

## THE SEVEN STAGES OF PURITY ( SATTĀ VISUDDHI)

The Pali word '*Visuddhi*', in a general sense, means 'brightness' or 'splendour' and in an ethical sense 'purity' 'holiness' or 'virtue'.

The word *Visuddhi* is used, in its precise sense, in the Suttas (e.g. *Satipatthāna Sutta*) and *Visuddhi Magga* to signify the 'highest purity' beings can attain (*Sattānam Visuddhi*) - Nibbana - realizable only after eradicating without residue, the taints of lust, hatred and delusion (*lobha, dosa* and *moha*). By an extension of the application, the term '*Visuddhi*' in the context of the Seven Stages of purity (*Satta Visuddhi*) is used to signify the preliminary profound and comprehensive development of morality, mental concentration and wisdom classified into seven which lead to the realization of the 'Highest Purity' - Nibbana.

Nibbana as the ultimate goal of Buddhism is the highest spiritual attainment realizable only through sustained endeavour and determination accompanied by a process of moral training. Discourses of the 'Tripitaka' mention many clusters of Factors, Constituents, Requisites and Perfections which cover substantially the ground for reaching the goal of Nibbana. Perfections (*Paramitā*), Requisites of Enlightenment (*Bodhipakkiyā Dhammā*) Three - fold Training (*tisso sikkhā*) contained in the Noble Eight - fold Path are the better known of such clusters.

The' Seven Stages of purity (*Satta Visuddhi*) are another such cluster of factors which are described in the text as attainments which lead the disciple to the goal of release in Nibbana (*Anupada Parinibbana*). In the *Rathavinita Sutta* (Majjhima 24) Venerable Punna Thera in reply to a question of Venerable Sariputta Thera states that the seven stages of purity (*Satta Visuddhi*) are a scheme of seven factors of moral culture such that the disciple can progress sequentially by mastering each stage and proceeding to the next until he reaches the final goal.

The progress along the Seven Stages is compared to a person travelling from one city to another using a train of seven coaches harnessed with well trained horses changing from one to another successively after some distance, and reaching the destination in the seventh coach. Each stage of purity is accordingly not an end in itself but a means to the attainment of the next higher stage which together with other six constitutes the means to the final goal, the attainment of absolute freedom (*anupādā parinibbana*)

The Seven Stages of Purity, as explained in the *Rathavinita Sitta* and *Visuddhi Magga* are the following :

1. *Sila Visuddhi* - Purity of Morality
2. *Citta Visuddhi* - Purity of Mind
3. *Ditthi Visuddhi* - Purity of View
4. *Kankha Vitarana Visuddhi*- Purity by overcoming Doubt
5. *Maggāmagga nānadassana Visuddhi* -Purity by knowledge and vision of what is Path and Not - Path
6. *Patipadā nānadassana Visuddhi* - Purity by knowledge and Vision of the Path Progress
7. *Nānadassana Visuddhi* -Purity of Knowledge and Vision

## SILA VISUDDHI

*Sila* (Morality) is a fundamental virtue in the Buddhist practice towards liberation from Sansara. It provides the ethical foundation that frees the mind from the roots of defilements which warp the mind of the individual and induce him to vicious behavior. *Sila* begins with abstinence from vices such as cruelty to living beings, dishonesty, carnal misconduct and mendacity and should be developed by fostering positive and healthy traits such as love, charity, honesty, integrity and restraint of the senses.

Purity of Morality comprises four kinds of Morality namely :

- a) *Pātimokkha - samvara sila* - Morality consisting in restraint with regard to codified rules of monastic discipline
- b) *Indriya - samvara sila* - Morality consisting in restraining of the sense faculties
- c) *Ājiva pārisuddha sila* - Morality consisting in purity of livelihood
- d) *Paccaya - sannissita sila* - Morality with regard to the four requisites (of a Bhikkhu)

### Patimokkha - samvara sila -

With the growth of the Buddhist Sangha as an organization where discipline was treated as the life-blood Discipline (*Sila*) became an indispensable virtue of priesthood. The moral precepts assumed the form of injunctions with penalties for breach which eventually got codified into a compendium called '*pātimokkha*'. *Patimokkha - samvara sila* accordingly is the Morality resulting from the compliance with the codified law of *Pātimokkha*.

### Indriya - samvara Sila

By '*Indriya-samvara*' is meant restraint of the five sense faculties. Sense faculties have an innate tendency to seek gratification. This tendency could develop into immorality if left unguarded. Guarding of the senses calls for mental alertness (*sati sampajaḍḍa*) and a sense of contentment. (*santutthi*).

