

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RIGHT VIEW (SAMMĀDITTHI) IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

Santhad Chanthathong ^{a*}

^a International Buddhist Studies College (IBSC), Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand

* Author for correspondence email; Santhd_chan@mcu.ac.th

ARTICLE INFO

Academic Article

Keywords

Right View, Significance of
Sammāditthi, Theravada Buddhism,

Received:

2021-06-02

Received in revised:

2021-06-07

Accepted:

2021-06-24

ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to propose a significance of the right view (sammāditthi) in Theravada Buddhism. According to the noble eightfold path, although each factor of them is individually important; but the right view is a major of the middle path as it is a header of them. In the threefold training (Trisikkhā), the right view is established as group of wisdom. The wisdom is compared with a weapon for eliminating the defilements, while the other factors of the middle path would be contributed completely depended on the right view. The listening to others (paratoghosa) and engaging the mind (yonisomanasikāra) are required-factors of it, meanwhile, without being a good friend (kalyānamittatā) the right view would be not completed by its function.

In generally speaking, the right view in Theravada Buddhism can be classified into two divisions, namely; (1) the belief in the individual ownership of action or belief in law of karma (Kammasakatā-saddhā), and (2) the right view (Sammāditthi) as the first branch of the noble eightfold path. Lastly, among two divisions of the right view, the first one is mentioned to the mundane right view (Lōkiyasammāditthi) and the second one is well-known as the supra-mundane right view (Lokuttarasammāditthi). We have to cultivate the Lokuttarasammāditthi in order to entering the end of sufferings.

Introduction

After the Buddha attained enlightenment, he suggested the five ascetics (*Pañcavaggīya*) into the first sermon entitled “*Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta* (the Wheel of truth in motion)”.¹ In this Sutta, he showed the nature of all things and expounded the middle path or noble eightfold path that he discovered it by himself. Besides, He exhorted the five ascetics to avoid from two extremes, i.e., the indulgence in sensual pleasures (*Kamasukhallikānuyōga*) and the devotion to self-mortification (*Attakilamathanuyōga*).² In the *Sammādiṭṭhi* sutta, the Venerable Sāriputta says: “*When, friends, a noble disciple understands suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the way leading to the cessation of suffering, in that way he is one of right view*”.³ The significance of the right view as mentioned in this Sutta, can be seen as follows;

The two extremes would neither lead to super-knowledge nor enlightenment, and it belong to wrong views. So, in the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*), the first factor is Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) or Right Understanding, the keynote of Buddhism. The Buddha started with right view in order to clear the doubts of the monks and guide them on the right way.⁴ The right view consists partly of the beliefs which will help one towards enlightenment, but also of a full understanding of those beliefs and realization of their full implications. Thus, the right view is thus central to wisdom in Buddhism.

In the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*), the first factor is the right view (*sammādiṭṭhi*) or the right understanding, the keynote of Buddhism. The Buddha started with the right view in order to clear the doubts of the monks and guide them on the right way. In Theravada Buddhism, the concept of *Sammādiṭṭhi* is penetrating insight into the nature of reality defines as knowledge of the Four Noble Truths. In the *Sammādiṭṭhi* sutta, the Venerable Sāriputta says-- “*When, friends, a noble disciple understands suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the way leading to the cessation of suffering, in that way he is one of right view*”,⁵ the right view is also often described as the forerunner of the other limbs of the Eightfold Path.⁶

¹ S V 326.

² S V 420.

³ M I 102.

⁴ Bhikhuni Tran Thi Vy, “*A Study of The Concept of Right View (Sammādiṭṭhi) in Theravāda Buddhism*”, (M.A. Thesis, Graduate School, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2018), p.2.

⁵ M I 102.

⁶ Bhikhuni Tran Thi Vy, op.cit., p.2.

Therefore, the right view is one of the noble eightfold paths. Considered from the standpoint of practical training, the noble eightfold path can be subdivided into three main groups (1) The wisdom group or understanding aggregate (*Pannā khandha*) – right view and right intention (2) The moral discipline group or virtue aggregate (*sīla khandha*) – right speech, right action and right livelihood (3) The concentration group (*samādhi khandha*) – right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. Therefore, the right view is mostly important teaching for self-improvement leading to the end of suffering. The opposite of right view is wrong view (*micchāditthi*); the wrong view is one of four mental defilements known as cankers that need to be eliminated. The right view is the first branch of Middle Path that needs to be cultivated for the end of sufferings.

How to Cultivate the Right View?

