

## The Five Impediments in The Path of Achieving Nibbāna

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### Introduction

All and sundries, irrespective of their religion, country, gender, physical, mental and material status, in this material mundane, are desire to be free from all kinds of miseries. But nobody is free from sufferings in this material mundane, whatever he is; either he is a king or a beggar because everyone has clinging and craving towards prosperity and wellbeing. Numbers of philosophers, scholars, researchers, ascetics, seers and sages working incessantly to overcome miseries since the time immemorial. They quested and suggested different paths for removing miseries those theories were turned into the form of religion by passing of time. In ancient times a seer who was born in family of the kingdom of *Kapilvatthu* has quested the path of cessation of sufferings known as the *Tathagata Buddha*.<sup>1</sup>

With having the ultimate goal to eradicate all kinds of sufferings; The Bodhisattva Siddhartha was practising Meditation technique particularly *Anāpāna Satti* and *Vipassanā Sadhanā* as per tradition of the time. The prince and son of the King Suddhodhana of Kapilavatthu, Siddhartha Gautama renounced the kingly palace and comforts of the life in quest of cessation of suffering. He had gone through the teachings and preaching of *Ācaryā Alāra Kalama* and *Ācaryā Rāmaputta Udareka*<sup>2</sup> honestly and meticulously but not satisfied because he was intending to quest the path that overcome sufferings of all sentient beings and moved further in search of the ultimate truth that the path succeed in eradication of suffering of all human race, towards the forest of Urevellā on the Bank of river Nirājanā. He meditated consistently and impulsively to achieve the object in the dark forest where sun light did not touched the earth even in daytime. The air create storm that trees in the forest got crash one another and generate a blunder sound. Bodhisattva Siddhartha and his other five colleagues, who joined him there, were meditated and meditated day and night continuously and consistently nearly for six years but no avail. Bodhisattva Siddhartha had not surrendered against the Māra even he became so thick and thin; when he touched his stomach, then he touched his spinal cord and when he touched his back, he touched his stomach. The his five colleagues left him all alone there when they saw that the Bodhisattva had milk food (*Pāyasa*) by the hands of Sujatā and after that they moved towards Sarnātha near Varanasi.<sup>3</sup>

Bodhisattva Siddhartha also took bath in the river Nirājanā and after crossing the river he came in Urevellā now this place is known as Bodhagayā and he meditated deeply with strong determination under the Pipal Tree (Bodhi Tree) and ultimately achieved Enlightenment on Vesāka Day.<sup>4</sup> Thereafter he become The Buddha, the Enlightened one, the awaken one. He

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<sup>1</sup> The Teaching of Buddha Published by The Corporate Body of The Buddha Educational Foundation

<sup>2</sup> The Buddha and Dhamma by Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, Pub. By The Buddha Education Foundation. Taiwan

<sup>3</sup> The Buddha and Dhamma by Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, Pub. By The Buddha Education Foundation. Taiwan

<sup>4</sup> THE GOSPEL OF BUDDHA by Paul Corus ,Pub. by THE OPEN COURT PUBLISHING COMPANY

came to know the subtle to subtlest teaching of the meditation techniques including these impediments or hindrances (the five Nivarna) in achieving Nibbāna and also come to know how to overcome these miseries. He came to know all what were supportive and helping (Bojjhaṅga) and hindrances or obstacles or impediments (*Nīvarṇa*) in the meditation practice those were the strong hindrances of the mind (*Citta*) that obstructed the mind in achieving the highest goal and purifying the mind from all kinds of clinging and utmost deliverance from the Cycle of Rebirth, *Nibbāna*. Mind is the superior of all senses and it is all in all. Whatever it thinks resulted into action and speech whether they are bad or good.<sup>5</sup>

The Bhikkhus who are meditated to achieve the Arhathood, they are also meditated for removal of all impurities in the mind and faced all kinds of these impediments during the period of meditation (the path of achieving Nibbāna). Their progress is obstructed from the mundane to the super mundane world of mindfulness. During the path of progress to achieve arhathood, they all are passing through some impediments or obstacles or hindrances in their divine path to Nibbāna. The Supreme Enlightened Buddha advised the Bhikkhus, the five impediments:-

1. Sense desire (*Kāmacchanda*)
2. Aversion and Ill-Will or Anger (*Vyāpāda*)
3. Sloth and Torpor (*Sthāna-Middha or Thina –middhā*)
4. Anxiety, Worry and Restlessness (*Uddhuccā-kukkuccā*)
5. Doubt (*Vicikicchā*)<sup>6</sup>

The above five impediments in the path; how to meditate and overcome these are described in *Mahāsattipaṭṭhana Sutta*, *Digha Nikaya* (DN-2/9), *Sattipaṭṭhana Sutta*, *Majjhima Niakaya* (MN-1/10).

