

## **Kammaṭṭhāna:**

### **“The Centre Of Work Or The Workplace Of Meditation”<sup>1</sup>**

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Meditation should be a compulsory subject in Buddhist universities. In *Theravāda* Buddhism *Pariyatti* is the theoretical learning that is the foundation of all other learning processes. Without a proper theoretical foundation, no effective practices are possible and therefore no realization of the truth can be expected. Even a minor vocabulary error in the meditation manual can cause a futile practice as in the example, “through mistaken reading of the word ‘*udayabbaya*’ as ‘*udakabaka*’ in the manual, a meditation student may end up with watching a heron instead of contemplating arising and falling of phenomena”.

Grammarians like Vimalabuddhi and Kaccāyana have provided the importance of learning proper *Pāḷi* grammar by way of illustration. Practice that relies only on translation or on the instruction of some meditation instructors who is not well-versed in the *Pāḷi* literature can sometimes lead to futile ends. In fact *Pāḷi* is the language used to preserve the teaching of the Buddha that has passed 2500 years of its journey. It was the media language that the Buddha and his disciples used in their teaching career. In the *Visuddhimagga*, the commentator *Buddhaghosa Thera* gave systematic

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explanation to provide the fact that learning before the actual practice is necessary.

“*Ādikammikena kulaputtena pubbe vuttanayeneva sīla parisodanadāni sabbakiccāni katvā vuttapakārassa ācarariyassa santike pancasandhikaṃ kammaṭṭhānaṃ uggahetabbaṃ.*” [Visuddhi: 1-269, (222)]

“So if a clansman who is a beginner wants to develop the meditation subject, firstly, he should do all the work connected with the purification of virtue, etc., in the way already described, after which, he should learn the meditation subject in five stages from a teacher of kind already described”. (299-186)

The basic qualifications of a meditation instructor are mentioned in the *Visuddhimagga* as follows:

<i>Piyo</i>	- He is dearly loved
<i>Garu</i>	- His personality is respectable
<i>Bhavani</i>	- He is encouraging
<i>Vatta</i>	- He speaks ingeniously
<i>Vacanakkharna</i>	- He is unshakable by criticism
<i>Gambirañca katham katta</i>	- He utters profound speech
<i>No ca thane niyocako</i>	- He never urges into unwholesomeness

Likewise the meditation students have the stages to follow.

<i>Uggaha</i>	- Learning the meditation subject
<i>Paripuccha</i>	- Questioning and examining about the meditation subject
<i>Upatthanam</i>	- Establishing the meditation subject
<i>Appana</i>	- The absorbing of the meditation subject
<i>Lakkhaṇa</i>	- (Penetrating) the characteristics of the meditation subject

When he learns the meditation stages in this way, he never tires himself nor worries the teacher.

Let me mention a few points here that would explain how the meditation could be mistakenly practised if the instructor did not teach well or the meditation student did not learn well.

In *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the Buddha taught, "*sabbakāya paṭisamvedī assasissamīti sikkhati, passasissamīti sikkhati.*" Here some people who cannot follow the explanation given in commentaries and sub-commentaries misunderstood the word "*Sabbakāya*". They take the word "*Sabbakāya*" literally which means the entire body.

Nevertheless the context here is not contemplation on the entire body; it is on the entire breath. Again some people say that the breath begins at the navel point, the middle is at the chest, and ends at the tip of the nostril. So, one has to follow the breath from the navel point to the tip of the nostril. In fact, as the words, "*Nasikaggeva (only on the tip of the nostril)*" (Vi. Tha. 1-265) and *Phutthathane cittaṃ thapetvā* (keeping the mind on the touching place) (Vi. Tha. 1-273), explain the object of contemplation should be confined to the tip of the nostril where the air touches. The aforementioned words of the Buddha that occurs in the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* explain that the entire body of breath the arising of breath, the presence of breath, and the disappearance of breath — must be observed; the meditation student should not miss any of these points. Therefore, a systematic meditation method requires thorough knowledge on *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, *Visuddhimagga*, and *Patisambhidāmagga Pāli* and commentary and devoted learning under a teacher well-versed in *Piṭaka*.

Another important point to mention here is that when the *Vipassanā* practice is well developed, at the stage of acquiring knowledge on arising and passing away of phenomena, the fantastic qualities of mind may be experienced. These qualities are *obhasa* (light), *pīti* (zest), *passadhi* (tranquillity), *sukha* (pleasure), *saddhi* (confidence), *virīya* (energy), *upatthana* (stability), *upekkhā* (equanimity), *nana* (sharp intelligence), *nikanti* (delight). These qualities might defile the practice if he is attached to those qualities. Here a meditation student is bound to possess a sharp and penetrating intellect that can penetrate the phenomena clearly and precisely. Then he might think that he has acquired *magga* and *phala* that is his final aim in the practice. As he thinks he has

accomplished the task the endeavour he made through out the practice is weakened. In fact the attachment to those qualities is direct opposite of the practice itself.

Many people who do not have thorough knowledge in *Piṭaka* understand *anicca* superficially. They say, “People die because they are impermanent; wealth, health, etc., are subject to destruction and therefore they are impermanent.” In fact, *vipassanā* penetrates deeper than that. *Anicca* should be understood as the arising, passing away, and as unstable and discrete nature of things. The penetration should reach inside the five aggregates. In the *Visuddhimagga*, the commentator explains, “*Aniccanti khandhapañcakam, kasma uppada vaya annatthattabhava*”. That means “The impermanent are the five aggregates. Why? It is because their essence is rise and fall and instability in the same aggregates.”

So, penetrating the characteristic of *anicca* means the penetration on the arising, falling, and instable nature of the five aggregates. One who realizes *anicca* realizes *dukkha* and also *anatta*. (*Khandhavagga Samyutta, Yadanicca Sutta*)

*Pariyatti* teaches theory. Practice should be based on a concrete theory. Practice that is not based on a concrete theory is like a building built on a soft soil. Therefore, *Theravāda* universities, colleges, and academies should accordingly teach *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta*, and *Patisamhhiḍāmagga* which are the essential themes of meditation, as well as the *Visuddhimagga*, which is the essential theme of the three *Piṭaka*.

To conclude I would like to point out that in *Theravāda* Buddhism the academic guideline is given: learning first, practice second, and penetration the last. Therefore meditation should be thoroughly and systematically taught as an academic subject before we carry out the actual practice that would help us to the purification of mind.

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