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THE BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF LIBERATION



ABSTRACT: -

This study will emphasize Theravada Buddhist Meditation and different the different type of methods applying them to different levels of knowledge. The objective is to explore how Buddhist meditation leads spiritual liberation and how meditative experience assists in understanding the meaning of Nibbana. The heart of Buddhist doctrines is that practical experience is more important than theoretical intellectual appreciation. This means, above all, that without practice, no one is able to achieve Nibbana. Indeed, the inclusion of meditation practice is necessary to fulfill the aim of this study. This paper will mainly investigate the following statements. First, this study will discuss the concept of spiritual liberation and the primary objective of meditation. Secondary, it will explore the methods of Theravada Buddhist meditation. Thirdly, it will describe the major types of Buddhist meditation and the process of insight. Lastly, it will analyze how the meditation leads one to realize the absolute peace of Nibbana.

KEYWORDS: Insight Meditation, Spiritual Liberation, The absolute peace of Nibbana .

INTRODUCTION

Buddhists mostly prefer to say that they wish

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to attain Nibbana instead of understanding what Nibbana really means. And so, often they state one can attain Nibbana through the practice of meditation. The state of Nibbana, the essence of which signifies deathlessness, the end of suffering, and liberation from bondage, is the highest goal for Buddhists. They think that Nibbana is within the reach of all. However, it is difficult for them to explain the essence of Nibbana philosophically. Yet the philosophical statement has been often brought up by non-Buddhist practitioners: If Nibbana doesn't mean the absolute extinction, then what kind of release does Nibbana signify?

Most Buddhists will explain that Nibbana is "ultimate reality" and they might say that it is difficult to describe the essence of Nibbana for those who have not yet attained the state of Nibbana. That accords with what is said in the Abhidhamma: the state of Nibbana is "beyond word, language or reasonings (Atakkavacara)" so that no one expect enlightened beings can understand its true essence through worldly concept. Enlightened beings can understand what Nibbana is through their insight wisdom. Since Buddhists know of the benefits of meditation generated by insight wisdom in individuals, they make their efforts towards the practice of meditation. This is how Buddhists approach their spiritual path. Based on their attitude towards the teachings of the Buddha, they affirm that vipassana (insight) meditation is a gateway to reach Nibbana.

Regarding the doctrine of Nibbana, there is a connection between insight and Nibbana. In this context, Nibbana or Asankhata-dhatu can be translated as freedom, liberation (vimutti). Meditation

methods can be connected to the method of the “Noble Eight Fold Paths (attha-magganga” and the method of the “Four Foundation of Mindfulness” as well. As a matter of fact, the Dhamma given by the Buddha can be divided into aspects: the doctrine and the practice.

The Principal formulation of the doctrine is the Four Noble Truths; the principal formulation of the practice is the Noble Eightfold Path. The two, however, are closely interwoven: for, as we shall see, the Noble Eightfold Path is the fourth of the Four Noble Truths, while the first step of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right View, means understanding the ‘Four Noble Truths.’

In the “Noble Eightfold Path,” Right View is the first factor of the path and the essential guide for all other factors of the path. The active counterpart of right view also is linked to right conduct with the idea of moral and spiritual excellence in body, speech, and mind. Right Mindfulness is the seventh factor of the path, that is, awareness of every single moment in body, speech, and thought. The power of mindfulness is to generate insight knowledge and to obtain liberation from suffering.

Mindfulness meditation makes possible the progress of insight during intensive meditation. The progress of insight consists of different levels of liberation (vimutti). However, according to the Nibbanadhatu Sutta, there are mainly two levels of liberation. They are: (1) psychological level of liberation (saupadisesa-nibbanadhatu) and biological level of liberation (anupadisesa-nibbanadhatu). Saupadisesa-nibbana-dhatu here means Nibbana element with the remainder of the phenomena of conditioned existence, while Anupadisesa-nibbana-dhatu is Nibbana element without any remainder of conditioned existence.

