

Four Sublime States of Mind

(*Cattāri Brahma Vihāraṇi*)

In Buddhism we are always advised to get rid of suffering and reach the real happiness which is the main purpose of beings. The main reason that we are happy is how far we have purified our mind and how our understanding is about the world as it is. Getting rid of negative thoughts such as anger, desire, ill will, jealousy, delusion and also cultivating positive thoughts such as generosity, loving kindness, compassion, friendliness and discipline is the path of happiness. Here, practicing three meritorious deeds which are generosity (*Dāna*), morality (*Seela*) and meditation (*Bhāvanā*) is the path how we get rid of suffering, and gain happiness.

Practicing generosity (Dana) is the first meritorious deed that helps us to go on the path of purification. When we offer something to others kindly concerning their qualities or needs, our mind is kind, helpful, pure and calm. According to Buddhism, generosity can be practiced in three ways as material offerings (*Āmisa Dāna*), giving fearlessness (*Abhaya Dāna*) and delivering Buddha's message (*Dhamma Dāna*). These are the things which purify and decorate our mind. Its final result is happiness. That is why the Buddha says "Practicing merits means gaining happiness" (merit is another word for happiness) (*Sukho puññassa uccayo*). Doing more merits is having more happiness. Therefore, the person who listened to the Buddha's advice is always ready to offer something to others with pure hands. He offers or donates not only for his close relatives and friends but also for any person who is in need. Practicing generosity is like ornaments which decorate our mind with happiness. And also practicing generosity is the ways how to win friends (*Dadam Mittāni Ganhati*).

The second meritorious deed that gives us peace of mind is practicing morality (*Seela*) which is higher than generosity. More and more we listen to the Buddha's message, we are ready to go on the path of freedom. In the name of happiness we further hope to go forward on the path. That is why we control our behavior and speech as morality. We discipline our behavior and speech not because of fear to others or next birth but for our mental culture. Good discipline in our behavior gets comfort to our life. If someone has good discipline, it means he has no mistakes or blame from others. He can remember his past with a happy mind because of his disciplined behavior.

The third and the most important merit that Buddhism points out is meditation, mental culture (*Bhāvanā*). Here we practice our mind in a correct way using some kinds of meditation techniques such as loving kindness or breathing meditation. Meditation is the highest, fastest and most successful way to develop our spirit to the maximum level. Among forty techniques in Buddhist meditation, practicing loving kindness is very important and useful at the very beginning of mental culture. In many discourses the Buddha has emphasized its need and benefits. Buddhism says practicing merits means practicing happiness (*Sukkho puññassa uccayo*)

Practicing four sublime states of mind is one of the major teachings that Buddha has explained on the path of purification. They are 1. love or Loving-kindness (*mettā*), 2. compassion (*karunā*), 3. sympathetic Joy (*muditā*) and 4. equanimity (*upekkhā*).

Loving kindness (*mettā*)

According to Right Understanding (*Sammā ditthi*) which is the very first step of the eight-fold path, if we have Right Vision about the world and purification, we change our attitude into correct way which is Right Thoughts (*Sammā samkappa*). It means we practice loving kindness. Here we wish others success like ours. We look at others with kind eyes. If we can gradually develop loving kindness, we can overcome anger which especially disturbs our peace of mind. We mostly suffer because of others mistake or misbehavior. If we can meditate on loving kindness, we can overcome suffering little by little. That is why the Buddha says us to practice loving kindness at the very beginning of the path of mental health. In the discourse of *mettā*, the Buddha explains how far we have to practice loving kindness. It says we may have an ability to see any person as one's only son or daughter. It means our mind is very high in spirits and merits. More and more we practice loving kindness, we can overcome anger. As we have reduced anger which is one of the main causes of suffering, we can get rid of suffering. That means we are happy. Other people or incidents can't disturb our peace of mind. If we can live without struggling when unpleasant objects reach our senses, it is our proficiency that Buddhism emphasizes.

When we practice loving kindness, first of all we develop it for ourselves, like "May I be well, happy and peaceful. May I be free from suffering. May I be free from illness. May I be free from stress. May no harm come to me. May no problems come to me. May no difficulties come to me. May I succeed in all good. May I attain final bliss of liberation." Then we focus it to others who are in the universe like "May all beings be well, happy and peaceful. May all beings be free from suffering. May all beings be free from illness. May all beings be free from stress. May no harm come to them. May no problems come to them. May no difficulties come to them. May they succeed in all good. May they attain final bliss of liberation." When we practice this concept again and again, our mind is going to cool down. More and more we practice this positive thought, we are friendly with others and we have no influence over others mistakes or misbehavior. We are always ready to forgive others mistakes. Others' mistakes can't disturb our peace of mind. And others can't steal our good qualities that we have practiced in our sansaric journey. We don't give way an external person or thing to alter our mental state. It means we are strong in mindfulness of loving kindness.

In the discourse of *Mettānisamsa*, the Buddha explains the eleven results of practicing loving kindness. He who practices loving kindness;

1. Sleeps comfortably (*Sukham supati*)
2. Wakes up comfortably (*Sukham patibujjhati*)
3. Doesn't see evil dreams (*Na pāpakam supinam passati*)
4. Is dear to and beloved by human beings (*Manussānam piyo hoti*)
5. Is just as dear to non-human beings (*Amanussānam piyo hoti*)
6. Deities guard him as a mother and father guard a child (*Devatā rakkhanti*)
7. Fire, poison and weapons don't affect him (*Nāssa aggi vā visam vā sattham khamati*)
8. Mind is easily concentrated (*tuvatam cittam samādhiyati*)

9. He appears to be calm and attractive (*Mukha vanna vipasidati*)
10. He dies unconfused (*Asammulho kālam karoti*)
11. If he didn't attain enlightenment, when he falls from this life, he reappears in the brahma realm (*Uttarim appativijjantho brahmaloko uppajjati*)

As the result of practicing loving kindness, other three qualities also increase which are compassion (*karunā*), sympathetic or altruistic joy (*muditā*), equanimity (*upekkhā*). These four things are called four boundless states. If a person practices these qualities, he can live like a brahma in the brahma realm. He is fully concentrated with happiness.

