

The Significance of Majjhimāpaṭipadā in Searching for Liberation

Ven. Jatila¹ (Namhsan)

Introduction

The term majjhimāpaṭipadā means the middle path because of avoidance two extremes of sensual indulgence (kāmasukhallikānuyoga) and self-mortification (attakilamathānuyoga). The majjhimāpaṭipadā is recognized as the Noble Eightfold Path (ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga) and the path leading to the cessation of suffering (dukkhanirodhagāminīpaṭipadā). In searching for liberation, a meditator must avoid the sensual indulgence and self-mortification, whereas he must follow the middle path leading to the complete cessation of suffering. The purpose of research is to analyze the practice of majjhimāpaṭipadā in Buddhism for liberation.

Methodology

Data were collected from the Pāli cannon, especially from the discourses such as the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, etc. The collected data were classified in the sense of cultivation of morality (sīla), concentration (samādhi) and wisdom (paññā) for liberation.

Discussion

The majjhimāpaṭipadā is well known as the practice of Noble Eightfold Path reflected in the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta (S V 421) and Saccavibhaṅga Sutta (M III 251-2). Without approaching the two extremes practice, the Buddha has awakened to the middle path which generates vision, knowledge, peace, direct knowledge, enlightenment and nibbāna to arise. The Noble Eightfold Path consists of right view (sammādiṭṭhi), right thought (sammāsaṅkappa), right speech (sammāvācā), right action (sammākammanta), right livelihood (sammā-ājīva), right effort (sammāvāyāma), right mindfulness (sammāsati) and right concentration (sammāsamādhi). These eight factors can be classified into three; training of morality (sīla), concentration (samādhi) wisdom (paññā). Sammāvācā, sammākammanta, sammā-ājīva are related to observing sīla. Sammāvāyāma, sammāsati and sammāsamādhi deal with training to develop samādhi. Sammādiṭṭhi

1. PhD Candidate, PGIPBS, University of Kelaniya. takkasila2012@gmail.com

and sammāsaṅkappa connect with the development of wisdom. This fact identifies that the practice of Noble Eightfold Path is development of sīla, samādhi and paññā. This practice is called the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

In respect of cultivation of good morality, sammāvācā means right speech which is refraining from falsehood, slandering, harsh words, and vain talk. Wrong speech should be avoided because it destroys oneself and others, whereas right speech should be communicated to provide right information to others and good benefits. Sammākammanta is good moral conduct through the abstinence from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. Next, Buddhists are encouraged to perform right livelihood (sammā-ājīva) for acquisition wealth because of harmlessness and to reject wrong livelihood such as trading in human beings, weapons, etc., due to harmfulness to oneself and others. Hence the practice of sammāvācā, sammākammanta, sammā-ājīva is the establishment of good moral conduct and purification of morality.

The next practice of sammāvāyāma, sammāsati and sammāsamādhi is the cultivation of mental development by meditation. Sammāvāyāma is right effort including the effort to prevent the arising of unarisen evil states, the effort to abandon the evil state that has already arisen, the effort to develop un-arisen wholesome states and the effort to maintain the arisen wholesome states. Further, sammāsati is described to contemplate on the four foundations of mindfulness: body, feeling, mind and dhamma. Each of these contemplation is required to establish four mental qualities— diligence, clear comprehension, mindfulness and removal from covetousness and displeasure in the world. The practice of mindfulness is the only path of insight meditation towards the realization of nibbāna. Next, sammāsamādhi stands for the cultivation of one-pointedness of the mind on single object either physical and mental. This practice leads to the attainment of absorption, rūpa-jhānas. Hence the practice of sammāvāyāma, sammāsati and sammāsamādhi is training to develop concentration.

In cultivating wisdom, sammādiṭṭhi is understanding of things as they really are. This comprehension indicates the realization of the Four Noble Truths. The Mahāvedalla Sutta (M I 294) mentions that listening to other words, wise attention, observance of morality, listening to the Dhamma, discussion of the Dhamma, contemplation on tranquil meditation and insight meditation are the conditions that support sammādiṭṭhi to arise. The opposition of sammādiṭṭhi is wrong view, micchādiṭṭhi and it is completely eliminated by the path stream-entry. Next, sammāsaṅkappa indicates developing thoughts of selfless renunciation, love and non-violence and eliminating thoughts of selfish desire, ill will and violence. Thus, the practice of sammādiṭṭhi and sammāsaṅkappa stands for training to develop wisdom.

The Noble Eightfold Path aims at promoting and perfecting three essentials of Buddhist training: morality, concentration and wisdom. Morality supports concentration and wisdom to strengthen. Cultivating concentration strengthens morality and wisdom. According to the *Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta* (DI 124), morality purifies wisdom and wisdom purifies morality. A man with good morality has wisdom. The man with wisdom also possesses morality just as the hands mutually wash each other. Regarding spiritual liberation, the restraint of the morality purifies the mind from gross defilements. The cultivation of concentration purifies the mind from moderate defilements. The development of wisdom purifies the mind from latent defilements. Hence, defilements must be eliminated through the development of morality, concentration and wisdom.

The *Ariyapriyesana Sutta* (M I 162-75) states that a prince Siddhattha Gotama before his enlightenment searched for liberation and approached to the eminent *Āḷārakālāma* and *Uddaka Rāmaputta*. He quickly attained the base of nothingness and the base of neither perception nor non perception from them respectively. He realized that this attainment did not lead to direct knowledge and *nibbāna*. Accordingly, *samathabhāvanā* practice existed in pre-Buddhist as well. Contemplation of *samathabhāvanā* leads to attain only the four *rūpa-jhānas* and the four *arūpa-jhānas*. This spiritual development is not final spiritual emancipation. Hence, the prince Siddhattha Gotama kept going in search of liberation independently. He turned to practice the middle ways (*majjhimāpaṭipadā*). Through that practice, he realized enlightenment. This highlights the significance of the Noble Eightfold Path.

As a traveler will need a road map to lead him to his destination, the meditator also requires to follow the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddha in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (D II 151-2) expounded to *Subhadda* that without following the Noble Eightfold Path, no true *samaṇa* is found. Nevertheless, *Sotāpanna*, *Sakadāgāmī* *Anāgāmī* and *Arahat* are found in the practice of *Dhamma-vinaya* only where the Noble Eightfold Path is found. As long as there are the disciples who would follow the Noble Eightfold Path, the world will not be devoid of *Arahat*. This fact highlights that the practice of Noble Eightfold Path is vital importance for a Seeker in searching for spiritual liberation.

Conclusion

The Noble Eightfold Path recognized *majjhimāpaṭipadā* plays significant role in the development of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* to realize the four noble truths. Through following the Noble Eightfold Path correctly, the truth of suffering could be understood. The cause of the truth of suffering could be eradicated. The cessation of suffering could be realized. Hence, the Noble Eightfold Path indeed highlights the right way how to attain the *nibbāna* like a roadmap.

Keywords: Majjhimāpaṭipadā, Sīla, Samādhi, Paññā, Liberation

Reference

Leon Feer, M (ed.) (1976). *Samyutta-nikāya Part V*, London: PTS.

Piyadassi Thera, (2003). *The Buddha's Ancient Path*, Kandy: BPS.

Rhys Davids, T.W and Estlin Chapenter, Prof. J (ed.) (1975/1966). *Dīgha-nikāya Vol I-II*, London: PTS.

Robert Chalmers, C.B. (ed.) (1977). *Majjhimanikāya Vol. III*, London: PTS.

Trenckner V (ed.) (1979). *Majjhimanikāya Vol. I*, ed. London: PTS.