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ARTICLE	DESCRIPTION	PAGE
100	Gratitude	02
101	Timely listening to the Dhamma	03
102	Noble eight-fold Path- Right concentration	04
103	Generosity	12
104	Bowing-What does it mean?	13
105	How big is my Hand?	14
106	Space	14
	CONCLUSION	15

Article 100

[Taken from the book titled *The Buddhist Way to Happiness* by Rahubadde and Tanuja Sarath-Chandra based on the Great Discourse on Blessings (Maha Mangala Sutta)]

Chapter 25 - GRATITUDE

However gifted, strong, healthy, rich, and powerful we may be, everyone needs some help from others for survival and advancement. Society can function well only if people do not forget the help they received from others.

Parents come first in the line of people who have helped us. That help cannot be repaid easily. However, we can try to repay gradually with acts of gratitude. Looking after them in illness and in old age is one essential way. There might also be close relatives and family friends who have helped us as a family.

Teachers come next. They have helped us to unravel our capabilities and become what we are today. In many cases they have not only taught us but guided us by example.

As teachers, the monks and nuns and lay persons associated with temples who taught in the Dhamma schools need to be remembered with a sense of gratitude. They may need our help now. Minor differences in opinion need to be set aside in showing gratitude.

Sometimes there are neighbours or even strangers who have helped us or our families, specially in times of personal or natural disasters. It is possible that they come due to our good kamma; that does not mean that we can forget them when convenient. Particularly, where strangers are concerned, one needs to be wise in trying to show gratitude.

We must be grateful to the Buddha for providing the guidance to live in peace and happiness in this life, in later lives and in our spiritual journey. The Buddha has also shown gratitude and given us an example to follow.

Article 101

[Taken from the book titled *The Buddhist Way to Happiness* by Rahubadde and Tanuja Sarath-Chandra based on the Great Discourse on Blessings (Maha Mangala Sutta)]

Chapter 26 - TIMELY LISTENING TO THE DHAMMA

Although we have six senses working round the clock, where learning and understanding of the Buddha's teaching is concerned, it is believed that the ear faculty is crucial. In the situation of teaching in a class, the most effective sense seems to be the ear. What we see on the white board helps to clear things up but fades off very quickly. What we hear has a lasting impact.

There are stories that relate to the attainment of enlightenment while hearing the Dhamma. One can argue that this is made possible by the strength of past good kamma. While it might be so, it does not detract from the fact that it is the experience of listening that creates the opportunity for the breakthrough.

The sense experience needs to be supported by proper discipline, practice of virtues, ardent effort, and wisdom. These are things that cannot be assembled in one moment. The level of concentration and mindfulness are also contributory factors.

One experience of listening might not work. There are two ways of progressing. The first is to listen to the Dhamma regularly. That helps to gather the essence of the teaching and helps to define areas of doubt and the need to question.

The other aspect is to hear the Dhamma at the correct time. This can be due to good kamma. A good teacher appears, and a good topic is taught, exactly when you need it. Experience tells us that this happens to most people. At the time one gets this opportunity, the mind may be having experiences that are conducive to proper listening. When you get the prompting from within, that could be a good time. Then we should not hesitate and must move to hear the Dhamma.

While listening to the Dhamma, the mind dwells on wholesome states of mind and there is no opportunity for unwholesome states to arise. That itself is beneficial.

When a noble friend suggests to you that such and such a teacher is going to teach on this or that topic, that might be the right time, and one needs to be diligent at that time. This is timely listening to the Dhamma.

Article 102

[Taken from the Dhamma Practice Training Academy -Dhamma Lessons book 5.3]

4082 RIGHT CONCENTRATION-DISCUSSION

1 INTRODUCTION

The word concentration suggests a concerted exercise to eliminate all other mental states. That might not be a good translation of the word Samadhi. Stillness of the mind would be closer to the meaning of Samadhi. Many Buddhist scholars, and monks like Venerable Brahmavanso, raise this matter. Stillness of mind is probably what is meant by Samadhi.

The question is how do we achieve that stillness? Thinking of cause and effect, it seems that the cause for disturbance needs to be removed to get the mind to be still. What causes the mind to be moving the whole time? It is the six senses. Hence, the process requires (1) the management of the five physical senses and (2) the management of unskillful actions.

Samma Samadhi therefore means the concentration of Kusala Citta. It is the confirmation of Kusala Citta. The basis of this confirmation is non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion. In other words, it means not inclining towards enjoyment of the six sense objects. Non-delusion here means not being deluded by the contact of any objects. It implies awareness. Usually there is a tendency to lose awareness, resulting in delusion.