Psychological liberation is a kind of spiritual liberation that means liberation from mental destruction due to craving (tanha) or desire (samudaya). For instance, when craving or desire together with ignorance (avijja) are eliminated, one can remove the mental defilements, such as unhappiness, worry, sorrow, sadness and other mental sufferings. Psychological liberation directly refers to the spiritual liberation, which is linked to mind. When one’s mind is released from defilements (kilesas), such as lust (raga), craving (tanha) and ignorance (avijja), one can psychologically liberate oneself from mental suffering which involves the mental factors of unhappiness, depression and so on.

According to the Abhidhamma, peace and happiness are linked to an inner peaceful state of mind. For enlightened beings, after achieving the state of Nibbana in this very life, the supreme peace and happiness are experienced, called saupadisesa-Nibbana, that is, liberation from mental suffering. In the Mangala Sutta, the statement has been recorded that since enlightened beings (Arahants) have freed themselves from craving or desire together with ignorance, they can never again be touched by fear and anxiety. Though eight worldly conditions (loka-dhamma), such as Gain (labha) or Loss (alabha); Honor (yasa) or Dishonor (ayasa); Praise (pasamsa) or Blame (ninda), and Happiness (sukha) or sufferings (dukkha), reach them, their mind is not shaken at all (cittam yassa na kampati). They are sorrowless (asoka) stainless (viraga) and safe (khema). In Buddhism, this kind of psychological freedom can be named “Psychological Liberation”.

“Biological Liberation” takes place, when enlightened beings enter the state of absolute Nibbana. Meanwhile, the process of the mind and body of enlightened beings, these so called identities of Arahants, totally stops and its kammic force comes to an end. After that, the round of their rebirths is broken for them. This kind of state is known as Anupadisesa Nibbana, or “Biological Liberation.” It is understood that after the enlightened beings have attained the absolute peace of Nibbana, there is no residue of the elements of conditioned existence. The process of the mental and physical phenomenal no longer exists, but only the deathless element and absolute peace exist. This kind of state is said to be the Unborn (appatisandi), Unmade (anupapatti), Unbecome (ajata), Unconditioned (asankhata).

In Buddhist perspective, spiritual freedom is also named vimutti (liberation). In this context, what does spiritual freedom mean to Buddhist? As has been mentioned before, spiritual freedom contains two levels: psychological liberation and biological liberation. However, meditation techniques help one understand what spiritual liberation means practically. Moreover, spiritual liberation is characterized as the taste of liberation (vimuttirasa). Indeed, the experience of the dhamma contains no sensory taste. Yet the state of the dhamma metaphorically consists of qualities of dhamma taste, the taste of spiritual liberation. In the Paharada Sutta, the Buddha addressed the matter thus:

Paharada, just as the great ocean has but one taste, the taste of salt; even so this Dhamma and Discipline (Dhamma-Vinaya) has but one taste, the taste of liberation (vimutti-rasa). This is the sixth wonderful and marvelous quality in this Dhamma and Discipline, which the monks perceive by reason of which they take delight in it.

In this regard, the spiritual liberation is fundamentally free from craving and ignorance that cause the whole mass of suffering, such as rebirth, aging, sickness, death, sorrow, lamentation and all kinds of mental and physical sufferings. If there is no craving for worldly pleasure, no clinging to existences (rebirth), and no ignorance about daily activities, there is no suffering for beings. In Buddhism, the realization of the absolute cessation of suffering is considered to be the attainment of Nibbana. Yet Buddhist meditation teachers are often asked: "How does one attain Nibbana?" To this question, the simple answer of the meditation teachers is to purify the mind (citta-visuddhi). What methods does one apply to practice? Again, the simple answer is to apply the Noble Eightfold Path (attha-magganga) which consists of eight factors for the practice. Thus someone may ask endless philosophical questions about Nibbana. Yet one may not understand what is the essence of Nibbana, until one has one's own experience of that taste of the Dhamma toward Nibbana through meditation.

