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6-6-84

A CLOSE STUDY OF MINDFULNESS

"SATI"

BY

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M. A. THESIS

ON

THERAVĀDA BUDDHIST MEDITATION

THE UNIVERSITY OF SRI JAYAWARDENEPURA

91419  
NUGEGODA

1981

91419

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## F O R E W O R D

The dawn of the 20th century ushered in a resurgence of human thoughts and values directed towards the pursuit of happiness as never before. The present age euphemistically referred to as the scientific age is moving towards harnessing all human ingenuity to devise more and more means to provide for physical comfort for human beings. But alas! all the sensual pleasures have not enhanced the quanta of human happiness in the world. In fact the world is reeking with pain and sorrow, dissatisfaction, intrigue, suspicions and so on at all levels.

Thus, it will be apparent that the palliative for human suffering does not lie in the pampering to the senses. Happiness and contentment is a condition of the mind. This is succinctly expressed in Buddhism as 'Mano Pubbangama' ie, 'mind is foremost.' Hence the search for happiness must essentially begin by looking inwards at one's own mind. A mind cultivated and trained can live calm, collected, and content even in the midst of the wildest confusion.

It is a significant fact that ~~the~~ mind training can be undertaken only by a human being. Sub-humans and superhumans cannot undertake training because their minds are obsessed<sup>ed</sup> by either too much misery or too much sensual pleasure or may be indifference. Thus the wonderful inheri-

tance of Buddhist literature is completely lost to them.

"It is extremely lucky that Buddha's original teaching is preserved upto date in the Pali language. In fact, Pali is a language reserved entirely to one subject namely the Buddha's teaching. The style of the discourses has a economic simplicity, coupled with richness of idioms that makes it a very polished vehicle hard to do justice to, in any translation. About the Pali canon Professor Rhys Davids wrote that, "Gotama Buddha did not leave behind him a number of deeply simple sayings for which his followers subsequently built up a system or systems of their own, but had, himself, thoroughly elaborated his doctrine, partly as to details, after, but in its, fundamental points even before, his mission began; that during his long career as a teacher, he had ample time to repeat the principles and details of the system over and over again to his disciples, and to test their knowledge of it; and finally, that, his leading disciples were like himself accustomed to the subtlest metaphysical distinctions and trained in the wonderful command of memory which Indian ascetics then possessed. When these facts are recalled to mind it will be seen that much more reliance may be placed upon the doctrinal parts of Buddhist scriptures than upon corresponding later records of other religions."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the stress-ridden world today need not despair.

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1. Introduction to 'The life of Buddha' - Bhikkhu Nānamoli

The ancient Path which was revered, praised and followed by the noble and wise sages of the by-gone centuries is still preserved and offers an excellent solution to today's problems. What is necessary is to excavate the gems and use them with intelligence to bring out their lost lustre and shine.

The quintessence of the Buddha Dhamma is the purification of the mind. 'citta visuddhiya,' it is the mind that propels the body along. Understanding this body and mind process is the task of the human being. By developing 'sati' of the four foundations of mindfulness, an intelligent and energetic person can understand this body-mind complex, with in <sup>his</sup> life time and attain to the highest goal enumerated by the Buddhas.<sup>1</sup>

The first of the four foundations of mindfulness is directed entirely to this body and all aspects of it are minutely analysed. Every action, every movement comes within the purview of mindfulness. It is of abiding interest to note that one of the refrains running through the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta "Atthi kāyoti vā paṇassa ..." which in brief indicates that the "body exists merely for the express purpose of establishing mindfulness with wisdom," ~~this~~ is a most profound utterance of the Buddha and could be comprehended only by one who is expert in the practice

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1. satipaṭṭhāna sutta

of the satipatthāna method. The three other foundations of mindfulness aim at tracking down and discovering the working of the inner recesses of the mind.

The entire canonical literature is richly overflowing with Buddha's precise instructions and exhortations as to how one could gain this wisdom and achieve deliverance from the stress and strain and fever of existence. The practical guidance is enumerated in the Satipatthāna Sutta. It is this practice that is most important, this practice alone results in personal conviction and realisation of the truth. No amount of the study of the theory can achieve this end.

In the pre-Buddhistic era, the practice of developing sati was undertaken by the Indian sages, but they lacked the wisdom of the Buddha and developed only concentration to a very high degree and attained states of tranquillity and re-birth in the Brahma realms.

