



AN OVERVIEW OF THE MORAL REMORSE (*KUKKUCA*) IN THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

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ABSTRACT

This article briefly discusses some of the views of Theravāda Buddhism on the moral remorse called kukkucca in comparison with psychological definitions of the moral regret. It is about Buddhist moral regret and correcting the traditional interpretations on behavior in ways that conflict with our beliefs and values in modern time. It's about the pang of remorse we feel when we realize we took the low road, made a choice that went against our principles, or failed to do the right thing and responsibility as to regret. The article aims at knowing the nature and natural parts of regret and which part needs to be removed and follow.



KEYWORDS : *Kukkucca, remorse, regret, repentance, displeasure, undesirable, anguish, agony, grief, deed, mistake, ignorance, negligence, fault, wrong doings, evil and responsibility.*

INTRODUCTION

1.0 The Traditional *Abhidhammā* definition of *Kukkucca*

Buddhist commentators interpreted remorse or regret or *Kukkuccā* as the kind of lasting heartburning (*anusocana*) and lasting displeasure (*vippatisāra*) that cause the body and mind to crumble and collapse because of the sins that have been committed and the right things that have not been done. It means burning memories and minds that cannot be easily removed. According to *Abhidhammā* texts, this remorse or regret is considered as the unskillful mental factor. In modern psychology, regret is an unpleasant emotion triggered by knowledge of the consequences of a rejected alternative. For the traditional Buddhists, on account of *kukkucca* being an unskillful mental factor, it came to the conclusion that it is not necessary to repent of one's wrongdoing, and modern intellectuals understand repentance as one's awareness and understanding of one's wrongdoing.

1.1 The need of moral regret in modern value

For the modern intellectuals, wrongdoers should accept the wrong deeds, receive punishment and responsibility for what they had committed. Like many emotions, regret involves both a phenomenological "feeling" and a cognitive judgment. A person who only has purely rational judgements without emotional components will not experience what is called regret. While we have obvious limitations in describing the phenomenology of emotions, one thing we can do is compare them to other emotions and descriptive terms.

For instance, regret is neither a happy nor a sad feeling, but we could say it is closer to the latter. Likewise, regret is closer to a negative emotion than a positive one. A reasonable word to describe the feeling of regret is discomfort. The idea that regret is a negative, uncomfortable emotional

experience does have support from the point of view of psychological science. Then, there is a big gap in understanding between modern intellectuals and traditional Buddhists to regret. This difference in understanding creates arguments, quarrels and difficulties in dealing with issues of justice within the community.

1.2 The gap between traditional Buddhist and modern psychological ideas on moral regret

In fact, the interpretations of Buddhist teachers are also mere superficial. They interpreted it without any original Pāli textual proof that *Kukkucca* must relate only to the evil one did and the good one did not do. However, the Buddha and commentators did not say that people should not accept their own mistakes, wrongdoings and responsibilities. They did not say that one should not be punished for being irresponsible persons. As a matter of fact, some mistakes in the past that have had a strong effect are making people fall in anguish, and there is no benefit to them. Removing regret stands in the sense that with anguish, someone else can't repeat the good deeds and they have to fix things that are uncomfortable, so it is necessary to make corrections in mind.

We can identify with all kinds of people for irrational reasons, and when we do, the regret that such identification brings is itself irrational. It's akin to feeling deeply saddened by the death of a famous person we didn't actually have a relationship with. Such grief is clearly possible, but since the relationship is entirely artificial, the emotion is irrational: when grief is directed at those we truly know and love, rather than those we merely wish we had known, this sadness is appropriate. Likewise, regret is appropriate when it is directed at events with which we truly identify.

2.0 The true meaning of Buddhist literature on remorse in comparison with the definition of modern psychology.

Both the Buddha and the commentators did not object at all to what people are saying about the need to understand and take responsibility for the crimes. However, the interpretation that the regret is depending upon the evil that had been done and the good that hadn't been done is also very narrow. As psychologists Camille noted in their study, "Contrary to mere disappointment... regret is an emotion strongly associated with a feeling of responsibility." The identification that's described is a specific sense of responsibility. It is feeling responsible for something because your sense of self is tangled together with the object of your responsibility.

Buddhist traditional narrow concept is the beginning of the problem. Regret should be based on the evil one didn't do and the good one had done. Modern intellectuals have pointed this out. For example, a poisonous snake was found in the yard and one did not kill him. But this snake bit his son and the child died on the spot. If, from the moment the father met the snake and killed it once, then he will not regret evil action and its consequences. Remorse can arise for the good things that have been done. There are times when the person who helped and saved others is causing them to suffer back. The truth is that all wrongdoings and right things to do are directly related to remorse because they are possible to worry about them again in the future. *Kukkucca* comes from suffering from the intense and severe consequences that he did not expect from the mistake, ignorance, unintentional negligence of accidents and weakness that one remembers as his own actions and he was slowly burning and depressing in heart.