To my way of thinking, the right view is the most important element of Noble Eightfold Path as it has mentioned in the first sermon of Buddha (*Dhammajakkappavattana Sutta*) or the wheel of truth in motion. It is so clear that the Blessed One laid down the way to cultivate the right view in various references of his teachings including this Sutta. First of all, it is true that at least, he mentioned the way to fulfill the right view into two factors, listening to others (*Paratōghōsa*) and engaging the mind (*Yōnisōmanasikāra*). Their significant meanings are as follows;

i) Two Factors leading to Right View

The following passage from the Tipitaka states the major importance of right view: How many factors contribute to arising of the right view? The answer is as follows: - There are two factors contributing to the arising of right view such as learning from others and systematic, critical reflection. There are two factors lead to *Sammāditthi* as follows:

1) *Paratōghōsa*- Listening to others, hearing others spread the word, listening to the suggestion and teachings of others;

2) *Yōnisōmanasikāra*- Engaging the mind, considering matters thoroughly in an orderly and logical manner through the application of critical or systematic reflection.⁷

In generally speaking, most people with undeveloped wisdom must still depend on the suggestions and encouragement of others and gradually follow these people until they achieve their own intelligence. But eventually these undeveloped people must practice until they are able to think

⁷ M 1 294.

correctly for themselves and can then proceed to final goal on their own. Those who have already developed wisdom, who already know how to apply critical reflection to a certain degree may still have to depend on the proper guidance of other as a compass for plotting their first steps down the Path and as a means of support and encouragement. This initial support will allow them to make increasingly rapid progress in the course of their training.⁸

In Addition, the Blessed One has established the role and import of these actors in process of practice and training as follows; (1) For bhikkhus, those in the process of learning ...I see no other external factor more beneficial than having a spiritual friend (*Kalyānamitta*);⁹ (2) For bhikkhus, those in the process of learning...I see no other internal factor more beneficial than critical reflection (*Yōnisōmanasikāra*),¹⁰ There are factors of cultivating the Right view as the Buddha has mentioned. However, practically there are methods for cultivating Right view as follows;

ii) Cultivation the Right View

The Factors lead to right view as can be conclude into three aspects as follows;

- 1) Knowing in the suffering
- 2) Knowing in the cause of suffering
- 3) Knowing in the cessation of suffering
- 4) Knowing in the path leading to the cessation of suffering.¹¹

When proper understanding has been established, it continues to evolve towards the final goal with the support of various factors. Such as the Blessed One said “Bhikkhus, proper understanding-which is assisted by five factors-brings about liberation of the mind (*Jetōvimutti*) and the liberation of wisdom (*Paññāvimutti*). The five factors are follows as:

- 1) Proper conduct (*Sīla*);
- 2) Knowing how to study, read a text, and make further interpretations (*Suta*)
- 3) Discussing, debating, and exchanging views; being able to answer other people’s questions (*Sākacchā*);
- 4) Attaining tranquility and peace of mind, not being deluded (*Samatha*);

⁸ Phra Prayudh Payutto, *Buddhadhamma: Natural Laws and Values for Life*, Tr.by Grant A. Olson, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp.223-224.

⁹ S V 102.

¹⁰ S V 101.

¹¹ S V 422.

5) Using wisdom to consider various phenomena and circumstances in accordance with their conditions, that is, in accordance with reality or their true nature (*Vipassanā*).¹²

Results

When someone has fulfilled the morality group, they are bodily and verbally purified and said to become Ariya (noble individual). As the Buddha said: “As when the sun rises, firstly the dawn will appear as a vision, such like the *Sammāditthi* is the leader and the vision for enlightenment the Four Noble Truths. It is possible that the monks who have accompanied by *Sammāditthi* can clear understand these aspects: (1) This is the suffering, (2) This is the cause of suffering, (3) This is the cessation of suffering, (4) This is the path leading to cessation of suffering”.¹³

Furthermore, the Samyuttanikāya mentioned that the noble eightfold path is important to attain these values as follows;

- 1) To attain Nirvāna
- 2) To establish in Arhatta-hood
- 3) To eliminate the greed (*Rāga*), hatred (*Dosa*) and delusion (*Moha*)
- 4) To recognize the sufferings
- 5) To clear comprehension in the relieving
- 6) To clear comprehension in the extremely relieving
- 7) To recognize the three feelings, namely; painful feeling, pleasant feeling, and indifferent feeling.
- 8) To refrain the three-mental intoxication, namely; the canker of sense-desire (*Kāmāsava*), the canker of becoming (*Bhavāsava*), and the canker of ignorance (*Avijjāsava*).
- 9) To refrain the Ignorance in these factors: Suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to cessation of suffering.
- 10) To refrain the three kinds of craving, namely; craving for sensual pleasures (*Kāmatanhā*), craving for existence, and craving for non-existence.
- 11) To refrain the Four Floods of mental intoxication, namely; the flood of sense-desire (*Kāmoga*), the flood of becoming (*Bhavoga*), the flood of speculative opinion (*Dithdhoga*), and the flood of ignorance (*Avijjoga*).