There are two relevant types of Samadhi:

Samatha Samadhi

Vipassana Samadhi

In Samatha Samadhi the Kusala aspect is not confirmed except when in the meditation. This can be so even after attaining the four immaterial mental states (Arupa Jhanas).

The 40 meditations listed in books such as the Path of Purification (Visuddhi Magga) belong to this category. The pre-Buddhist concept of absorption (Jhana) was different from what the Buddha taught. Then the four immaterial Jhanas were the highest spiritual attainment possible.

Vipassana Samadhi is based on understanding. To deal with a situation with calmness, awareness and understanding are features of Vipassana Samadhi.

Right effort and right mindfulness are connected to Vipassana Samadhi.

The attention is on the current object and can move from it to another. There is no need to hold on to one object with exertion. With vipassana samadhi, it is mentioned that enlightenment can be reached.

Samma Samadhi means Kusala citta ekaggata. It means the one-pointedness of skillful thought. It is vital to note that this citta is capable of distancing itself from suffering (dukkha). It is the eighth lane of the noble eight-fold path.

Samma samadhi is developed through mindfulness (sati) and not via samatha samadhi.

In Theravada Buddhism the culmination of concentration is in absorptions developed through mindfulness. These are called Jhanas and are attained via the practice of the following:

- 1 Precepts (sila)
- 2 Renunciation of dealings with sensuality
- 3 Understanding of the negative aspects (adinava) of unwholesome mental states without aversion

Some teachers of mindfulness meditation assert that the attention to negative aspects might create aversion. They suggest that simply being mindful is enough.

The writer not being a meditation teacher hold the opinion that this an unnecessary controversy, because when wisdom and mindfulness are both present when looking at negative aspects, there is no room for aversion. That is his own experience.

JHANA 1

Jhana 1 requires the atonement of sensual engagements (vivicca kama) and the observance of precepts (vivicca akusala). Vivicca indicates partial abandonment or taking a break from certain experiences. It does not demand destruction of Kama or Akusala. The development of the mind is gradual.

In the case of refraining from akusala, the standard required is high. In the case of sensual engagements, the standard is what is reasonable in the given circumstances.

The first jhana is feasible, even when there occur thoughts and thinking or evaluation of objects and thoughts (vitakka, vicara). The writer has observed some scholars discussing on the internet whether Jhana 1 is a true Jhana. This is an argument in definitions. Once you begin practicing, it Jhana 1 is as real as Jhana 2.

The mind is still disturbed internally. However, it is the first stage of a valuable attainment. Do it and see it rather than arguing about it.

JHANA 2

In absorption 1 there comes a stage when the mind ceases to contact with memories or other new thoughts. Then it does not involve the mind internally arguing about the validity of the thought process when a thought emerges. It is based on the calmness attained in the first Jhana.

The calmness becomes stronger. This generates a mental state of joy (piti). That is why it is called a samadhiyam piti. The joy is a result of calmness. The joy in the mind causes tranquility (sukha) of the body. It is like the pleasure of being free from mental disturbances, a state of peace.

JHANA 3

The tranquility generates a higher state of calmness. With mindfulness the meditator discerns that this state of mind is a result of the calmness attained, and that it is for the time being only. Then the joy and tranquility are toned down and abandoned. Equanimity is generated. Then it does not matter whether there is peace or there is no peace. This is Jhana 3. Mindfulness brings about this mental state. One-pointedness results. The mind is now in a mental state of one-pointedness on equanimity.

JHANA 4

The meditator mindful of the calmness and equanimity lives in this state of mind, still and equanimous.

This is Jhana 4.

2 WHAT IS DONE IN A FALLBACK SITUATION

When jhana practice continues, the training received, tends to last. It is suggested that it continues to the next life and so on. It is stronger than the absorptions claimed in a samatha Jhana.

However, a disturbing factor may arise, and the formal absorption may get destroyed. If you want to resume the Jhana, how do you come back?

Some meditation teachers suggest that one can go back to the original meditation, for example breathing.

Some teachers suggest that reminiscences help restore the absorption. For a short time, the mind is held in a state of stillness based on any of these objects. When stillness is achieved, then the meditator resumes the jhana practice.

The suggested reminiscences are:

Buddha

Dhamma

Sangha

Virtue (Sila)

Benevolence (Caga)

Deities (Devata)

Death (Marana)

Nibbana

Body-based Meditation (Kayagatasati)

Breathing (Anapana)

The disturbance is because the mind is still subject to attractions and repulsions. Repeated application, honest practice, commitment, wisdom, all help to abandon these mental states. The state of nissita needs to be reached.

Nissita is the term used to describe a settled mind. Anissita is the opposite.

