



THE CONCEPT OF OVERCOMING OF GRIEF (SOKA) BY MINDFULNESS IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

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ABSTRACT :

Grief (soka) is a feeling of deep sadness. Grief arises when death occurs in a man's beloved family, when he loses his fortune, or when he is afflicted with a disease, or when his moral character or religious faith goes to rack and run. Everybody who faces ruin in one way or the other is troubled with grief. Every man comes to grief when he is in probable danger of being killed. The grief-troubled man is unhappy, sadden, afraid and agitated. His mind is in confusion. He cannot sleep. He cannot eat anything. Lonely, distressed and over his troubles, he suffers from the throes of grief. Such is affliction of every grief -troubled man and woman. Grief is another word for mental suffering. So the Buddha expressed it as the truth of suffering. Grief troubles every normal person who is not yet free from defilements. All normal people wandering in the cycle of life (samsāra) are bound to be troubled with grief. Grief oppresses every ordinary living being irrespective of people, or religion.

KEYWORDS : *Grief - Soka, Stiapatthāna - Mindfulness, Defilement, Attachment, Nibbāna.*

INTRODUCTION

If attachment is 'natural' then grief is a 'natural' emotion that is experienced when one is parted from what is dear. If grief is dealt with effectively it can initiate insight. However, if it is dealt with unskillfully, complications may arise. The normal grief reaction may manifest physically, emotionally, cognitively and behaviorally. Grief may have phases. However, some health workers encourage a task oriented approach to more actively enable a bereaved person to process and resolve the grief reaction. One way of effectively dealing with grief is that of the Theravada Buddhists' practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness means staying aware of mind and body conditions in a present moment context. The task oriented approach can utilize mindfulness, and mindfulness may also be evident in many modern psychotherapies. Traditional mind-tools to encourage mindfulness may be used in collaboration with a counselor or therapist as well as in solitary practice. With mindfulness a bereaved person can more effectively acknowledge the reality of loss and allow the pain of grief to manifest without further complication. If the pain is experienced without undue reaction,



the undermining effect and manifestation of grief can be resolved and the bereaved person can function relatively free from impediment. Grief is a common emotion that human beings experience when they are parted from that to which they are attached. Its effect can be painful and debilitating. Probably the most debilitating type of grief occurs when a loved one dies. If the grief is not dealt with effectively the grief can become pathological and create a situation

where the bereaved person is unable to function in the world adequately. The pain of grief is just as much a part of life as the joy of love; it is, perhaps, the price we pay for love, the cost of commitment. The resolution of grief can be accomplished by developing mindfulness. The practice of mindfulness (satipatthāna) emphasizes being aware and surrendering to the natural and present moment conditions of mind and body. Primarily this is an approach of Theravada Buddhists. However, elements of its practice can be found within common task oriented and supportive grief counseling techniques as well as some modern psychotherapies.

ORIGIN OF GRIEF

The Buddha says, grief originates when one comes into contact with one of the five kinds of ruin or one of the troublesome sense-objects. Thousands of people come to grief because of the loss of parents, husbands, wives, children or friends. Besides some are themselves with anguish over the loss of, or separation from their beloved ones. Some suffer from sleeplessness or loss of appetite to the point of breakdown in their health and some eventually die of a broken-heart.

In the Dhammapada the Buddha has expounded many reasons of the origin of grief. The first reason is that grief and fear arise out of affection as follow:

Affection begets grief, affection begets fear.

For him who is free from affection.

There is no grief how can there be fear for him.

The second reason is that grief and fear are arising out of endearment as follow:

Endearment begets grief endearment begets fear.

For him who is free from endearment.

There is no grief how can there be fear for him.

The third reason is grief and fear arises out of enjoyment of sensual pleasures and attachment as follow:

Attachment (sensual pleasures) begets grief attachment begets fear.

For him who is free from endearment.

There is no grief how can there be fear for him.

The fourth reason is that grief and fear arise out of lust for sensual pleasure as follow:

Lust begets grief lust begets fear.

For him who is free from lust.

There is no grief how can there be fear for him.

The fifth season is that grief and fear arise out craving as follow:

Craving begets grief craving begets fear.

