




Significance of Wise Reflection (Paccavekkhana)

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[Abstract]

The general conception of paccavekkhana as mindful and wise reflection, and as a key principle in Buddhist meditation practice in meditative concentration is the main concern of this undertaking. A post-canonical literature are carefully examined for this purpose. This study has affirmed paccavekkhana as an approach to clear understanding of reality through initial training of dasadhammā as a primary behavioral modification/refinement to meditative concentration for Buddhist soteriology. The term ‘paccavekkhana’ is characterized as the integrative intent for the sīla-samādhi-pañña framework of Buddhist praxis. The paccavekkhana practice is most crucial for spiritual practice and it is actually a pragmatic advice for one’s daily living, especially the ordained. Hence, a right understanding of its value, internalisation of it through a creative, and practical technique of transforming paccavekkhana into “walking the talk” via a daily checklist would give rise to a systematic and self-rectifying slant in one’s dhamma faring.

Keywords: wise reflection, paccavekkhana, defilement, spiritual, Buddhist Meditation

Introduction

Ambalaṭṭhika Rāhulovāda sutta is one of the most important and special *suttas* found in *Majjhima Nikāya* where the Buddha instructed young *Rāhula* who was about seven years old on reflection (*paccavekkhana*)¹ before, during and after performing a physical, verbal and mental action. The *sutta* offers a simple and systematic way for training one's conduct to be most skillful, to prevent mental defilements and for spiritual development.

The *Ambalaṭṭhikarāhulovāda sutta* emphasizes for the repeated reflection in order to suppress bad habits which are natural inclination in human beings. Through repeated reflection one will be able to understand the way to right performance of an action (*kamma*) for the spiritual development. The Buddha started to instruct Young Venerable *Rāhula* by using similes to make him to be more reflective in committing any action. As said in *Dhammapada* because everything is mind made;

“Mind precedes all mental states, mind is their chief, they are all mind-wrought. If one speaks or acts with pure mind, happiness follows him like never departing shadow.”²

Whatever one does, thinks or speaks is all mind made, it arises from the mind, hence, the Buddha instructed to reflect before and after one acts, speaks or thinks thus- “Will it harm me, harm others or harm both?”³ *Sutta* seems to be particularly taught to seven years old Venerable *Rāhula*, however, advices are applicable to all human beings regardless of age.⁴

Term ‘*Paccavekkhana*’ is very important in Buddhism for the pu-

¹ *paccavekkhitvā paccavekkhitvā kāyena kammaṃ kattabbaṃ, paccavekkhitvā paccavekkhitvā vācāya kammaṃ kattabbaṃ, paccavekkhitvā paccavekkhitvā manasā kammaṃ kattabbaṃ. Yadeva tvaṃ, rāhula, kāyena kammaṃ kattukāmo ahoṣi, tadeva te kāyakammaṃ paccavekkhitabbaṃ.* MN.61.2.1.

² Acharya Buddhārakkhita, trans., *Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1985), p.23.

³ *Attabyāpadhaya, parabyāpadhaya, ubhayopadhaya saṃvatteyya* MN.61.2.1.

⁴ Piya Tan, trans., “*Ambalaṭṭhika Rāhulovāda Sutta: Advice to Rahula at Ambalaṭṭhika*” Web, 9 August, 2015. <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/3.10-Ambalattika-Rahulovada-S-m061-piya.pdf>

rification of mind and for the development of holy life (*brahmācariya*)⁵ in the *sāsana*⁶. It is to be reflected continuously without fail in performing or in using requisites for the growth of conduct purity, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. Reflection is the main role of the suppression of bad habit, conduct, and support for the cleansing impure mind; it enhances the increase of moral conduct and purifies the body, verbal and mental actions (*kamma*). Purification of conduct is the purification of actions through reflection. *Ambalaṭṭhikarāhulovāda* sutta of *Majjhima Nikāya* explains the importance of *paccavekkhana* that one has to reflect wisely before performing an action, while performing an action and after performing an action either bodily or verbally or mentally thus, “Does this action is beneficial to oneself, to others and both, if this action bring unwholesome with painful result, then certainly, you should not do such an action.”⁷ However, after proper reflection, one knows the action is wholesome which will bring happy results and then one should certainly, do such action by three doors.”⁸ It is not only the action that one has to reflect for the spiritual development but one has to reflect repeatedly with regard to basic necessities which are essential in daily life, otherwise, mind will be overpowered by defilements, as says in *Dhammapada* thus, “Just as a storm throws down a weak tree, so does Māra⁹ overpower the man who lives in pursuit of pleasure, who does not control over his senses, no moderation in eating, indolent and dissipated.”¹⁰ It is through reflection one is capable of conquering *Māra*, the defilements.