According to the Buddha's preaching, they all are envelop the mantle abilities in many ways just like the clouds cover the sky and create hurdles to see the light ,similarly in improving mantle capabilities or removing impurities by way of meditation –through Equanimity (*Upekkhā-Bhavanā*) and through mental reform (*Vipassanā-Meditation ,Samādhi- Bhavanā*). Human mind is always in wavering state just like a monkey who sites on one branch of a tree at one moment and a little bit later on the other branch of the tree. Therefore, to keep the mind stable, one has to be practiced for equanimity first through breath (*Ānāpāna Satti*) and thereafter (*Vipassanā*) *Samādhi*. The impediments disturbed the mind as and when any one goes to equanimity state in the perfect conditions of outside nature and neighbouring place where one has meditated. Inside the mind a storm of impediments is created, so that the person gives up the practice at once.

Hence, for the purpose of eradication of all kind of impurities form the mind Bhikkhu can not only meditate for a longer period but also deeply, consistently, continuously and regularly with keeping in mind all unshakeable impediments. The five impediments inside the mind

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<sup>5</sup> Dhamma Pada ( first and second suttas)

<sup>6</sup> Discourse on Mahasattipaṭṭhāna Sutta by S.N. Goenka Pub.Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri, India.

make it impure and obstruct so it cannot become calm and cool for meditation constantly and not to tractable, wieldy, lacks of glowing transparency and steadiness. Just as body needs

food for existence similarly the mind also required nourishment for calmness and development.

### **The Five Impediments (*Nivarana*)**

1. Sense Desire (*Kāmacchanda*):- Desire or craving is the root cause of all miseries. *Kāmacchanda* is made of two words – *Kāma* (means sexual desire) and *cchanda* (means selection). (*Kāma –Vasanā* ) Sexual desire is the strongest desire in all kinds of desires and it is hard to get rid of from the mind. Under the grips of sensual desire a person is not in control of his consciousness. He wants to perform this act to satisfy his desire at any cost. The human nature is having craving and clinging for things that he had not have. He has great lust for opposite nature of sex. The *māra* also send his children to betray Buddha from meditation. But they did not over power Him. He also knew that many ascetic Brahamans and Rishis-munis were succumbed to the *māra* in the ancient times in the battle of purification. Many of the so called ascetics and sages, now -a-days, are also behind the bars since they were defeated by *Māra* and succumbed before him, they committed the sin by the clutches of the evil passions.

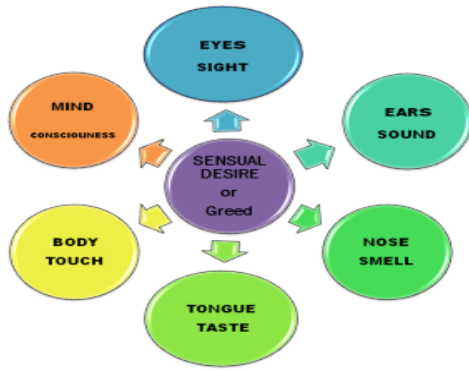
The human body have five outer senses-ears, eyes, nose, tongue and body through which the mind, an inner sense, is associated to the outer world and also impurities entered in the mind through these sources. The mind is the supreme of all the senses and he is the master of all. For example:- There are five holes at the top of mountain and a small creature like mouse was in it. A Bhikkhu has to catch that mouse from the mountain hole but the mouse run away from one hole and entre to the other one. Similarly the sexual desire created through one sense organs or the other but it is difficult to control the same unless and until all other sense organs are not blocked. The object of eyes is sight, ears is sound, nose is smell, tongue is taste and body is touch which create lust for sexual desire (*tannhā*) and the desire is nourished by these objects.<sup>7</sup>

The Buddha had overcome of the *Māra* by ignoring their activities and also *Mucalinda* serpentine also helped the Buddha when he was in deep meditation near serpentine lake at Mahabodhi complex by making seven coils of his body around

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<sup>7</sup> Mahasatipatṭhan Sutta By S.N. Goenka.

body of the Buddha and kept its hood over the head of the ENLIGHTENED.