For him who is free from craving.

There is no grief how can there be fear for him.

The above mentioned discourses in Dhammapada have showed by the Buddha as the reasons of origin of grief.

The mindfulness (satipatthāna) for overcoming of grief

Everybody who desires to overcome of grief has to practice the way of mindfulness (satipatthāna). The Buddha has described the four foundations of mindfulness (satipatthāna) in Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta. They are: Kāyānupassanā satipatthāna- contemplation of body, Vedānānupassanā satipatthāna- contemplation of feeling, Cittānupassanā satipatthāna- contemplation of mind, and Dhammānupassanā satipatthāna- contemplation of mind-objcets. The path of satipatthāna mindfulness is the only path of the Buddhas, *Paccekabuddhas* and the *Ariyan* disciples for successfully overcoming grief, anxiety and

lamentation. This is the only path for overcoming of grief and there is no other path. Those who follow the satipatthāna (mindfulness) path can certainly overcome grief and attain to liberation of suffering called Nibbāna.

Practice of Mindfulness (satipatthāna)

According to the Buddha, a person should note all physical and mental phenomena that arise at every moment of contact between the sense-organ and the sense-object: he should try to know them as they really are.

When the person sees something at the moment of contact between the eye and the visual object, he should note mentally, "seeing," "seeing."

When he hears at the moment of contact between the ear and the sound, he should note "hearing," "hearing."

When he smells at the moment of contact between the nose and the odour, he should note "smelling."

When he knows the process of eating at the moment of contact between the tongue and the taste, he should note "know the eating."

When he knows the contact between the body and a tactile object, he should note, "know the contact."

When thinking arises from the contact between the mind and the mind-object, he should note "thinking," "thinking."

This method is in accord with what the Buddha says in the Āyatana section of the Contemplation of the Mind-object in Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta. "The meditator should know the eye as well as the eye-object, etc.," This noting of the physical and mental phenomena that occur at every moment of contact between the sense-organ and the sense-object is called vipassanā or insight-meditation.

Initially the person is not able to note "seeing", "hearing," etc., in respect of whatever he sees, hears, etc. Therefore he should follow the advice given in the commentary on the Visuddhi Magga. "The path of purity" which says that the beginner in insight meditation should first pay attention to what is conspicuous. Of the two objects of insight meditation, i.e. mind and corporeality, the latter is more conspicuous.

In the contemplation on corporeality, the person should focus his mind on the four basic and primary elements viz., the earth-element, the water-element, the fire-element and the wind-element. Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw instructs us to begin with the contemplation of the wind-contact corporeality that is indicated by the motion of the belly. From such a beginning we should extend the contemplation to the exercise in noting all the psycho-physical phenomena, such as seeing, hearing etc., that arise and pass away at every moment of contact between the sense-organ and the sense-objects.

For this purpose the person should retire to a quiet place, pay respect to the three jewels, sit cross-legged, keep the body erect, close both eyes gently and with body and mind composed, focus his attention on his belly. In this position he should breathe in and breathe out normally. He should not deliberately control his breathing and make it either slow and imperceptible or fast and perceptible. He should keep his breathing at its normal usual pace. While this breathing in and out, he should focus on the physical phenomenon of motion that arises from the contact between wind contract corporeality and the body-sensitivity of the belly. He should note "rising" when breathing out and note "falling" when breathing in. This noting is to be done mentally and not verbally.

While noting the rise and fall of the belly, there may arise some kind of mental image in his closed eyes and then he should note "seeing", "seeing" until it vanishes. After its disappearance he should resume noting "falling" and rising." The same may be said of his imagined hearing and smelling. He should note them until they pass away and then resume noting, "The rise and fall" of the belly. When the person (meditator) is meditating there is no consciousness of eating. If the mouth becomes full of saliva, he should note, "much saliva," "the desire to swallow it," "the act of swallowing". If he wants to spit out, he should keep a spittoon

handy and note, “desire to spit out, he should take the spittoon, desire to spit out he should put back the spittoon.” Then he should again note, “rising” and “falling.”