The *Sabbāsava Sutta* explains the importance of wise reflection

⁵ The one who has gone forth from home into homelessness is the one who practices celibacy under the Buddha’s Doctrine and discipline (*Dhamma-vinaya*).

⁶ Dispensation of the Buddha.

⁷ *paccavekkhitvā paccavekkhitvā kāyena kammaṃ kattabbaṃ, paccavekkhitvā paccavekkhitvā vācāya kammaṃ kattabbaṃ, paccavekkhitvā paccavekkhitvā manasā kammaṃ kattabbaṃ. Yadeva tvaṃ, rāhula, kāyena kammaṃ kattukāmo ahoṣi, tadeva te kāyakammaṃ paccavekkhitabbaṃ.* MN.61.2.1. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi.

⁸ Bhikkhu Ñāṇāmoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, p. 524-525.

⁹ Five kinds of *Māra*: i. *Devaputtamāra* (as deity), ii. *Kilesamāra* (as defilement), iii. *Khandhamāra* (as aggregates) iv. *Kammamāra* (as kamma formations) and v. *maccumāra* (as death). Nyanaponika, p. 97.

¹⁰ Acharya Buddhharakkhita, p.23-24.

thus: “When one attends unwisely, unrisen taints arise and arisen taints increase. When one attends wisely, unrisen taints do not arise and arisen taints are abandoned.¹¹ It is very important to reflect what we do, what we speak and what we think in order to remove our three kinds of defilements (*kilesa*), thereby purify our own conducts and develop morality, concentration, and wisdom which will be supportive for our final destination for the ending of suffering. When it comes to a practical aspect of reflection, one has to contemplate one’s own conduct constantly without fail.

Definition of *Paccavekkhana*

‘*Paccavekkhana*’ or *pratyaveksana* (Skt.) term is translated as ‘consideration, review, reflection, contemplation, looking at¹² which is derived from *pati* + *ava+ikkh+a* (to consider or to contemplate)¹³. *Yoniso mānasikāra* is also a synonym of *paccavekkhana* which means wise consideration, contemplation, and reflection. *Dhammasangani* commentary says; “*dhammānaṃ sabhavaṃ pati na apekkhati*” the characteristic of law is not to desire.

Significance of *Paccavekkhana*

How does one start to architect basic reflection to develop spirituality? In Buddhism, as one starts searching for spirituality, one has to reflect in some basic things to check his mind to prevent the non-arisen defilements, to remove the arisen defilements. The ten reflections are basic practices for the followers of the Buddha who want to purify one’s own conduct and mind which should be repeatedly contemplated (*abhiñhaṃ paccavekkhītabbā*) as mentioned in the *Dasadhamma Sutta* of *Anguttara Nikāya* thus, (AN. 10.48) “Monks, one should reflect on these ten reflec-

¹¹ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, p. 91.

¹² A.P Buddhadatta Mahāthera, *Concise Pāli Dictionary*. p.169.

¹³ T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, p. 384.

tions again and again by the one who has gone forth.”¹⁴

Furthermore, it is also advised to reflect on the four basic requisites of *bhikkhus* to lead a simple and satisfying life as a monk. Moreover, it is to check the mind from arising attachment towards requisites. Though it may be considered as basic, however, it is a crucial beginning for the development of spirituality, mind, and purification of conduct, otherwise, the attachment will develop into clinging (*upādāna*) and ruin the purpose of spiritual life. *Visuddhimagga* mentions *paccaya sannisita sīla* as a virtue which instructs to use the requisites with ‘wise reflection’ (*paṭisaṅkha yoniso*),¹⁵ namely; robe (*cīvara*), food (*piṇḍapāta*), shelter (*vihāra*) and medicine (*senasana*). One should reflect with the understanding of meaning, by reviewing, again and again, the purpose of using these requisites. The *Dhammapada* says, “Moderating in eating, controlling the senses, Māra never overpowers him”¹⁶ (Dhp. 8).