The Attainment of Wisdom (Nana) Through Insight Meditation

There are two fundamental methods, also called "yanika" (vehicle). One is samatha-yanika (one who has tranquility as vehicle) and the other is vipassana-yanika (one who has insight as vehicle). Those practicing vipassana meditation without attaining the level of samatha-jhana (absorption) are known as sukka-vipassaka-yanika or suddha-vipassana-yanika (one who supports his practice with bare insight as vehicle). Those who teach the method of samatha-yanika base their instruction on the commentary statement in the text. The statement reads as follows:

Alternatively, when, having entered upon those jhanas and emerged from them, he comprehends with insight the consciousness associated with the jhanas as liable to destruction and to fall, then at the actual time of insight momentary unification of the mind arises through the penetration of the characteristics [of impermanence, and so on].

However, those who prefer to teach the method of sudha-vipassaka-yanika base their instruction on the sub-commentary statement of the text. The statement reads as follows:

Khanika-samadhi means concentration, which penetrates into the objects from moment to moment. Such kind of concentration is able to destroy the hindrances (sensual thoughts and thoughts of ill will etc.), so that the mind is unshakably upon the object and rests upon the object from moment to moment.

By practicing insight meditation, one realizes the path and fruition knowledge. Since one has fully attained the path and fruition knowledge through vipassana meditation, he or she is considered an enlightened being in Theravada Buddhism. In the present age, Buddhists in Burma (Myanmar) mostly practice vipassana meditation without developing samatha jhana. However, some meditators do start their practice with the development of jhana before switching to vipassana meditation.

Most Burmese meditation masters state that jhanika-samadhi (momentary concentration) has the function of concentration in that it removes mental distractions from the mind and eradicates adverse things, known as nivarana (hindrances) at each moment of awareness. This kind of mental state that temporarily keeps hindrances away from one's mind is able to attain insight as well as path and fruition knowledge. Yet Pa-Auk Sayadaw who is a well-known meditation master in Burma prefers to start his instructions with the development of jhana meditation.

In this regard, the function of concentration is to reduce nivarana (hindrances) from one's mind so as to purify the mind. The nivarana consists of the five factors that are obstacles to the mind and blind one's mental vision (spiritual wisdom). The five factors of nivarana are: (1) kamacchanda-nivarana (sensuous desire), (2) vyapada-nivarana (ill will), thina-middha-nivarana (sloth and torpor), uddhacca-kukkuca-nivarana (restlessness and remorse), and vicikiccha-nivarana (sceptical doubt). Those who follow the path of samatha (jhana) meditation proclaim that in the presence of the nivarana one cannot reach upcara-samadhi (neighbourhood or access concentration) and appana-samadhi (absorption or full concentration). Yogis following the path of

vipassana-meditation state that in the presence of the nivarana, one cannot clearly discern the truths. Those truths include nima-rupa (mind and matter), which are related to the three universal characteristics: anicca (impermanency), dukkha (suffering), and anatta (non-self or the impersonal and insubstantial nature of all corporeal and mental phenomena of existence).

Vipassana (insight) meditation is also linked to the “Four Foundations of Mindfulness Meditation” in Buddhist practice. Those who practice the “Four Foundations of Mindfulness Meditation” are considered to be practicing vipassana meditation.²⁹⁸ The mindfulness meditation provides seven benefits to those who practice it. The seven benefits are: (1) purification of beings (sattanam visuddhiya), (2) and (3) overcoming of sorrow and distress (sokaparidevanam samatikkamaya), (4) and (5) disappearance of pain (physical pain) and sadness (mental pain) (dukkha-domanassanam atthangamaya), (6) gaining of the right path (nayassa adhigamaya), and realization of Nibbana (nibbanassa sacchikiriya). When one considers how wonderful it would be to overcome sorrow and distress and to cause the disappearance of the mental anguish associated with the pain of the body as well as purely mental sadness, the benefits are very encouraging for those meditators who seek the path of liberation, Nibbana. In the Mahasatipatthana Sutta, the Buddha clearly addresses this:

