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THE IDEOLOGICAL DOCTRINE OF WISDOM (PAÑÑĀ) FROM THE BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT:

This article is regarding the importance of wisdom in Theravada Buddhism. It is to understand the meaning of wisdom correctly. The systems of Buddhist philosophy emphasize on the concept of wisdom: Buddhism believes that wisdom is the most important in human life. Without wisdom a person cannot know what he ought to do, what he ought not to do, and he cannot discriminate what thing has value and what thing has no value. Wisdom is the ability to think and act using knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense,

and insight.

Paññā is often translated as 'wisdom', but is closer in meaning to 'insight', 'discriminating knowledge', or intuitive apprehension'. In the Pāli canon, paññā is concentrated insight into the three characteristics of all things such as impermanence- anicca, suffering- dukkha and non-self- anatta, and the four noble truths. In the Visuddhimagga, Buddhaghosa explains that the function of paññā is 'to eliminate the darkness of delusion'.

KEYWORDS: *Wisdom, paññā, anicca, dukkha, anatta, insight, vipassanā, Buddhism.*

INTRODUCTION

Wisdom is very important in human life. Because without wisdom we cannot say that we are human beings. People who do not have wisdom should not say "We are human beings in the world". Those who live without wisdom, they like killing others, they want properties of others, and they can do wrongful activities. But people who have wisdom will not kill others. They will not be thieves and they will not do anything wrong. People who have wisdom will practice the

right way. They always have right actions and good ideas for living in the world. This article will be of an advantage for those who are interested in Buddhism. People will understand the concept of wisdom in Theravada Buddhism. They can choose the pragmatic *Dhamma* from it to perform in daily life. They will feel happy in this world and in the next life. Finally, they may attain the ultimate aim of their life when they choose to practice a correct way.

The Meaning of Paññā (Wisdom)

Wisdom means '*Paññā*' which is the knowing all about what things have value and what

things have no value. The term *paññā* consists of two components- 'Pa' and 'ñā'. Here the word 'pa' is a prefix denoting the sense of proper, full, exact, right etc. And the word 'ñā' is a root with its verbal form as '*Jānana*', which means to know, to understand and to comprehend. Thus the literal meaning '*Paññā*' is to know, to understand or to comprehend fully and thoroughly but in Theravada Buddhism, it has been used in a specific sense, which convey the sense of knowledge. *Paññā*' is often translated as "wisdom", but is closer in meaning to "insight", "discriminating knowledge", or "intuitive apprehension" *Paññā* is

the fourth virtue of ten *Theravāda pāramitās*.

In the *Pāli* Canon, *paññā* is concentrated insight into the three characteristics of all things, namely impermanence, suffering and no-self, and the four noble truths. *Paññā* is defined in a variety of overlapping ways, frequently centering on concentrated insight into the three characteristics of all things — impermanence, suffering and no-self and the four noble truths.

WISDOM IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

Theravada stresses purifying the mind from defilements (*kilesas*, in *Pāli*) and cultivating the mind through meditation (*bhāvanā*) In order to develop discerning or penetrating insight into the Three Marks of Existence and the Four Noble Truths. This is the path to wisdom. All Buddhism makes a distinction between wisdom and knowledge. The Buddhist scholar **Walpola Rahula** in his book *What the Buddha Taught* said that "According to Buddhism there are two sorts of understanding: What we generally call understanding is knowledge, an accumulated memory, an intellectual grasping of a subject according to certain given data. This is called 'knowing accordingly' (*anubodha*). It is not very deep. Real deep understanding is called 'penetration' (*pativedha*), seeing a thing in its true nature, without name and label. This penetration is possible only when the mind is free from all impurities and is fully developed through meditation."

"Wisdom" in Theravada Buddhism usually is understood to be discerning or penetrating insight into the Three Marks of Existence and the Four Noble Truths. As **Walpola Rahula** explained, this penetrating insight is not about an intellectual or conceptual understanding of these doctrines. It is not about being able to write an essay about the Three Marks or Four Truths and explain them on a test. This penetrating insight is one's own personal and intimate insight into the dharma. Dharma is a word used to mean many things, but in this case it refers to the true nature of reality.

Two Kinds of Paññā

There are two kinds of *Paññā* acknowledged in Theravada Buddhism. These are as follows:

- (1) insight knowledge (*vipassanā-paññā*) and
- (2) The knowledge pertaining to the supra mundane paths (*magga-paññā*).

The first, *Vipassanā-Paññā* is the direct penetration of the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena – impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and selflessness (*anatta*). It takes as its objective sphere the groups of mental phenomena constituting individual existence, i.e. the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*) of material form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Because insight knowledge takes the world (*loka*) of conditioned formations (*sankhara*) as its object it is regarded as a mundane form of wisdom. Insight-knowledge does not itself directly eradicate the defilements. It serves to prepare the way for the second type of wisdom, the wisdom of the supramundane paths, which emerges when insight has been brought to its climax.

The second *Magga-paññā*, occurring in the four distinct stages of the supramundane Noble Eightfold Path, simultaneously realizes *Nibbāna*, understands the Four Noble Truths, and cuts off the defilements. This wisdom is called "supramundane" (*lokuttara*) because it rises up (*uttarati*) from the world (*loka*) of the five aggregates to realize the state transcendent to the world, *Nibbāna*.