The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* says two kinds of powers (*bala*) - the power of Reflection (*paṭisaṅkhāna-bala*) and power of mental development (*bhāvanā-bala*).

“What, o monks, is the power of reflection? If, o monks, someone thinks thus: ‘Bad conduct in deeds, words and thoughts verily bears bad fruits both in this life, as well as in the next life’, and in consequence of this consideration, he abandons bad conduct in

¹⁴ “I am now changed into a different mode of life (from that of a layman). 2. My life is dependent on others. 3. I must now behave in good conduct. 4. Do I find fault in myself regarding my virtue (*Sīla*)? 5. Do my wise fellow-monks having tested me; reproach me regarding my virtue (*Sīla*)? 6. There will be a parting someday from all those who are dear and loving to me. Death brings this separation to me. 7. I am the owner of my actions, heir of my actions, actions are the womb (from which I have sprung), actions are my companions, and actions are my refuges; whatever action I perform, be it good or bad, of these, I shall become the heir. 8. How do I spend my nights and days? 9. Do I take delight in solitude? 10. Have I gained superhuman faculties? Have I gained that higher wisdom so that when I am questioned (on this point) by fellow-monks at the last moment (when death is approaching) I will have no occasion to be depressed and downcast?”

¹⁵ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, trans., *The Path of Purification* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society 1991). p.31.

¹⁶ Acharya Buddhārakkhita, trans., *Dhammapada* (Kandy: BPS 1985).p.2.

deeds, words and thoughts, follows good conduct, and keeps his heart pure, this, o monks, is the power of reflection”¹⁷ (AN.2.11).

By wise reflection on three doors, one will be able to abandon bad deeds in body, speech, and mind and will keep his conduct pure. In addition, the Buddha’s advice to Venerable Rāhula gives the importance of reflection for the spiritual development and mental cultivation whereby behavioral conduct is purified and the power of mental development can be obtained which are known as factors of enlightenment (*bojjhāṅga*). It is said in *Samyutta Nikāya* that the reason for arising of five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) is non-wise consideration.¹⁸ *Ghosa sutta* of *Anguttara Nikāya* says thus;

“Monks, there are these two conditions for the arising of the wrong view. Which two? The voice of another and inappropriate attention. These are the two conditions for the arising of the wrong view.”

“Monks, there are these two conditions for the arising of right view. Which two? The voice of another and appropriate attention. These are the two conditions for the arising of right view.”¹⁹ (AN 2.125-126).

When one is heedless in his reflection, there is more opportunity to have wrong views with regard to his own *kamma* and its consequences, whereby, he will overpower by the impurities of the mind. Therefore, wise reflection is a major factor to prevent *kilesa* in mind and fill with pure actions.

¹⁷ Web, October 12, 2015. <http://www.palikanon.com/english/wtb/n_r/patisankhaana_bala.htm>

¹⁸ Web, October 19, 2015. <[http://what-buddha-said.net.drops/II/Feeding the Hindrances.htm](http://what-buddha-said.net.drops/II/Feeding%20the%20Hindrances.htm)>

¹⁹ Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans., “Ghosa Sutta.” Web, October 19, 2015. <<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an02/an02.125-126.than.html>>

***Paccavekkhana* as a Major Factor for the Prevention of *Kilesa* (defilement)**

It has become apparent with the instruction that has been given to young *Rāhula* by the Buddha for the perfect understanding of the importance of *paccavekkhana* to prevent defilements and unwholesome action as well. The *Atthasalīni* enumerates ten kinds of *kilesa*²⁰ (defilements) which should be prevented through wise reflection in three doors; body, speech, and mind. Fundamentally, defilements are three kinds that arise in different stages, namely; i. Gross defilements (*vītikamana kilesa*), ii. Medium size defilements (*pariyuṭṭhāna kilesa*) and iii. Subtle defilements (*anusaya kilesa*).