The Buddha's method consisted of developing both tranquillity and wisdom, popularly called samatha and vipassanā or samādhi and paññā. The Buddha advocated various objects of meditation to achieve tranquillity as a preliminary course and switched over to vipassanā subsequently. Both methods aim at developing mindfulness. It is found through experience that samatha helps vipassanā to a great extent and Vipassanā helps Samatha to a great

extent and that therefore both methods of training must be undertaken to supplement each other, to the benefit of both.

In conclusion it must be mentioned that both methods are most rewarding and indispensable to modern living.

"How can anyone recover health through an effective medicine, if he ignores the physician's advice?"

Bodhicaryāvatāraya - Śāntideva

With this view and after taking several meditation retreats I have selected this topic for my M. A. thesis. I have already gained immensely and it gave me no end of joy and interest in doing this work. My grateful and humble respects go to my Venerable teachers. May they attain the Bliss of Nibbana.

KUSUMA DEVENDRA

31. Mahamegha,  
Maharagama,  
Sri Lanka.

"Samma Sati or Right mindfulness is in fact, the indispensable basis of Right living and Right thinking - everywhere, at any time, for every one, it is applicable in the midst of life's turmoil as well as the peace of a monk's cell. It has a vital message for all. Not only for the confirmed follower of the Buddha and his Doctrine, but for all who endeavour to master the mind, that is so hard to control, and who earnestly wish to develop its latent faculties of greater strength and greater happiness."

"The Heart of Buddhist Meditation"

By Ven. Nyañaponika.



List of Abbreviations

A. N. Anguttara Nikāya

D. N. Dīgha Nikāya

Dh. Dhammapada

M. N. Majjhima Nikāya

V. M. Visuddhimagga

S. N. Samyutta Nikāya

Sn Sutt<sup>ā</sup> Nipāta

What is Mindfulness? - Sati

The definition of sati as given in the Dhamma Sangani is as follows:

"Sati is recollecting, calling back to mind, remembering, bearing in mind. Sati is not merely memory, but a lucid retention of both the past and the present. It is compared to an inward mentor, or advisor, <sup>discriminating</sup> between good and bad, and prompting choice, "Not floating on the surface like empty pumpkins and pots on water."

"Sati is, entering into and plunging down into the objects of thought"<sup>1</sup> According to this definition, sati appears to be a neutral factor. But sati occurs only in the list of Dhammas which are essentially wholesome. It does not belong to the factors 'common to all consciousness' i.e. Sabbacitta sādharana.

Mindfulness or sati is one of the twenty five 'states that are good' (sobhana sādharana kusala cetasika) and therefore accompanies every kusala citṭa. Sati does not accompany 'akusala' cittas i.e., unwholesome consciousness<sup>2</sup>

It is said in the Attasalini<sup>2</sup> 'In a mind devoid

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1. translation of Dha. San. Mrs. Rhys Davids - Buddhist Psychology

2. page 249

of right faith (assaddhiya citte) there is no sati. How then, do ~~not~~ adherents of wrong views, remember actions performed by them? They do, but that is not through sati. It is merely an unwholesome thought process occurring in that aspect. (tōṇākāreṇa akusala cittappavattati) That is why miccha sati is not included in the unwholesome consciousness." Miccha sati is mentioned in the suttas in this context.

In this connection, it is relevant to mention the place of saññā (perception) in the function of cognizing and remembering. The mental factor saññā belongs to the group of 'common to all consciousnesses' i.e. sabbacittasādhāraṇa. The definition of Saññā found in the Attasālini<sup>1</sup> gives 'sañjānana lakkhana' to it. This means literally 'cognizing well.' The saññā'rasa' is recognising, i.e. 'paccābhiññāna'. The essential property given to saññā is 'making marks as a condition for a repeated perception' i.e., for recognising and remembering 'puna sañjānana paccaya nimittākāreṇa'. Therefore, it is the function of saññā, the marking and remembering of an object's <sup>ve</sup> distinctive marks. The way in which one remembers the earlier phases of one's thought process is through selected marks by saññā and not by sati, (nimittākāreṇa) Saññā functions in the groups of both wholesome and unwholesome consciousness<sup>25</sup>, but sati occurs only in the group of wholesome consciousness<sup>26</sup>.