When we practice loving kindness, first we practice it for ourselves. For example;

May I be well, happy and peaceful!
May I be free from suffering!
May I be free from illness!
May I be free from stress!
May no harm come to me!
May no problems come to me!
May no difficulties come to me!
May I attain the final bliss of liberation!

After that we can practice loving kindness to others who are around us.

May my parents, relatives, friends and enemies be well, happy and peaceful!
May my parents, relatives, friends and enemies be free from suffering!
May my parents, relatives, friends and enemies be free from illness!
May my parents, relatives, friends and enemies be free from stress!
May no harm come to them!
May no problems come to them!
May no difficulties come to them!
May they attain the final bliss of liberation!

Finally, we can focus on all over the world like this,

May all beings in the world be well, happy and peaceful!
May all beings be free from suffering!
May all beings be free from illness!
May all beings be free from stress!
May no harm come to them!
May no problems come to them!
May no difficulties come to them!
May they attain the final bliss of liberation!

At the beginning of practicing loving kindness, we do it as a sitting meditation. However, when we practice loving kindness continuously, we can practice it in four postures. That is why the Buddha has said;

**When standing, walking, sitting, lying down,
Whenever he feels free of tiredness
Let him establish well this mindfulness
This, it is said, is the Divine Abode.**

In this level, we always live vibrating of loving kindness.

Compassion (*Karuna*)

If we have real loving kindness, and if we are really friendly, our heart is sensitive and warm with others' sorrow, tears and lamentation. When someone has any problem or difficulty, we are ready to help them. We feel others' suffering as ours. We are always ready to save them from negative feelings. We bless all success to others. Even though we are not with others in their success, we are with them when they have failures. Like a mother takes care of her only son from suffering, we are always ready to take care of others in troubles as much as we can.

Sympathetic Joy (*Muditā*)

Furthermore, as the result of practicing loving kindness, when others succeed in any kind of good, we are not jealous. We are happy when others are happy. This is a very high level good quality because most people are not happy when others are successful. If we can be happy in others' success, it means our spiritual power is rich and high. Here we especially wish '**may others meet with success!**' again and again.

Equanimity (*Upekkhā*)

Equanimity, which is one of the highest qualities, is a perfect, unshakable balance of mind, rooted in insight. The nature of the world is always changing with good and bad. Buddhism explains it as eight worldly conditions (*Attha Lokadhamma*). They are gain and loss, honor and dishonor, praise and blame, happiness and misery. If someone can live without attachment and detachment in these worldly conditions, it is equanimity.

If someone is clever enough to live without desire and anger among above worldly conditions, external objects can't disturb his peace of mind. It is a higher spiritual quality. Our success not only depends on money, education, relatives and friends, but how far we don't suffer when we face unpleasant situations.

If someone can live with above four kinds of sublime states (*Mettā*, *Karunā*, *Muditā*, *Upekkhā*), he lives like a brahma (or divine) being bearing a human body. Then he doesn't feel physical pain a lot because his mental state is very high and rich in merits and spirit. His mind is pure, quiet and calm. He is fully happy.

Developing concentration, by practicing some meditation techniques such as loving kindness meditation is one of the goals of spiritual path. However, gaining concentration with four sublime states is not the final destination of liberation, enlightenment or bliss of Nibbana according to Buddhism. Tranquility (*Samatha*) helps to see the world reality as it is. Buddhism always encourages us to overcome suffering seeing world truth. The Buddha points out to see world as impermanent (*Anicca*), unsatisfying (*Dukkha*) and egoless (*Anatta*) through concentrated mind. If someone is clever to see that everything is impermanent with concentrated mind, his defilements like greed, anger and delusion gradually decrease. Our real success depends on how far we have overcome suffering. Also getting rid of suffering depends on how far we have overcome defilements. For this spiritual success, we have to reflect on impermanence again and again when we have any experience through our six senses.

If we have any experience through our senses, five aggregates arise together. Five aggregates are forms (*Rupa*-රූප), feelings (*Vedanā*-වේදනා), perception (*Saññā*-සංකල්පනා), mental formations (*Sankhāra*-සංඛාර) and consciousness (*Viññāna*-විඤ්ඤාණ). These five aggregates arise together at the moment when the conditions are together, and they cease when the conditions separate instantly. These five things appear behind any kind of experiences in our life, but they are invisible, and have to be known with insight. The nature of these five aggregates is arising and ceasing. At the moment of ceasing everything ceases without leaving anything remained. The most valuable and interesting explanation in Buddhism is impermanence. It is said in Buddhism; **Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) will not go to (the future) occurrence** (*Ahuttvā sambutam hutvā na bhavissati*). This is the nature of impermanence that Buddhism illustrates.

With this understanding, we know very well that in every moment our experience arises and ceases. Then we can live with a fresh mind without bearing past defilements with ignorance. This should be our highest goal in spirituality for the bliss of Nibbana. Then we are able to live without any suffering but with mindfulness and wisdom about the world.

May the Triple Gem Bless you!

May all Beings be Well, Happy, Prosperous and Peaceful!

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