If the contact arises in the body he should note it. The whole body is continuously pervaded by the rising and vanishing mind-produced element of motion in terms of the desire to walk, the desire to sleep. Because of the desire to breathe in and out there arises the mind-produced element of motion in terms of breathing. Because of breathing there is contact between the corporeality of motion and the body-sensitivity of the belly and hence the contact of the rising and falling corporeality of motion in the body. Noting this is in accord with the teaching in Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta.

Moreover, tilting, inclining and other motions of the body while the yogi (meditator) is sitting are also the result of the contact of the corporeality of motion in the body.

Again while noting the rising and falling, the person (meditator) may feel itching, then he should focus his mind on these pains resolutely until they pass away, bearing in mind the saying that perseverance will lead to Nibbāna.

There is no ailment that does not yield to real perseverance. In the end everything passes away in accordance with the law of impermanence as pointed out by the Buddha. If many kinds of physical pain rise all at the same time, the person (meditator) should choose the most painful of them as the object of contemplation. After its disappearance, he should deal with other pains in the same way and then resume noting the rise and fall of the belly.

If owing to lack of practice the person (meditator) cannot focus on a pain patiently for a long time, and there arises in him the desire to do something for its cessation, he should note his desire and act accordingly. This should, of course, be the last resort. When the person (meditator) can no longer bear the pain. Should he give way to his desire and try every now and then to remove the pain, his power of concentration would not develop quickly.

The person (meditator) who constantly notes the physical pains is acting in accord with the Buddha’s teaching in the section “Contemplation on the feelings” in the Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta. If he finds the pains unbearable in the mind, he should note “unbearable,” “depressing,” etc. This is what the *sutta* tells us about the contemplation on mental suffering.

Then he should proceed to note the rising and falling. There arise various thoughts and intentions; he should focus on them until they pass away. Then he should go on with the arising and falling. This is contemplation on the mind according to Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta.

We have outlined the method of noting all psycho-physical phenomena beginning with the conspicuous corporeality of motion that arises in the sitting position. We have explained the method in accordance with the Buddha’s teaching. In actual practice the person (meditator) need not follow any hard and fast rule. Instead he should focus on any phenomenon that arises naturally while he is noting the rise and fall of the belly, on manner whether it be any thought or intention or any pain or hearing. If he contemplates otherwise he will have the illusion of ego-entity, permanence or pleasantness when he sees or hears anything; and if despite such illusions he has anxiety. The object of insight-meditation is to be free from such illusions and anxiety and to have inner peace.

The person (meditator) should note “walking,” “standing,” “sitting,” or “lying” in accordance with what he is doing at any moment: When his mind is concentrated on the object of meditation he has purity of mind. When he distinguishes between the noted object and the noting consciousness he gains insight into the distinction between mind and corporeality. If he knows that his attentiveness is due to the presence of some object, he has insight into the causal relation between mind and corporeality. Then there arises another insight, which makes him aware of the impermanence, suffering and non-self. Again the person (meditator) develops another insight that restricts his awareness to arising and passing away of everything.

As this last insight-knowledge becomes sharp and acute, it rules out the arising of greed, hatred delusion and other defilements, which beset an unmindful person. This means their momentary extinction at every moment of mindfulness. Thus the person (meditator) who has well-developed insight knowledge can

momentarily overcome hatred and grief which are rooted out only at the Anāgāmi stage on the Ariyan holy path.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, if a man focuses his mind on grief and anxiety that be-devils him in the face of any kind of ruin or a troublesome sense-object, he will find that his mental sufferings pass away one after another. As his contemplation gains momentum he should continue to note ceaselessly every psycho-physical phenomenon that arises. Then as a result he will develop the insight that makes him aware of ceaseless dissolution, the insight that makes him disillusioned, frightened, sick of life, and eager to be liberated, the insight that is linked with tranquility and other insight that lean to the attainment of the four paths and their fruitions (magga and phala). Therefore, when we want to overcome this grief we have to practice mindfulness (satipatthāna) coming from Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta. The mindfulness is the only way to overcome grief in Buddhism. If we remove this grief we have no mental and physical suffering concern with sorrow which experience to the people in the world. Finally we can attain to Nibbāna which is the liberation of suffering.

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