There is, monks, this one way to the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and distress for the disappearance of pain and sadness, for the gaining of the highest path, for the realization of Nibbana: - that is to say the “Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

In Buddhist writings, the word “vipassana-nana” very often appears in relation to Buddhist meditation. Therefore, one might pose the question: “What is vipassana-nana (insight-wisdom)?” Insight-wisdom is the intuitive sense or experience that is able to realize the truth of impermanency (aniccanupassana-nana), of suffering (dukkhanupassana-nana), of impersonality or in other words the insubstantial nature of physical and mental phenomena of existence (anattanupassana-nana). According to Buddhist perspective, insight wisdom is not the result of mere intellectual understanding, but it is a kind of realization that links to direct meditative observation of one’s own physical and mental process. The initial observation of the physical and mental phenomena with insight wisdom can lead one to attain Nibbana. In this theoretical context, Buddhists point out the fact that since the experience of Nibbana is pertinent to meditative practice, it is impossible to understand Nibbana nature merely through intellectual speculation. “Realization of Nibba” refers to realization of the process is accomplished through supramundane wisdom at attainment of full enlightenment. The “experience of Nibbana” has the function of discovery. For the true essence of Nibbana arises with the attainment of the state of absolute peace; at that time, one experiences seeing the process of all phenomena that have totally ceased and absolute peace comes to exist.

It is impossible for those who haven’t undertaken meditative practice to understand the true experience of Nibbana. It is argued that based on the theoretical aspect, the word Nibbana is indeed vague and hard to understand. Thus some non-meditative practitioners like Robert L. Slater interpret the word “Nibbana” differently; “It (Nibbana) belongs to the language of faith. The negative terms employed are just as much an affirmation of this faith as the associated picture-terms of analogy which are more obviously positive.” But the Buddha repeatedly expressed that it is impossible to understand the essence of Nibbanic nature merely through intellectual speculation. It can only be fully understood by the attainment of enlightenment.

Buddhism describes its systematic approach practically as well as theoretically. The following step is a preparatory stage for vipassana (insight) wisdom. If one sincerely desires to develop insight wisdom in the present life, one should give up worldly thoughts and actions during the meditation training. Since this practice is for the purification of conduct (sila-visuddhi), it is essential to observe precepts either five precepts or eight precepts initially. As an additional regulation, one is not to speak to other yogis (meditators) and visitors during the meditation training. This Buddhist action is known as “Noble Silence (tunhibhava).” For the Buddhists, there are some additional preparatory actions, such as asking for forgiveness from the Noble Ones as well as the meditation teachers, if one has offended them before the training. Moreover, one should generate caturarakkha-bhavana (the “Four Protections of mental development”). They are: (1) reflection on the virtue of the Buddha (Buddhanussati-bhavana), (2) generating loving-thoughts towards all beings (Metta-bhavana), (3) reflection on the loathsomeness of the body (asubha-bhavana), and (4) reflection on nature of death

(marananussati-bhavana).

According to Mahasi Sayadaw, to begin the vipassana meditation training in the appropriate way, one should start sitting meditation with a comfortable posture. One should give up worldly thoughts, staying in the present moment, and keep one's mind on the object of the abdomen, that is, the movement of rising and falling, or in and out breath (anapana) and so on. After a short time, one will come to know the movements of rising and falling obviously through awareness. One's mental noting or mental awareness of each movement of the abdomen helps one perceive the process of nama-rupa, this is, the bodily sensation and mental awareness of the object so as to develop one's spiritual ability in the practice. One is able to know each successive occurrence of the mental and physical processes at each of the six sense organs when insight contemplation is fully developed. As one makes progress in mindfulness meditation, one can distinguish the differences between true nature of mind and body; between pleasant and unpleasant sensation, and between wholesome and unwholesome mental factors including greed, hatred and delusion. Thus one will realize the aim of practicing vipassana (insight) meditation, that is, to release one's mind from greed, hatred delusion which are the roots of all evil and suffering of human beings.

