering gifts, it the noble intention and volition that really counts as the action, not the mere outward deed. And generosity (*Dāna*) is the first *Pārami*. From their point of views, *Dāna* is the most primary state because of the *Bodhisatta* "the future Buddha" fulfilled firstly the perfection of *Dāna*. And generosity (*Dāna*) is a kind of meritorious deed which is very famous in the Buddhist countries like Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. Therefore you should do acting of *Dāna* in your very rare life in time.

Second Essence of Buddhism- Morality (*Sīla*)

In the first chapter I completed my survey of the generosity (*Dāna*). In here I will discuss as regard the Morality (*Sīla*).great and small to the Buddhist people the treading to the end of suffering of only goal. And so they march on gradually to achieve to their goal. In their mind they believe that they will reach one day to the end of suffering and their achievement is greatest. When one goes to the someplace he should hold ration such as water and some dried food and so on, in order to take on the way. Unless he does take anything to have on the way he will not reach his direction very well. In the same way, the Buddhist people who lead to the end of samsara need to take ration such as generosity (*Dāna*), Morality (*Sīla*) and Mental development (*Bhāvanā*) to achieve their goal perfectly as well.

According to Buddhism Morality (*Sīla*) is second ration or essence which Buddhist people follow and practice systematically, eagerly, and holed in their way. *Sīla* or virtue means abstention from physical and verbal misdemeanor and where ever a person given to stealing and lying is at the helm of affairs there one cannot expect to see proper organization and management. Training in morality is simply elementary preparatory practice, which enables us to live happily and helps stabilize the mind. Morality yields various benefits, the most important being the preparing of the way for concentration. Other advantages, such as conducting to happiness or to rebirth as a celestial being, were not considered by the Buddha to be the direct aims of morality.

He regarded morality as primarily a means of inducing and developing concentration. As long as things continue to disturb the mind, it can never become concentrated. Morality is simply suitable behavior, behavior that conforms to the generally accepted standards and causes no distress to other people or to

oneself. It is coded in the form of five moral precepts, or eight, or ten, or 227, or in other ways. It is conducted by way of body and speech aimed at peace, convenience and freedom from undesirable effects at the most basic level. It has to do with the members of a social group and the varieties of property essential to living.

Third Essence of Buddhism-Mental development or mental culture (*Bhāvanā*)

In brief, I have already discussed concerning the generosity (*Dāna*) and Morality (*Sīla*) up to now. Going on, I will take as to mental development (*Bhāvanā*) rough-and-ready ways up with you, taking out some of literature on meditation in this chapter. To the Buddhist people, meditation is the last essences, the indispensable which lead to the realization of the Ultimate Truth. The Buddhist *Bhāvanā*, properly speaking, is mental culture in the full sense of the term. It aims at cleansing the mind of impurities and disturbances, such as lustful desires, hatred and restless, and cultivating such qualities as concentration, awareness, intelligence, will, energy, the analytical faculty, confidence, joy, tranquility, leading finally to the attainment of highest wisdom which sees the nature of things as they are, and realizes the Ultimate Truth, *Nibbāna*.

There are two forms of meditation. One is the development of mental concentration (*samatha* or *Samādhi*), of one pointedness of mind (*cittakaggatā*), by various methods prescribed in the texts, leading up to the highest mystic states such as “the Sphere of Nothingness” or “the Sphere of Neither perception nor Non-Perception. All these mystic states, according to the Buddha, are mind-created, mind-produced, (*samatha*). They have nothing to do with Reality, truth, *Nibbāna*. This form of meditation existed before the Buddha. Hence it is not purely Buddhist, but it is not excluded from the field of Buddhist meditation. However it is not essential for the realization of *Nibbāna* because it does not give complete liberation.

This is essentially Buddhist meditation. It is an analytical method based on mindfulness. It is impossible to do justice to such a vast subject in a few pages. Therefore an attempt is made here to give a very brief and rough idea of the true Buddhist mental development, in practical way. The most important discourse ever given by the Buddha on mental development is called the *Satipatthāna sutta* the setting up of Mindfulness. This discourse is so highly venerated in tradition that it is regularly recited not only in Buddhist monasteries, but also in Buddhist homes with members of the family sitting round and listening with deep devotion. neither the way meditation given in this discourse are cut off from life, nor do they avoid life; on the contrary, they are all connected with our life, daily activities and so on and so forth. The

discourse is divided into four main sections: the first section deals with our body (*kaya*), the second with our feelings and sensations (*vedanā*), the third with the mind (*citta*), and the fourth with various moral and intellectual subjects (*dhamma*).

It should be clearly borne in mind that whatever the form of meditation may be, the essential thing is mindfulness (*sati*), attention or observation (*anupassanā*). One of the most well-known, popular and practical examples of meditation connected with the body is called, the mindfulness or awareness of in and out breathing (*anapanasati*). For other forms of meditation given in this *sutta*, you may sit, stand, walk, or lie down, as you like. But, for cultivating mindfulness of in and out breathing, one should sit, according to the text, cross-legged, keeping the body erect and strain. Now, bring your mind to concentrate on your breathing in and out; let your mind watch and observe your breathing in and out; let your mind be aware of your breathing in and out. When you breathe you sometime take deep breathing, sometimes not. This does not matter at all. Breathe normally and naturally. The only thing is that when you take deep breathes you should be aware that they are deep breaths, and so on.

In other words, your mind should be so fully concentrated on your breathing that you are aware of its movements and changes. Forget all other things. Your surroundings, your environment; do not raise your eyes and look at anything. At the beginning you will find it extremely difficult to bring your mind to concentrate on your breathing. But if you continue to practice this exercise twice daily, morning and evening, for about five or ten minutes at a time, you will gradually, begin to concentrate your mind on your breathing. This exercise of mindfulness of breathing, which is one of the simplest and easiest practices, is meant to develop concentration leading up to very high mystic attainments. Besides, the power of concentration is essential for any kind of deep understanding, penetration, insight into the nature things, including the realization of *Nibbāna*.

Apart from all this, this exercise on breathing gives you immediate results. It is good for your physical health, for relaxation, sound sleep, and for efficiency in your daily work. It makes you calm and tranquil. Even at moments when you are nervous or excited, if you practice this for a couple of minutes, you will see for yourself that you become immediately quiet and peace.

Conclusion

The Buddha said that one is one's own refuge, who else could be the refuge? He admonished his to be a refuge to themselves, and never to seek refuge in or help from anybody else. He taught, encouraged and stimulated each person to develop himself and to work out his own emancipation, for man has the power to liberate himself from all bondage through his own personal effort and intelligence.

And so, these three essences were practiced not only in the early time but also up to now by the Buddhist people and others in many ways. Therefore, there were so many beings which faced with good result not only in the Buddha's time but also until now. Here I am not going to expand on the fruit again. If you wish to know the fruit which can get by practicing these three essences, do try it at once. If you practices that, you will meet with the benefits in the present and future.

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