Understanding the causes of the discomfort associated with regret is critical to understanding the cognitive components of this emotion. Now, let's focus on the "unpleasant" feeling. From an academic philosophical perspective, Rorty describes regret as "a special painful feeling, a sharp pain, a stabbing pain, a stabbing pain in waves." With all this in mind, let us give a general definition of the emotional phenomenology of regret: Regret is a negative and uncomfortable feeling, especially about something that happened in the past. This definition agree with Buddhist literature. Even unintentional accidents and mistakes are morally neither sinful nor sinless. However, they can be the source of regret. Thinking of mistakes back, it slowly burned the heart and one is feeling low until his life is gone, is the manifestation of *kukkucca*. These are all long lasting agony and pains afterwards. What the Pali literature is saying is not the ordinary meaning of regret that people understand.

Some emotions, such as excitement, fear, are primarily focused on the future. Regret is the opposite of these emotions in that it focusses primarily on the past. Only from this perspective does the emotion focus on the present or the future. For example, because one regrets something he did, he might work to change the situation in the future. Although he has a predetermined attitude toward the future, an independent attitude motivated by regret and directed toward the past underlies his motivation. In addition to looking back, the cognitive content of regret is also discernible. What I understand as a discerning emotion is: an emotion whose cognitive content is related to self-perception, personality assessment and personal identification (as I understand it) involves liability.

The famous psychologist, Williams claimed that "a person can feel [agent regret] only towards his own past actions (or, at most, actions in which he regards himself as a participant)." Contrary to Williams, event is not participation in the behavior but identification of it with the behavior. Although we can identify with people and their actions, it is still possible and reasonable to feel deep personal regret for actions in which we had no part. This collective regret over an event in which ones were not directly involved is not just a feeling of "they wish that hadn't happened" but a feeling associated with a deep sense of responsibility and self-blame because being no part becomes an action. The combination of matters, deeds and undesirable consequences creates remorse.

2.1 The only and direct usage of *kukkucca* in *Vinaya* text.

According to the *Abhidhamma*, which is a development of later Pali literature, the use of *kukkucca* with the meaning of *kukkucca* mental factor begins to be found in the description of the incident of venerable *Sudinna* in Pali *Pārājikakandha*. This usage is not the Buddha's Sutta Pali oral usage, nor has the Buddha himself made a clear statement about it. Before becoming a monk, venerable *Sudinna* was the only heir son of a wealthy family. He became a monk and left behind his wife, all his wealth and family in order to practice nobility in Buddha's dispensation. His parents were insisting that he deserved to be held accountable for his family's heir because he had no child. Then, he decided to have sex with his ex-wife.

When people and monks knew about it, and after all the protests and accusations for ignoble sex of a monk, he felt intense regret for his sexual misconduct, and his body and complexion were getting thin, pale, and completely withered. When he came before the Buddha for confession, he was in trouble though, the Buddha scolded him as a vain person, and laid down the first rule of compelling monks from the Samgha order (*pārājika*) as to sexual intercourse. *Kukkucca* is the pain of seeing the negative effects, mistakes, wrongdoings and crimes on himself, his loved ones, and the things he valued.

2.2 Different types of *Kukkucca*

Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler could not feel *kukkucca* about the murder of over six million Jews. They are just satisfied with their ideology and the ability to prevent the consequences for themselves. There is no *kukkucca* in people who are satisfied with the evil and consequences. Psychopaths and sociopaths also lack instincts and intelligence, and are fearless of evil and its consequences. Their evil edifice will only continue to grow. There will only be satisfaction in opening up the barbaric ruins of humanist culture. According to *Abhidhammā*, people can love the evils and sadness. People who have suffered great harm can also experience trauma. Not every trauma is *kukkucca*. *Kukkucca* can only be rooted in his own self-blame for what happened, directly related to his own faults. Blaming themselves, not for their deeds but for having experienced unfortunate and unexpected traumatic incidents only on themselves is mere traumatic grievance.

Kukkucca is connected with wrong-ness, mistakes, faults, and evils as one's deeds. It sees his faults and feels the consequences together, and is ashamed of wrong and evil, disgusted and contemplation are projected by the conscience of a virtue, ethic and morality.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Buddhist literature does not object to self-recognition and acceptance of one's own deeds. Responsibilities are all over the book of disciplinary rules. There is also a search for justice. So

what does Abhidhamma say that one must remove the regret or kukkucca means to correct the mentality if the burnout caused by the irreparability of always remembering the one's own misdeed as the source of all the consequences it suffers from becomes a mentally crippling and bankrupt collapse. Past actions cannot be undone. Because of the slow burn that he is suffering now, it can't make him be able to regain the responsibility of doing good to others in the present and future. Taking responsibility for justice and fixation itself is removing regret. It means to remove the task of rebuilding the haphazard collapse. It doesn't mean that one can do bad things wherever he wants and don't accept his own mistakes and responsibility without regret. The removal of this type of repentance does not mean he is satisfied without having regret. It's proper to say the more superficially one touches Buddhism, the more it will be destructive.

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