As has been mentioned, meditators use these three types of concentration in different parts of the training. For instance, (1) upacara Samadhi (neighbourhood or access concentration) is a kind of concentration which emerges during samatha meditation and which takes place just before entering any of the jhana (absorption) states. However, (2) appana Samadhi (absorption or full concentration) is a kind of concentration that exists while one is in the state of jhana. Meditators who practice vipassana meditation mainly apply khanika Samadhi (momentary concentration) to vipassana meditation. The method of khanika Samadhi takes a step toward mental purification by overcoming greed, hatred and delusion from moment to moment. This method of meditation is employed to attain the realization of Nibbana.

Regarding the progress of insight in vipassana practice, there are some divergent perspectives contained in the Buddhist commentaries. In the Visuddhimagga, the commentators mention the progress of insight knowledge starting with namarupa-paticcheda-nana (analytical knowledge of mind and body), paccayaparigaha-nana (knowledge of discerning cause and condition) and then sammāsana-nana (knowledge of comprehension), etc., while in the Abhidhammattha-sangha, the commentator mentions that the progress of insight wisdom starts with sammāsana-nana (knowledge of comprehension).

According to Mahasi Sayadaw, a meditator who wants to attain Nibbana in this very life should base the practice on the foundation of the "Noble Eightfold Path" taught by the Buddha in the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, the Mahasatipatthana Sutta, and in some other Suttas. This path consists of the eight factors (Right Understanding, Right Aim, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration). These constituents of the path lead one to the realization of the cessation of suffering, that is, Nibbana.

The sequence in developing insight-wisdom is given, in the Visuddhimagga. That sequence is follows: (1) nama-rupa-pariggaha-nana (analytical knowledge of mind and body), (2) paccayapariggaha-nana (knowledge of discerning cause and condition), (3) sammāsana-nana (knowledge of comprehension), (4) udayabhaya-nana (knowledge of rise and fall of formations), (5) bhanga-nana (knowledge of the dissolution of formations), (6) bhaya-nana (knowledge of dissolving things as fearful), (7) adinava-nana (knowledge of fearful things as dangerous), (8) nibbida-nana (knowledge of disenchantment with formations), (9) muncitukamyata-nana (knowledge of desire for deliverance), (10) patisankha-nana (knowledge of reflecting contemplation), (11) sankharupekha-nana (knowledge of equanimity towards formations), (12) anuloma-nana (knowledge of conformity), (13) vutthanagamini-vipassana-nana (knowledge of leading to Emergence), (14) gotrabhu-nana (knowledge of maturity), (15) magga-nana (knowledge of Path), and (16) phala-nana (knowledge of Fruition).

In this context of the progress of insight wisdom, Mahasi Sayadaw points out the spiritual process and how to get into the state of the realization of Nibbana through the path. He provides the following statement.

According to the Visuddhi Magga, the "Insight Leading to Emergence" is the culmination of Insight, and is identical with the following three knowledges; Equanimity about Formations, Desire for Deliverance, and Knowledge of Reobservation. It is called "Leading to Emergence" because it emerges from the contemplation of

formations (conditioned phenomena) to the Supramundane Path that has Nibbana as its object. That means is no longer a mental construct of conceptual thinking.

Although these stages of insight wisdom are the entire way of mindfulness meditation progressing up to its culmination, the emphasis of the progress is on the advanced stages of the path with the distinctive feature of meditators being their clarity of insight. Those who have not participated in the practice personally may not understand the significance of the stages of insight wisdom. As a matter of fact, these experiences are illustrated by the actual meditative practice. Therefore, philosophical thinking about insight wisdom may not grant great clarity in this sense. It is indeed good to examine insight wisdom through philosophical thinking, but the best way to examine insight wisdom is to make the effort to practice in order to see this insight wisdom for oneself directly. Practice is the only means of reaching or achieving the Buddhist goal, Nibbana.