¹² A III 20.

¹³ S V 422.

12) To refrain the Four Attachments (*Upādāna*), namely; clinging to sensuality (*Kāmapādāna*), clinging to views (*Ditthupādāna*), clinging to mere rules and rituals (*Sīlabattupādāna*), clinging to the ego-belief (*Attavādūpādāna*).

13) To recognize the Three Becoming, namely; the Senses-Sphere (*Kāmahava*), the Form Sphere (*Rūpabhava*), and the Formless Sphere (*Arūpabhava*).

14) To remind the suffering, conditioned things, and impermanence of these.

15) To remind the personality-view (*Sakkāyaditthi*) briefly called attachment in the Five Aggregates.¹⁴

Moreover, the characteristics as be a result of the right view can be described as follows: -

- Wisdom
- Knowledge
- Discovering
- Wisely Selection
- Researching in the Dhamma
- Specify and particular specify
- Condition of knowledge
- Wise-ness
- Deeply Knowledge
- Clearly Knowledge
- Innovation
- Thought
- Contemplation
- Wisdom like the land
- Intelligence as tools for distinguishing desires
- Intelligence as a guidance
- Insight Knowledge
- Good knowledge
- Wisdom like *Patak* (a goad)
- Intelligence
- Wisdom as internal senses fields

¹⁴ D III 215; M I 294.

- Power of wisdom
- Wisdom like weapon
- Wisdom like a castle
- Wisdom like Light
- Wisdom like a lamp
- Wisdom like a Golden Jubilee
- Non-ignorance
- Dhamma investigation
- Right understanding
- Truth investigation which is the enlightenment factor of the Paths.

All above, these called the specific characteristics of Sammāditthi.¹⁵

Furthermore, according to tradition of Insight Meditation as taught by the most Venerable Phradhammadhirarajmahāmuni (Jodok Nānasiddhi, Pali IX); he summarizes eleven characteristics of the right view as follows;

1) **Dassana:** right understanding in the Three Characteristics of Mind and Matter: (i) Impermanence (*Aniccatā*), (ii) State of suffering (*Dukkhatā*), (iii) Soullessness (*Anattatā*). Absolutely it mentioned about the Four Noble Truths and Nibbhāna.

2) **Pahāna:** To refrain the wrong view (*Micchāditthi*) such as misunderstanding about the Middle Paths, the Fruition, and Nibbhāna etc;

3) **Upāthambha:** the other factors of middle way such as the right intention need to depend on the right view for appearing; the right view is the major of other factors of Middle Path;

4) **Pariyādāna:** the specific function of the right view is defilements' elimination in division of the Path of Stream-Entrance (*Sōtāpattimagga*);

5) **Visothana:** the right view leading to purification of Mind;

6) **Adhithāna:** the right view sustainable accompanied by Mind and Matter, the Three Characteristics, the Threefold Trainings and placed on the Paths, the Fruition and Nibbhāna;

7) **Vōdāna:** It means purification of the mind; because all of passion were eliminated by the right view;

8) **Visesātigama:** the right view helps to attain the Paht of Stream-Entrance etc.

¹⁵ D II 312; MI 61; M III 251.

9) **Pativêda**: It helps to enlighten the textual teaching (*Pariyatti*), Practical teachings (*Patipatti*), and the true doctrine of penetration (*Pativêda*).

10) **Abhisamaya**: Enlightenment the Four Noble Truths.

11) **Patithāpana**: The Mind has established in the extinction (Attain to Nibbhāna).¹⁶

In other word, the opposite word for the right view is the wrong view (*miccāditti*). Its significant meaning can be studied in the *Majjhima Nikāya* as follow;

The wrong view or wrong understanding is called *ditthi*. It may also mean wrong belief, wrong-view sees things as they are not, and seeing things in such a way has an effect which is detrimental, it produces what ought not to be done: ‘is not’ produces an ‘ought not’. All sixty-two wrong views are based on considering the self or “soul” of a person, to be self-sufficiently knowable and the universe to be truly existent.¹⁷

The right view as well as wrong view conditions our action. The Buddha teaches that actions which are molded by those opposite views lead to their own results. The wrong view will lead us towards courses of action that bares results in suffering while the right view will guide us towards right actions, and thereby towards the cessation of suffering. The Buddha declared that he sees no single factor so responsible for the arising of unwholesome states of mind as wrong view, and no factor so helpful for the arising of wholesome states of mind as right view. The right view refers to understanding of the “Four Holy Truths”.¹⁸ It also can refer to insight into the nature of the Dharma Body of the Buddha.