The *Āṅguttara Nikāya* explains the systematical method of eliminating the *kilesas* thus, “Bhikkhus, there are gross defilements of gold: soil, grit/and gravel. Now the soil remover or his apprentice first pour the gold into a trough and washes, rinses, and cleans it. When that has been removed and eliminated, there still remain middle size defilements in the gold: fine grit and coarse sand. The soil remover or his apprentice washes, rinses, and cleans it again. When that has been removed and eliminated, there still remain subtle defilements in the gold: fine sand and black dust. So the soil remover or his apprentice washes, rinses, and cleans it again. When that has been removed and eliminated, only grains of gold remains”²¹ (AN. 3. 101. (10)).

Various ways and methods to prevent defilements are found in *Pāli* canon and its commentaries. *Paccavekkhana* is one of the prominent factors for the prevention of taints (*āsava*) and impurities of the mind. The significance of *paccavekkhana* is concentrated for the numerous ways to preclude defilement, such as reflection on *kamma* and *vipāka*, reflection on three kinds of suffering and fivefold restraint, namely; morality, mindfulness, patience, knowledge, and effort.

It is advised in *Ambalaṭṭhika Rāhulovāda sutta* to purify one’s own

²⁰ i. *Lobha* (greed), ii. *Dosa* (hatred), iii. *moha* (delusion), iv. *māna* (conceit), v. *diṭṭhi* (wrong views), vi. *vicikicchā* (doubt), vii. *Thīna* (sloth), viii. *Uddhacca* (restlessness), ix. *Ahīrika* (shamelessness) and x. *anotappa* (fearlessness).

²¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, p. 335.

conduct of the body, speech and mind, is to be contemplated before doing, while doing, and after doing, thus; “is it harmful or beneficial for me, others and both,”²² as advised in. It is also advice in *Abhinhapaccevekkhitabbāhāna sutta* to reflect on *kamma* to avoid doing unwholesome actions; as such *kamma* can lead us to unhappy states and bring unhappy results in this very life and hereafter.²³

Conclusion

Pāli Canon has used the term ‘*paccavekkhana*’ (Reflection) extensively in this particular *sutta* and others whereby ‘*paccavekkhana*’ can also be referred to as meditative concentration. This is especially so while reflecting on the nine *vipassanā ñāṇa* (Insight knowledge) as mentioned by Ācārya *Buddhaghosa* in *Visuddhimagga*.²⁴ *Paccavekkhana* or reflection is one of the basic bhikkhu trainings for those who have earnest wish to cultivate and maintain their pure spiritual life in the dispensation as advised in *Dasadhammā*- “These ten essentials (*dhamma*) must be reflected upon again and again by one who has gone forth (to live the holy life).”²⁵ Furthermore, it is explicitly stated that a *bhikkhu* should reflect wisely while using his four basic requisites i.e. robe, alms food, shelter and medicine for deeper understanding.²⁶ Stringent practice as such advised to understand the ultimate meaning with wise reflection restraint our mind which could be overcome by greed, hatred, and ignorance. One could easily deviate from his or her spiritual path undertaken with defilement (*kilesa*) afflicted mind, running counter to, be away from the ultimate goal of every follower of the *Buddha*.

Continuous and habitual reflections²⁷ enable one to purify one’s

²² *Attabyābadhāya, parabyābadhāya, ubhayabyābadhāya*, (MN 61).

²³ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses*, p. 686.

²⁴ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, trans., *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society 1975.), p.755.

²⁵ Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans., “*Dasadhamma sutta: Ten Things*.” Web, 15 August. 2015. <<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an10/an10.048.than.html>>

²⁶ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, p.17.

²⁷ *Paccavekkhitvā paccavekkhitvā* is used for the repeated or constant reflection. MN 61.2.1.

bodily, verbal and mental action with unblemished conduct. Eventually, one progresses in his or her spiritual path. Buddhist spiritual path is no mere religious rites, rituals or devotion. It is, in fact, a psychological transformation from the ordinary mind to inner peace with purified conduct, morality, development of wisdom leading to the final eradication of all defilements.

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