CONCLUSION

In terms of the interpretation of Nibbana, this research has readjusted and promoted the former scholarly interpretations, which are indeed not sufficient enough to understand what the true meaning of Nibbana is theoretically and philosophically. The reasons are the limitation of the language that they use; probably the writers who have insufficient practice purifying the mind are unable to realize what the nature of Nibbana is and therefore they are unable to clarify what the meaning of Nibbana is practically. In reality, Nibbana can be expressed with a positive statement or a negative statement, depending on what one thinks. My premise is that there is no way to describe Nibbana in positive terms only. Although Nibbana is mostly described in negative terms, such as the absolute extinction, not becoming, and not rebirth, it does not mean that Nibbana is negative. That conclusion is indeed a positive statement.

The interpretations, however, may see this statement about Nibbana as a negative statement and try to counter with what seem positive terms, using or emphasizing descriptions such as absolute happiness, peacefulness, transcendental serenity and blissfulness. Since the former interpreters cannot reach the transcendental levels of Nibbana through worldly language or by way of the philosophical context, they attempt to define it as a peaceful and blissful state like a paradise with transcendental light. However, one may not understand the nature of Nibbana through worldly concepts, but one may assume that it is a transcendental state, which exists in the nature of dhamma. Dhamma here means lokuttara-citta (supramundane consciousness), that is, the state of dhamma-dhatu (dhamma-element), which exists as a transcendental state known by enlightened beings.

One may say that Nibbana is neither negative nor positive. This is because the nature of the dhamma is neither negative nor positive. The view of negative or positive is merely a worldly concept. Therefore, if one attempts to describe the word Nibbana as a concept through a worldly language for the purpose of communication or philosophical appreciation, one may not reach the true essence of Nibbana, since the true essence of Nibbana goes beyond worldly language. Again, there are no exact words or no languages with which one can describe the true essence of Nibbana, but practicing meditation with the proper methods resolves this problem. This study indeed does not attempt to resolve the concept of Nibbana linguistically, at least not completely. Moreover, this study does not attempt to determine whether the concept of Nibbana is eternalism or annihilationism, based on the scholars' interpretations. The primary purpose of this study is to explore the methods that lead one to understand what Nibbana is theoretically and attain insight wisdom (vipassana-nana) and the Path and Fruition wisdom (magga-phala-nana) with which one realize Nibbana with the practical basis.

As has been mentioned, the canonical texts provide meditators the understanding of what is Nibbana with systematic and practical methods. Since systematic applications of the canonical methods clarify the significance of meditation, meditators come to know that the primary objective of Buddhist meditation, that is to purify the mind. One may understand from oneself what Nibbana is by applying the canonical methods, such as (1) pariyatti (to study theory), (2) patipatti (to practice meditation in accordance with the theories), and (3) pativeda (to attain the realization of Nibbana). Theoretical understanding and philosophical understanding of Nibbana (that is pariyatti) are always incomplete. Nibbana (that is pariyatti) are always incomplete.

Consequently, one must practice the path of spiritual realization in order to properly understand the meaning of Nibbana. With progress on the path of spiritual realization (visuddhi-magga) there is clarification of the theoretical and philosophical opinions. Spiritual liberation here means liberation from defilements, liberation from hindrances, and liberation from wrong view or concept.