2. **Aversion or Ill-will or Anger (*Vyāpāda*):**- Ill-will, hatred, carelessness, anger, jealousy, hostility, enmity, ego and aversion all are harmful for a human being. Rejecting the things since it deems nasty even at the time it looks favourable and reasonable. Whatever is good, done by us and whatever is bad done by wrongdoers. When a Bhikkhu thinks acts or speaks against any other with bad intension, he must have malice his mind first and there after his deeds are reflected into his speech or physical actions. Bhikkhu has a wrong view about someone and react accordingly and also focus over some object for betterment but he finds bitter, so reject it. He first harms himself than the other one. There are ten bad actions exits –three of Mind, four of Speech and three of body. Similarly there are ten actions are good- three of mind, four of speech and three of body. Ill-will when arise it goes on arising for a longer period and resulted in action. One harms the other or has a satisfaction when one losses or be harmed by other. He is joyful when his enemy was suffering. He is not suffering from his miseries but feeling suffered when the other is joyful.
3. **Sloth and Torpor (*Thina-Middhā*):**- It refers to the physical appearance and actions of the body of a meditator. A Bhikkhu seems dull, drowsiness, restless, painful, changing position again and again, sneezing, sluggishness, yawning etc. and meditating without alertness with low energy or high energy. It may be due to tiredness or overworking or overeating. A tactic of confrontation and battling for avoiding unpleasant or complicated circumstances. He is unable to handle the situation arises due to losing of patience by weakness. Ill-will is manifested in a number of ways such as, some are very active and some of them are passive. Some are completely harmful and active in the mind or any part of the body. Some can be identified easily and some are hard to know. Some are more dangerous and some are less dangerous. Some are seems that are existing and some are hidden or unarisen.
4. **Anxiety, Worry and Restlessness (*Uddhuccā-kukkuccā*):**-Anxiety is refers mostly to mind of the person which has been feeling of over-excitement, unpleasant, disagreeable, objectionable, nasty and agitating. Agitating in the mind whether has to do or not to do. The nature of mind is to shift away the work which has to be done just now but mind shift it for other time or moment. Mind is wavering all the moments just like a monkey. Mind never stay at one thought. Mind has the highest

speed to move from one place to the other. At present moment it in Delhi and very next moment in U.S.A. Mind never be calm and peaceful and remain idle. There is old saying that an idle mind is devil's workshop. Anxiety is a non- categorical of worry. Worry for something that was done but not to be done. Worry for future or neighbourhood activities. Mentally disturbed and not concentrated at all for meditation. Due to all, he is uncomfortable and either moving his body up and down or changing feet, arms or posture again and again. Having dreams or thinking about useless things continuously.

5. Doubt (*Vicikicchā*)- Doubt is refer as Confusion, wavering , not knowing the truth, disbelief, suspicion, misguide ,qualm etc. in literature ; but in Vipassanā meditation it is a strong and most dangers impediments that creates difficulties and hard to overcome during the period of achieving Nibbāna. It is also known as not deciding whether it is false or true. It is a thought that create in the mind of the Bhikkhu many kinds of uncertainty and inabilities to practice meditation. Bikkhu has no faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha. He disbelieves in the teachings and the teacher. He is in the position of indecision and uncertainty. He loses his path of meditation and ultimately the path of liberation.

### **How to Investigate and eradicate the Impediments by practising the Vipassanā Sadhanā ?**

It must be observed and recognised first of all that an impediment is present there then distinguish and identify the true nature of it what kind of impediment is there among the five, acknowledge it without any love and affection or hesitation. There after meditate with equanimity, loving kindness with facts and truth. Again un-arisen same kinds of impediment arise, and then continue meditation till the same is eradicated again at all. Same process of equanimity meditation (*Upekkhā Vipassana*) is applied with all kind of impediments and removes all of them one by one from the mind. Practicing for impermanence and keeping in mind that everything is changing and changing every moment. Every *sankkharā* is suffering and all phenomena are (*anātmā*) egoless. The meditator practice for Four Noble Truth, dependent origination, Four immeasurable and Ten perfections. At the end in this process Non – Identification of impediment state comes. No “I” (Ego) or “My” exists thereafter and the Bhikkhu or Vipassanā Meditator is on the path of achieving Nibbāna.