3 WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP AFTER JHANA IS ESTABLISHED?

Rising from the fourth Jhana, one contemplates or reflects on the realities relating to existence in the cycle of births and deaths. Some of these are listed here:

Coming into being-ceasing to be (samudaya-vaya)

Cause and effect (hetu-phala)

Dependent origination (the twelve links)

Reflection on the three features of existence, impermanence, suffering and no-self (anicca, dukkha, anatta)

whether one can contemplate these while in the Jhana is a matter of controversy. The writer is unable to subscribe to this idea.

It is believed that this practice leads to the abandonment of the self-view (sakkaya ditthi) and opens the way to stream-winning (sotapatti).

4 SAMADHI – SAMATHA AND VIPASSANA DISTINGUISHED

A point of view by Rahubadde Sarath-Chandra

IDEA OF SAMADHI

Right Concentration (Samma Samadhi) lane 8 in the Noble Eight-Fold Path, means the concentration of mind maintaining a wholesome (kusala) state. The basis of this concentration is non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion.

In other words, it means not inclining towards enjoyment of the six sense objects. Non-delusion here means not being deluded by the contact of any objects. It also implies awareness. Often there is a tendency to lose awareness in concentration. It is also called One-Pointedness of mind (citta ekaggata).

There are two types of Samadhi:

Samatha Samadhi (practised even before the Buddha)

Vipassana Samadhi (practised on the instructions of the Buddha)

In Samatha Samadhi the Kusala aspect is not confirmed except when in the meditation. This can be so even after attaining the four material Absorptions (Arupa Jhanas). The concentration can be lost at some stage. This concentration helps in suppressing suffering (dukkha) during the meditation. Suffering returns when the meditation is finished.

The 40 objects listed in Theravada Dhamma books belong to this category and can be used to develop samatha samadhi. These are still practised, but do not seem to lead directly to enlightenment.

This pre-Buddhist concept of Jhana was different from the Buddhist concept. Before the time of the Buddha the four immaterial Jhanas were the highest spiritual attainment possible. Ascetic Siddhatha's first teacher Alara Kalama had attained the material Jhanas. The second teacher Uddaka Ramaputta had attained the immaterial Jhanas.

Vipassana Samadhi was advocated by the Buddha as a way towards enlightenment, ending the cycle of births. It is based on understanding, not suppression. To deal with a situation with calmness, awareness and understanding are features of Vipassana Samadhi.

Right effort and right mindfulness are closely connected to Vipassana Samadhi. Right Mindfulness is the key element of Vipassana Samadhi.

Vipassana Samadhi also includes the four Jhanas. But they have a different meaning here. These help in distancing the mind from Dukkha ultimately eliminating suffering.

This practice essentially involves the following:

- 1 Virtue (sila)
- 2 Renunciation (nekkhamma)
- 3 Understanding of the negative aspects of experiences (adinava)

How the four Vipassana Jhanas are attained is described in a separate article or lesson.

5 EXTRACTS FROM SERMON BY VENERABLE BRISBANE DHAMMARAKKHITA-19 JUNE 2022 AT QSA BUDDHIST FORUM 04 SESSION 12

Right concentration is comprised of the four absorptions or Jhanas.

JHANA 1

This is the reduction of articulated unwholesome actions (pariutthana kilesa). This is achieved by practising mindfulness.

At this level in samatha these are suppressed. In mindfulness these are overcome by sharpening mindfulness, bringing mindfulness to the forefront.

Still the incidence of thoughts and evaluation of thoughts (vitakka and vicara) continue.

Attention to the object of meditation gradually helps reduce these. You can draw attention to the walking as left and right foot. At a higher level, attention is paid to details such as moving the feet. This can be broken into two phases, four or six and so on. When you do that, the attention to the disturbing factors is reduced.

This results in peace of mind, and a sense of freedom of the mind and the body. From that Jhana 2 arise.

Answering questions, the monk clarified that this may also be attained through contemplation of the mind (cittanupassana). Reminiscences are helpful but not necessary. Prior training in calming meditation is helpful.

Mindfulness is brought to the forefront. Involvement with the senses and the unwholesome actions is minimized. Vitakka and vicara continue.

JHANA 2

Now vitakka and vicara are reduced using mindfulness. In walking meditation this can be done by paying attention to parts of the movement of feet or more phases. into 2, 3 and so on.

This removes the verbal and mental fabrications of vitakka and vicara by moving the attention. Body fabrications still remain.

This results in one-pointedness, and peace. Hence the Jhana 2.

JHANA 3

The resulting peace of mind prompts unity of mind and generates equanimity (Upekkha). The peace of mind causes a sense of tranquillity in the body (sukha).

When mindfulness is applied to the peace, its significance subsides. This results in Jhana 4.