In the Khanda Niddesa of the Visuddhimagga, Sati is described in the following way.<sup>1</sup>

"By its<sup>2</sup> means they, remember (saranti) It has the characteristic 'Lakkhana' of not wobbling (apitāpana) Its<sup>3</sup> function is not to forget wholesomeness. It is manifested as the state of confronting an objective field. Its<sup>4</sup> proximate cause is strong perception or its<sup>5</sup> proximate cause is the foundation of mindfulness concerned with the body, feeling, consciousness and mind objects."

In the introduction to the Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta,<sup>2</sup> Professor Rhys Davids says that,

Sati was described as memory, recollection, calling to mind, being aware of certain specified facts. Of these the most important fact was, 'the impermanance of all phenomena bodily and mental' and, it included the repeated application of this awareness to each experience of life.

He goes on further, to explain - thus, "when the Christians are told, 'whether therefore ye eat or drink, or what so ever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' A way is shown by which any act, however lowly can, by the addition of a remembrance (sati) be surrounded by the halo of a high moral enthusiasm and how by the continual practice of this

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1. Chapter XIV page 524

2. Sacred books of the East, Dialogues of the Buddha Vol.II

remembrance, a permanent improvement in character can be obtained. The Buddhist idea is similar but, the remembrance is of what we should call a natural law, not of a deity. This has been made a corner-stone of the system of ethical self training (the corresponding corner-stone of the West is conscience). The doctrine of sati is dependent not on intuition but on grasp of actual fact. The ethical value of mindfulness (sati) would be sufficient to explain the great stress laid upon it."

Professor Rhys Davids goes on to quote from the samyutta nikāya<sup>1</sup> (V 179, 180, 294) thus;

"Who so ever neglects the practice of mindfulness in the fourfold way, he misses the Path. Who so ever practises mindfulness in the fourfold way has found the Path."

He also mentions that, "the Mahā satipaṭṭhāna Sutta is the oldest authoritative Doctrine and is still in frequent and popular use among those Buddhists who have adhered to the ancient faith. The ethical desirableness of sati, as the instrument most efficacious in self mastery, lay in the steady alertness of inward vision which it connoted, whether past or present experience was contemplated. In discussing it, the Buddhist are concerned, not with the outer world as such, but with the microcosm of his subjective experiences and with the vehicle thereof, sense and mind."

The suttanta is a discipline - The supreme discipline in ethical introspection." One may add that, a person who is concerned with the microcosm of his subjective world is at peace with himself. Such a person not only avoids creating problems for others but also is able to contribute his best to the world. It is to be at peace with one's self, that should be the aim of every human being, and this is gained by developing sati, Mindfulness or awareness of one's reaction to the outside world, makes a person realise how much his ego and self reference is playing up. This awareness makes it possible to view a situation more correctly and develop the art of letting go. Very often situations deteriorate by interference, owing to the selfish motives that creep in due to lack of mindfulness.

In the Sumangala Vilāsini, the definition of Sati or mindfulness is given as "Saranatthena Sati" According to this definition, sati, is the same as memory. i.e., the process of recalling back to mind, which one has committed in the past. 'Patthāna' is described as 'Patthapetabbopatthānam! This means that sati is 'that which must be established.' It goes on to describe the use of the four patthānas as follows.

'Cattāro satipatthānū bhāvitā bahulikāta satta bojjhange pāripurenti' which means that, a person who establishes and increases and extends sati of the four

foundations of mindfulness, acquires the seven requisites<sup>1</sup> necessary for attaining the supreme knowledge of an Arhant. This is the highest form of (Kusala) skillfulness.

Further, the Sumangala vilāsini goes on to question "Why is sati referred to in the plural as sati patchānā?" The answer to this question is given as, "sati assumes a plurality due to the multiplicity of objects cognised by the sense doors." It is this unbroken chain of sati of the Kusala cittas ie, skilful consciousnesses, that begets concentration or samādhi.<sup>2</sup>

Again, the establishment of sati of the four foundations of mindfulness is referred to as the highest form of meditation - Bhāvanā. ie, meditation is that which develops and proliferates and perfects wholesome consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

Sumangala Vilāsini goes on further to describe the development of sati according to Buddhist meditations as conducive to supramundane bliss by the attainment of the thirtyseven accessories necessary for supreme knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

1. The seven requisites are sati or mindfulness, investigation, energy, joy, calm, contemplation, and equanimity.
2. 'Kusalacittassa ekaggatā nāma samādhi'
3. "Bhāveti kusala dāma<sup>h</sup> āseveti, vaḍḍeti, etāyāti bhāvanā
4. list out