Three Types of Wisdom (Paññā)

According to the *Dighanikāya*, the texts mention three types of *paññās*: (1) *Sutamaya-paññā*, (2) *Cintāmayaya-paññā* and (3) *Bhāvanamaya-paññā*. *Sutamaya-paññā* is wisdom obtained from listening to others, from being instructed by others about impermanence, suffering and selflessness. It may also develop from reading sacred texts. This type of *paññā* is clearly dependent on an external source. Thus, *sutamaya-paññā* consists of learning which has been gained by listening to others (*parato sutvā patilabhati*). This may inspire one to tread on the path of *Dhamma*, but in itself cannot lead to the attainment of liberation. *Cintāmayaya-paññā* is wisdom obtained from one's own thinking, not just from hearing others (*parato asutvā patilabhati*). It is the understanding of impermanence, suffering and non-self, from what one has grasped by means of one's own intellect. It is the process of intellectually

analyzing something to see whether it is logical and rational. Having gone through such a process, one can then accept a teaching intellectually. One may thereby become knowledgeable about the theory of *Dhamma*, and may be able to explain it to others. One may even be able to help others realize the fact of impermanence, suffering, and non-self, but still one cannot obtain liberation for oneself. On the contrary, there is a danger that one may accumulate more mental defilements by developing ego since one lacks the direct experience of wisdom.

Bhāvanāmaya-paññā is the wisdom obtained by meditation - the wisdom that comes from the direct experience of the truth. This development of insight is also called *vipassanā bhāvanā* (*Vipassanā* meditation). The meditator makes right effort and so realizes for himself that everything in the world is transitory, a source of suffering, and non-self. This insight is not the mere acceptance of what someone else has said, nor the product of deductive reasoning. It is, rather, the direct comprehension of the reality of *anicca, dukkha and anatta*.

Cultivating Wisdom

The Commentator, Buddhaghosa, provides the analogy of a tree to discuss the development of *paññā*: The soil of the tree are: five aggregates, twelve sense bases and eighteen elements, twenty faculties, four noble truths, dependent origination. The *roots* are: purification of virtue, purification of consciousness. The *trunk* is made up of: purification of view, purification by overcoming doubt, purification by knowledge and vision of what is and is not the path, purification by knowledge and vision of the way, purification by knowledge and vision. Buddhaghosa instructs that, to achieve *paññā*, one should first learn about the soil, then the roots and then the trunk.

The Factors of Wisdom

Right Understanding and Right Thought, which are Wisdom factors, will lead to good, moral conduct. The first element of the Eightfold Path is Right Understanding which arises through insights into the first three Noble Truths. If you have these insights, then there is perfect understanding of *Dhamma* - the understanding that: 'All that is subject to arising is subject to ceasing.' It's as simple as that. You do not have to spend much time reading 'All that is subject to arising is subject to ceasing' to understand the words, but it takes quite a while for most of us to really know what the words mean in a profound way rather than just through cerebral understanding. To use modern colloquial English, insight is really get knowledge - it's not just from ideas. It's no longer, 'I think I know', or 'Oh yes, that seems a reasonable, sensible thing. I agree with that. I like that thought.' That kind of understanding is still from the brain whereas insight knowledge is profound. It is really known and doubt is no longer a problem.

This deep understanding comes from the profound insights knowledge. So there is a sequence leading to Right Understanding of things as they are, namely that: All that is subject to arising is subject to ceasing and is not-self. With Right Understanding, you have given up the illusion of a self that is connected to mortal conditions. There is still the body, there are still feelings and thoughts, but they simply are what they are - there is no longer the belief that you are your body or your feelings or your thoughts. The emphasis is on 'Things are what they are.' We are not trying to say that things are not anything at all or that they are not what they are. They are exactly what they are and nothing more. But when we are ignorant, when we have not understood these truths, we tend to think things are more than what they are. We believe all kinds of things and we create all kinds of problems around the conditions that we experience.

When we are developing Right Understanding, we use our intelligence for reflection and contemplation of things. We also use our mindfulness and wisdom together. So now we are using our ability to discriminate with wisdom (*vijjā*) rather than with ignorance (*avijjā*). This teaching of the Four Noble Truths is to help you to use your intelligence - your ability to contemplate, reflect and think - in a wise way rather than in a self-destructive, greedy or hateful way.

CONCLUSION

Wisdom is like an important instrument for developing mind. Our mind will be pure and clean with wisdom. And this wisdom must be only the highest wisdom or ultimate truth, but it is not worldly knowledge or conventional truth. In summary, if any wisdoms which are for the purpose of fortune, rank and authority, praise, sensually exciting and stimulating the mind, increasing *Dukkha*, accumulating *Kilesa*, wanting much, being lazy and idle, then we should know that these kinds of wisdom are neither *Lokuttara-paññā*, nor Buddha *Dhamma*, nor the Teaching of the “Great Teacher”. Wisdom is the most important instrument which can help human being to be free from suffering. Wisdom is the antidote to the self-chosen poison of ignorance. And the ultimate goal of wisdom is enlightenment, and it is also leads to peace in the present life.

We have an attempt to study so much for wisdom which is called ‘Paññā’, because we want right knowledge for developing ourselves in a correct way. We cannot reject that the wisdom is the best property in the world because it can be our guiding star when we have some problems. So, in fact, when we follow the right way, then it leads to a happy life. The nature of wisdom (*paññā*) is pure and clean from defilements which mean ignorance and delusion.

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