### Ājiva - pārisuddha Sila

The word '*Ājiva*' means livelihood, mode of living or occupation. '*Ājiva Pārisuddha Sila*' in the context of monastic discipline is life of purity totally free from wrong livelihood. Wrong livelihood is explained in the texts as seeking support for life by unethical means such as :

- I. scheming (*kuhana*) - indirectly inducing gains
- II. talk (*lapana*) - indirect persuasion of gains by flattery, ingratiating
- III. hinting (*nemittika*) - give a sign inducing a benefit
- IV. belittling (*nippesikata*) - disparaging, tale bearing
- V. pursuing gain with gain (*labhena labham nijigimsan*) - going in search of gain

A number of activities generally pursued by other recluses (such as soothsaying, palmistry) are specifically prohibited for monks. A person who practices right livelihood is expected to cultivate positive qualities such as charity and pleasant speech.

### Paccayasannissita sila

The morality relating to the use of the four requisites (*catu paccaya*) obliges the recluse (a) to practise continence in the enjoyment of the four requisites limiting the enjoyment of the items to the extent just sufficient to satisfy the physical need without deriving a sensuous delight therefrom, and (b) to contemplate, on each occasion when any item is enjoyed, the limitation of the satisfaction to be derived therefrom

Additionally, the recluse avoids solid food from meridian till day - break of the following day, rejects ornaments and perfumes, does not use comfortable seats and refrains from fraud and deception, Purity of Morality is abstemious use of the requisites of life.

## 2. CITTA VISUDDHI

Citta Visuddhi (Purity of Mind) as a general concept signifies the eight Attainments (*attha samā patti*) together with Neighbourhood concentration (*Upacāra samādhi*). The mental Attainments are a means of suppressing Hindrances (Nivarana). *Citta Visuddhi* is accordingly an endeavour to purge the mind of the Hindrances by means of Ecstasies attained through Tranquillity meditation (*Samatha Bhāvanā*). Visuddhi Magga gives a well structured list of Forty Subjects of Meditation (*Kāmmatthā na*) for developing Tranquillity Meditation.

Of the forty subjects, 29 including 10 kasina subjects namely Perception of Loathsomeness of food and Analysis of Elements produce, Neighbourhood Concentration (*upacara samā dhi*). *Citta Visiddhi* is an intermediate stage of the path to *cetovimutti* which is the emancipation of the mind in the highest sense, the liberation from all passions, sense pleasures (*kamā*), continued existence (*bhava*), ignorance (*avijja*) which when complemented by *paññā vimutti* (liberation attained by insight) represents the fruit of Arahantship. Purity of the Mind is a step leading to the next stage, purity of view (*Ditthi Visuddhi*).

### DITTHI VISUDDHI

The word '*Ditthi*' means 'Views'. Purity of view means seeing or determining correctly the true nature of the mind - matter or psychophysical complex of the individual (*nāma-rupa*) represented by the Five Aggregates (*Khandha*) (*nāma rupa yathā dassana*). Although '*Ditthi*' etymologically means unqualified religious views, by usage it has in some contexts acquired a derogatory connotation, as heretical or unorthodox view. Right View (*Sammā Ditthi*) is fundamental and forms the basic foundation of the moral edifice of Buddhist practice. The right understanding of the Five Aggregates (corporeality, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness) enables one to get a right understanding of the whole world.

According to *Abhidhammattha sangaha*, Purification of View is the discernment of mind and matter with respect to their characteristics (*lakkhana*) functions (*rasa*), manifestations (*paccupatthāna*) and proximate causes (*padatthāna*)

The right understanding of the five Aggregates enables the understanding of the Truth of 'Suffering' (*panca upādanakkhandhā*) Understanding of the Egolessness of the Aggregates prevents the arising of the illusion of the "Ego". The Purity of View dispels the web of wrong views and enables one to see things in a process of arising (*uppāda*) and passing away (*vaya*) which is true reality.

### KANKHĀ VITARANA VISUDDHI

*Kankhā Vitarana Visuddhi* is the 'Purity achieved by overcoming doubt'. According to *Abhidhammattha Sangaha*, it is the discernment

of the conditions of (the same) mind and matter. It is founded on wisdom and consists in the knowledge of the causes and conditions of the complex of mind and matter, its occurrence and its continuity due to Kamma which dispels doubts. This knowledge enables one to realise the second Truth, the cause of suffering more analytically explained by the Law of Dependent Origination (*paticca Samappada*). Who clearly understands Dependent Origination is freed from doubt with regard to things that have come into existence.

### MAGGÂMAGGANÂNA DASSANA VISUDDHI

'*Magga*' is 'Path' and the word '*maggamagga*' as a combination means what is the (right) path and what is not the (right) path. It is based on wisdom and consists in the understanding which knows the right path from the wrong path and which leads one to the realization of the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering (*Dukkha Nirodha Gamini Patipada Ariya Sacca*) abbreviated as '*Magga sacca*' (Truth of the path).