In this regard, one can distinguish the differences between the theoretical understanding and the practical realization through practice only. Theoretical understanding contains the concept of "I" which deals with delusion, hallucination, defilement, or fetters. There may be clinging to oneself, desire to enjoy oneself, hatred of someone for "I", love of someone for "I" and so on. Without forsaking the concept of "I", one will not obtain the purification of mind and may not realize the true essence of Nibbana as well, because the so-called "I" itself is an illusion and an obstruction to the realization of Nibbana. In Buddhist doctrines, anatta (no self) theory has been precisely described in order to remove the concept of "I" from oneself. If one wishes to purify the mind and to obtain the experience of true dhamma, one must detach from "I", from oneself and attempt to be aware of one's phenomenal experience without involving "I". Since there is no "I" in oneself, mind has a better opportunity to obtain liberation from mental fetters (samyojanas). When one realizes the natural process of mind and matter, that is, physical phenomena and mental phenomena, which truly exist in oneself, there is no room for the concept of "I". This means that the so-called "I" no longer exists in oneself at that moment. As a result, there is no such "I", which formerly suffered in pain and discomfort. If it is so who suffers?

For there is suffering, but none who suffers;
 Dhamma exists although there is no doer;
 Extinction is but no extinguished person;
 Although there is a path, there is no goer.

Since there is no "I", that is identified as "ego" or "self" or "me" or "mine" and this is realized by meditators through meditation, there is no one who suffers in pain. If there is no "I" who suffers in pain, then one can realize the state of freedom from mental and physical sufferings and peace, known as spiritual liberation. Moreover, Nibbana is described as the end of suffering and the end of samsara. Indeed, one of the functions of Nibbana is to stop the transferring from death consciousness to rebirth consciousness. This rebirth is due to causes and conditions. In this context, a word like "unconditioned" seems to be the relevant translation for Nibbana. Thus meditation is considered to be vitally important for one to know how consciousness and mental factors are unified and stopped, how the internal and causal process led to its own destruction with the realization of the dhamma, and how desires and delusion disappear by purifying the mind.

When one can experience the significance of purification of mind that is momentarily free from mental suffering or unhappiness due to delusion, one's mind begins to become purified and comes to experience the significance of spiritual liberation, which involves peace and happiness moment to moment. That peacefulness and happiness is the result of the "I" being removed from one's mind. Since the minds of the meditators are overwhelmed by spiritual peace and bliss, the practitioners begin to have hope that the final liberation is not far away any longer; the absolute peace of Nibbana is there. Thus Buddhist meditators apply these methods pragmatically in order to attain the final realization of Nibbana, but do not use merely the philosophical methods through worldly language.

Yet this study, must give credit to Pali commentators, Buddhist and non-Buddhist interpreters, especially the most wonderful commentator, Ven. Buddhaghosa who systematized the canonical methods for the sake of meditation. Consequently, his wonderful works, such as the Visuddhimagga and the other commentaries, show his intellectual and practical skills in Buddhism so that his works could start a new era for Theravada Buddhism. Without his works, Theravada Buddhism perhaps would not survive in a healthy condition nowadays. And his commentaries are like a map that leads one to reach his or her spiritual liberation and final destination.

Now let us sum up the primary purpose of the discussion. This study attempts to analyze the perspectives of Buddhist and non-Buddhist scholars' interpretations of Nibbana. It may be assumed that the words of Buddhist scholars are based on canonical texts through theoretical study and probably practical

experience as well, while the work of non-Buddhist scholars is possibly very much based on their intellectual understanding about Nibbana from their doctrinal perspectives of this concept and through the philosophical approach. Thus their interpretations of Nibbana have involved positive and negative statements. However, this study does not attempt to confirm whether or not the interpretations of Buddhist and non-Buddhist scholars are right or wrong. Moreover, this study has not completely covered the entirety of canonical texts, commentaries, and sub-commentaries, because of the large number of volumes of canonical texts and the richness of the sources of Buddhist literature.

It is hoped that this study will assist other academic researchers in Buddhist studies and will help them with a way to apply the canonical methods for the development of further Buddhist studies. Since it provides some of the benefits of meditation for those who have an interest in Buddhist meditation, they may come to understand at least in rudimentary terms the theoretical, practical and philosophical aspects of the word "Nibbana". Finally it is my contention that although a partial understanding is possible with a philosophical approach, without having personal experience of the meditative practice, one will not truly understand what the word Nibbana really means.

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