Discussion

The Pali term *Sammā-ditthi* has been translated as a “*Right View*”, *Right Understanding*, *Right Vision*, and *Right Perspective*. The term *sammā* (right) indicates that all such components are the opposite of their *micchā* counterparts. It also conveys a sense of comprehensiveness, which implies avoidance of shortcuts in deciding what is right and wrong

The word “*Diṭṭhi*” has generally been translated as view, belief, opinion, or a way of seeing. In the ultimate sense, the right view is to understand life as it really is. It can be described as the basic core of the Buddhist philosophy which is essentially the correct understanding of the

¹⁶ Phradhammadhirarajmahāmuni, (Jodok Nānasiddhi, Pali IX), *Insight Meditation Vol.7-8-9*, (Second Edition), (Bangkok: Sahadhammika Printing Co.Lmd., 1995), 433-436.

¹⁷ M I 172.

¹⁸ A I 124.

Four Noble Truths. The right view is a clear understanding of the various laws of nature which express in one way or the other the central Buddhist principle, i.e., the knowledge of Dependent Origination.

Moreover, it is the realization of the three characteristics of existence (*Tilakkhaṇa*), namely, impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). It is also mentioned as knowing evil, the roots of evil, goodness and the roots of goodness.

Absolutely, in Theravada Buddhism, the concept of *Sammā-ditthi* is penetrating insight into the nature of reality defines as knowledge of the Four Noble Truths. To follow the Noble Eightfold Path is a matter of practice rather than intellectual knowledge, but to apply the path correctly it has to be properly understood. In fact, right view of the path is itself a part of the practice.

Remarkable factors leading to right view can be divided into two factors, namely; (a) *Paratōghōsa*- Listening to others, hearing others spread the word, listening to the suggestion and teachings of others; and (b) *Yonisōmanasikāra*- Engaging the mind, considering matters thoroughly in an orderly and logical manner through the application of critical or systematic reflection.

Conclusion

It is so clear that Buddhism is the way of good life in both physical and intellectual. The significance of right view in the Middle Path can be conclude as follows--the Noble Eightfold Path is best understood as a collection of personal qualities to be developed, rather than as a sequence of steps along a linear path. The development of right view and right resolve (the factors classically identified with wisdom and discernment) facilitates the development of right speech, action, and livelihood (the factors identified with virtue).

Absolutely it is very important to confirm that the right view in Theravada Buddhism should be classified into two divisions, namely; the right view in mundane division (*Lōkiyasammāditthi*) and the right view in supra-mundane division (*Lokuttarasammāditthi*). The first one is belief in the individual ownership of action or belief in law of karma (*Kammasakatā-saddhā*); the second one is the right view (*Sammāditthi*) in the noble eightfold path.

Lastly, we have to mention that the right view is about the awareness of what is true and right. To cultivate right view, need to accompany by being a good friend (*Kalyānamittatā*)

and listening to others (*paratoghosa*) as the text mentioned. The results of right view led to be a noble person as it is the goal of cultivate right view on Buddhist perspective.

Bibliography

Bhikhuni Tran Thi Vy. “A Study of The Concept of Right View (*Sammā diṭṭhi*) in Theravāda Buddhism”. *M.A. Thesis*, Graduate School, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2018.

Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu, Bodhi, (tr.). *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, a Translation of the MajjhimaNikaya. Oxford: PTS, 2001.

Pali Text society. *Dīgha-nikāya: Dialogues of the Buddha (3 vols.)*. ed. T.W. Rhys Davids and J.E. Carpenter. Oxford: PTS, 1899-1995.

_____. *Majjhima-nikāya: Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, Middle Length Sayings (4 vols)*. ed. V. Trenckner et al. Oxford: PTS, 1888-2006.

_____. *Samyutta-nikāya: Connected Discourses of the Buddha, The Book of Kindred Sayings (6 vols)*. ed. L.Feer and Mrs C.A.F. Rhys Davids. Oxford: PTS, 1884-1998.

_____. *Majjhimanikāya, Vol. I*, Trenckner, (Tr.) Oxford: PTS, 1993.

_____. *Aṅguttaranikāya, Vol. I*, R. Morris, Warder (revised), Oxford: PTS, 1989.

Phra Prayudh Payutto. *Buddhadhamma: Natural Laws and Values for Life*. Translated by Grant A. Olson. New York: State University.