According to Abhidhammattha sangaha the meditator comprehends the formations (*sankhāra*) in terms of the Three Characteristics (*tilakkhana*) by way of duration, continuity and moment and as he contemplates with the knowledge of 'rise and fall' there arise in him ten conditions including an aura characteristic of supreme Enlightenment. The meditator, unless he is discerning, is prone to misconceive that he has reached the ultimate Path and Fruit. With discrimination he understands that those are really imperfections of insight and he has not yet reached the Ultimate goal. The discrimination between the ten imperfections as not being the path and the practice of contemplation as being the correct path is called the, Purity by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path. (*Maggā magga nana dassana visuddhi*)

### PATIPADÂNANA DASSANA VISUDDHI

The word '*patipadā*' means the path or the means to reach a goal or destination. Hence *patipadā òāna dassana visuddhi* is the purity by Knowledge and Vision of the way meaning the 'Way to the realization of the goal of Nibbana'.

According to Abhidhammattha sangaha, this purity comprises a succession of Special knowledge called Insight knowledge (*Vipassanā òāna*) which may be enumerated as follows:

#### 1. Knowledge of Rise and Fall (*Udayabbayanāna*)

This is the knowledge in contemplating the arising (*udaya*) and cessation (*vaya*) of formations. Rise and fall is discerned in terms of conditionality, understanding how formations arise through causes and conditions and how they cease with their cessation.

#### 2. Knowledge of dissolution (*Bhanganāna*)

*Bhanga* means 'dissolution'. '*Bhanganupassanā*' is contemplation of dissolution. As the meditator's knowledge becomes keen, he withdraws attention from arising and focuses on cessation and destruction of formations. Knowledge thus gained is knowledge of dissolution.

#### 3. Knowledge of the Fearful (*Bhayatupatthāna Òāna*)

As the meditator contemplates the dissolution of formations at all three periods of time he recognizes that all such dissolving formations are fearful. The knowledge thus gained is knowledge of the Fearful.

#### 4. Knowledge of danger (*Âdinavaòāna*)

This is knowledge consisting in the recognition that all formations are fearful and bereft of any core and security lies only in the Unconditioned state (*Nibbāna*).

#### 5. Knowledge of disenchantment (*Nibbidā nana*)

This is the knowledge contained in the disenchantment that one engenders on being convinced that all formations are fraught with danger, taking no delight in them.



6. Knowledge of desire for deliverance (*Muñcitukāmyatā òāna*)

This is the knowledge born of the desire for being delivered from the whole field of formations and for escaping from it.

7. Knowledge of reflective contemplation (*Patisankhā nana*)

This is the knowledge derived by the meditator from reflective contemplation of the formations in his examination of them while seeking deliverance from the whole field of formations.

8. Knowledge of Equanimity towards formations (*Sankhāra upekkhā nana*)

This is the knowledge born of equanimity towards all formations developed by the meditator (through reflective meditation) after abandoning both terror and delight at which stage he sees nothing in the formations to be taken as 'I' or 'mine'.

1. Knowledge of Conformity (*anuloma nana*)

This knowledge is called Adaptation to Truth (or Conformity with Truth) since while contemplating on the characteristics of formations it adapts itself to the preceding eight Insight Knowledges and to the immediately following stages of the Supramundane Path.

**PURITY OF KNOWLEDGE AND VISION (*Nāna dassana Visuddhi*)**

Purity of Knowledge and Vision is the knowledge associated with any of the four Supra mundane path consciousness (*Lokuttara magga citta* e.g. *Sotapatti Magga Citta*).

Immediately upon the Adaptation knowledge, there arises, the Maturity knowledge (*Gotrabhu nana*) taking as its object the unconditioned, (*Nibbana*) transcending the rank (*gotra*) of the worldling (*putujjana*) and entering the rank of Noble ones (*Ariya*) being the first turning towards Nibbana. As the immediate continuation following upon that Maturity knowledge there arises the First path Consciousness (Stream Entrance) destroying 3 out of 10 Fetters (*sanyojana*). This process

continues until all the 10 Fetters are destroyed (in one stroke or successively) when the Fourth Path consciousness (*Arahatta Magga Citta*) arises.

*Nāna dassana Visuddhi* is the knowledge of the four paths (Stream entrance, Once - return, Non - return and Arahanta) which constitute the means to the attainment of Final Deliverance (*Anupadā parinibbana*) as enunciated in the *Ratha vinitha Sutta*.

The seven Stages of Purity are to be attained in sequence each being the support for the one that follows. The first purity relates to the Factor of Morality of the 'Three Trainings' (*tisso sikkha*), the second to concentration, and the last five to Wisdom. The first six are mundane (*lokiya*) in character and the Seventh supra mundane. (*lokuttara*)

**QUESTIONS**

1. Explain the concept of Purity (*Visuddhi*) and specify the objective of Purities.
2. Explain the four components of the Purity of Morality (*Sila Visuddhi*)
3. Discuss how the Morality consisting in the Purity of Livelihood. (*Ajiva parisuddha sila*) may be practised by the Bhikkhu and the householder.
4. Explain a given stage of Purity (*Visuddhi*).