JHANA 4

With there is subsidence of peace of mind and a pleasant feeling of body, attention shifts to the visibility of the origins of the feelings and the abandonment of both pleasure and pain. Similarly, the mental feelings of pleasure and pain (somanassa, domanassa) are abandoned. Mindfulness shows that these are futile.

In Pali this is called sabba sankhara samato.

It is like adukkham sukha (neither pleasant nor unpleasant) feelings.

Continuation allows abandonment of this too.

What remains is equanimity and mindfulness.

Article 103

Ajahn Brahm's Quote:

[Gratefully extracted from the newsletter of the Buddhist Society of Victoria
1 June 2022]

GENEROSITY

"There's joy when you see someone do a beautiful act of kindness, forgiveness, or generosity. Generosity is not just by giving donations, but by giving a little bit of space to somebody. Sometimes people make mistakes. Sometimes they snore during meditation. When they do that, please open the door of your heart to them."

Source: Opening up to Kindfulness by Ajahn Brahm

Ajahn Brahm's Quote:

[Gratefully extracted from the newsletter of the Buddhist Society of Victoria
9 June 2022]

BOWING-WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Sometimes people forget why we do rituals and ceremonies such as bowing. Some people say they don't know what we bow for. Is it a religious rite? It could be if you don't understand why, you are doing it.

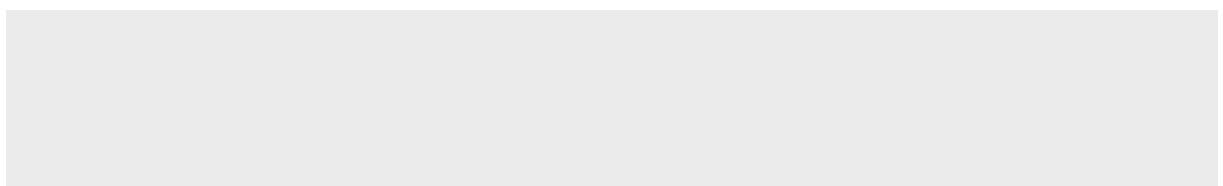
When I bow, I bow to what the Buddha represents for me. To me the first bow is always for virtue, for goodness, for ethics. Because when you are a good person, a kind person, a trustworthy person, it makes life so peaceful and so safe.

The second bow is to peace. Peace comes from virtue as you don't need to argue with one another to get your own way. You can relax and find some peace in this world by lowering your expectations of what life is. You're not fighting but making peace, being kind, being gentle with yourself and with others.

The last bow is to wisdom, to kindness. Wisdom is not something you write in books or argue about. That's what my teacher Ajahn Chah always said when he saw people arguing. He looked at one monk and said, "You're right but not correct" then looked at the other monk and said, "you're correct but not right." It's a very beautiful little statement, not preferring one person to another but saying you're both wrong because you're arguing.

Real wisdom is something which settles arguments, calms people down. It finds common ground, connections between people, things which everybody can agree upon, and love and respect. Things like compassion and kindness, things like truth. Even the Buddha used to say: "You can know it's the truth, it's the dharma, if it leads to peace, freedom, and enlightenment."

Source: Opening up to Kindfulness by Ajahn Brahm



Article 105

Ajahn Brahm's Quote:

[Gratefully extracted from the newsletter of the Buddhist Society of Victoria

16 June 2022]

HOW BIG IS MY HAND?

An old simile is: when you put your hand right in front of your face, it's so big. Just like when I'm obsessed with a problem, it stays right in front of my face, I can't see anything else but the problem—and it's huge. When you're peaceful, it goes out to where it belongs, at the end of your arm. The hand hasn't diminished in size, the problem is exactly the same, but now with perspective it's not such a big deal anymore. You've found some peace in your life. And peace is not what people tell you or force you to do. Peace is what happens when you relax, let things be, and have some kindness.

Source: Opening up to Kindfulness by Ajahn Brahm

Article 106

Ajahn Brahm's Quote:

[Gratefully extracted from the newsletter of the Buddhist Society of Victoria

23 June 2022]

SPACE

We can find peace in the space between people. Do you ever notice a room is mostly empty? When we just see people and not space, then we always see people, chairs, bottles of water, Ajahn Brahm. But imagine just seeing what is around all the things in a room, which is far greater. There is always more space than there are things. Unfortunately, we have always been trained to perceive things rather than what's between things.

Change your perception. The distance between people is not what separates them, but this lovely emptiness actually joins them together. The space which embraces everybody is peace. So don't look at things, look at what's between things. This is how we learn how to appreciate peace rather than things.

The emptiness which embraces everything is peace.

Source: Opening up to Kindfulness by Ajahn Brahm

The end of the QSA Dhamma Magazine for the period July 2022

Issued by the President of QSA, Reverend James Wilson

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