1. Sense Desire: - The sensual desire that represents craving or clinging is removed from the mind by meditating equanimity (*Samatha Bhawnā*) and impermanence. One should know at that the impediment of sense desire is exist and observe constantly without craving the same then know it arise and passing away slowly and gradually. Thereafter know again arise the unarisen one; know it also passing away gradually and steadily without creating any trace of liking. Through *Satipatṭhāna Sutta* meditation and applying *sattipatthan sutta*

teachings and techniques, then acknowledge that the sensual desire is eradicated completely at last and mind become totally calm and peaceful. No iota of sensual desire impediment remains in the mind for good. All kinds of sensual desire hindrances are removed. This path leads towards Arhathood.

2. **Ill-Will:-** To remove ill-will we have to practice (Mettā Bhawanā) loving kindness towards the ill-will arise thereafter compassion. Then know without malice that ill-will arise again unarisen ill-will and accept and acknowledge with patience and watch until it passing away without maligning in it. Again unarisen ill-will arise keep on guarding ill-will sense consistently till we overcome. We meditate Vipassana gradually. In this way one should achieved the path of non returner (Ānāgāmi)

3. **Sloth and Torpor (Thina–Midda):-** As soon as Dullness or drowsiness arise in the body due to over energy or lower energy. One should either wash his face if even then one also feels restlessness than make a walk for a while or again sit down for vipassanā meditation seriously. Even than it does not overcome then take rest for a while. One should take balance diet. At last keep constant watching sensation that the dullness is passing away rightly. Again unarisen came over then observe potentially until it pass away completely.

4. **Anxiety, Worry and Restlessness (Uddhuccā-kukkuccā):-** This impediment is related to mind particularly and it create restlessness due to dreaming, planning for anything else, thinking about your relatives and friends, work, financial position of the family while sitting for vipassana meditation. Mind is not concentrated. Worry for anything which is not available neighbourhood. Feeling uncomfortable all the time. During this kind of meditation one should be single pointedly concentrated and watch the impediment as it passing away patiently. Again unarisen hindrances arise then also watch it till it again passing away. Meditate equanimity till it rooted out from the mind. Some philosophers suppose this kind of restlessness due to physical weakness or over energy because of over eating. But it is just like a monkey who jump from one branch of tree to another. He doesn't sit for a longer period on a branch. Similarly mind also wondering all the time from one object to the other. Mind is wavering all the time. It is very difficult to control it without meditation. One should concentrate over breath when and as such type of situation arises. Try to meditate for a longer period over breath and thereafter over sensations. When one must meditate intensely and consistently, if he has to achieve Arhathood (Nibbāna) or non-returner (Ānāgāmi)

5. **Doubt:-** Doubts are so many kinds such as non- believing ,not able to decide any way, wavering mind, stiffen in nature, indecisiveness, uncertainty, confusion, wandering mind, etc. The only panacea to doubt is to know the truth, the ultimate truth and correct knowledge. One should meditate single point object such as on breath and thereafter on sensations or both simultaneously. If someone is not believe on the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, or technique that eradicate the doubt then how one should meditate and gets wanted results. All are waste therefore have faith and true knowledge of the technique.

## Conclusion

There are many Bhikkhus who work hard day and night for achieving Nibbana but they are unsuccessful as they are distracted into impediments and hindrances. They are attached with any of the hindrances and lost their goal in the middle of the path. They satisfied themselves with their position of life without hurdles.

Similarly the lay man have faced so many impediments accepts all above because they live with social life with their family. They have to manage for the food, clothes, shelters and unexpected calamities such as COVID-19, Floods, Earth quacks, etc.etc. Along with the above mentioned hindrances. The layman has not knowledge how to handle these impediments. So he Suffer throughout the life. But thinks that he enjoying his life with all the hindrances and following the cycle of rebirth.

The Buddha preached the five advantageous and practical methods to examine impediments (Sattipatthana Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 10.36 and Digha Niakaya Mahasatti Patthana Sutta -2),

1. Acknowledge when impediments are exist.
2. Acknowledge when impediments are not exist.
3. Evaluate the situation that originates impediments to occur.
4. Evaluate the situation that originates impediments to abandon.
5. Investigate how to avoid it from arising again in the future.

The most important directives in working with the impediments are to revolve them into your meditational object, It is little matter if impediments are exist or not, but it is significant if you are not conscious of it. If you are unaware of impediments then you have to suffer definitely. Nobody can save you. Buddha never washes your miseries and negativities by his hands and his spiritual realisations are not transfer to anyone. His teachings of the truth of suchness are beings librated.

“Atta Dipa Bhava”

Bhavatu Sabba Mangalam

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