

Chapter 7

Wise View

Discussion points

- Eightfold Noble Path
- Wise view?
- Role of citta in determining the nature of rūpa
- Various kinds of ‘Wanting’

We had a brief discussion on the unwise view in [Chapter 3](#) the attitude of blaming others for our unhappiness. Of course apparently, the unhappiness dose seem to arise because of situations, circumstances, and people. We all put so much effort in changing these; but alas, we are never fully successful! Howsoever powerful, howsoever wealthy I may be, I can never be in full control of any situation, circumstance or person. Consider a common scenario: I change a job since it seems that I am suffering because the work culture of the company is not to my liking; I move to another company where the work culture is better, but the quality of job is not up to my standard, and I suffer. Move again to another company where both the quality of job and the work culture are good, but the pay packet is lesser and I suffer. I can keep on changing jobs ad infinitum, it is very unlikely that I will find that ‘perfect’ job. The same is true of our relationships. One can never find the ‘perfect’ partner, who always stays perfect. It needs a Buddha to ‘see’ that all the attempts to eradicate unhappiness by adjusting the external conditions is like chasing a mirage. Even if I have ‘everything’ – partner, job, health, wealth, relations, reputation- perfect at a time, sooner or later something or other will become imperfect. The relations with the partner get strained or the job loses its ‘zing’ or health falls down or the reputation goes for a toss. Change is inevitable, a fundamental characteristic law of the universe. Situations change, circumstances change, our perception changes, people change! The understanding that the cause of my suffering lies outside is the unwise view that the Buddha advises us to give up. He reveals that the real cause of unhappiness is not external to us but deep within, viz. the insatiable ‘thirst’ of wanting, the [tanhā](#), as we discussed in brief in Chapter 3 . Recognizing this Truth is a crucial

aspect of the wise view which reveals that elimination of this ‘wanting’ is the key to ending the unhappiness. The Buddha terms this as the **third Noble Truth**⁴⁴:

And this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of unhappiness: the remainder-less fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving (taṇhā).⁹

And how to give up this taṇhā? The Buddha suggested a calibrated path to do so⁹:

*"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of (unhappiness) suffering: precisely this **Noble Eightfold Path** — wise view, wise resolve, wise speech, wise action, wise livelihood, wise striving, wise mindfulness, wise concentration.*

This he terms as the **fourth Noble Truth**.

One who understands all these four noble Truths is said to have a **wise view** for their assimilation will surely lead to complete cessation of unhappiness.

Let us try to understand this in detail on the basis of the exposition given in the famous discourse: Mahā-satipaṭṭhāna-sutta⁴⁵.

The Buddha describes the ‘wise view’, *sammādiṭṭhi*, (This Pāli word is also translated as ‘right view’) as:

Insight-knowledge of dukkha, Insight-knowledge of the origin of dukkha, Insight-knowledge of the cessation of dukkha, Insight-knowledge of the path leading to the cessation of dukkha.

This clearly points out that wise view (or wisdom) would emerge from a comprehensive understanding of the Four Noble Truths; the fact of unhappiness often encountered in the human realm, the cause of unhappiness, the possibility of its cessation and the way to do so. This understanding is not just a cerebral understanding, but a comprehensive experiential understanding, powerful enough to alter our world view, so that we can distinguish between the appearances and the reality.

In the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta the Buddha points out how he himself used these Truths to attain enlightenment. Associated with each Truth there are three aspects, viz. knowledge of Truth: *saccañāṇa*; knowledge of the task to be accomplished

⁴⁴ The first two noble Truths have been discussed in Chapter 3.

⁴⁵ DN22 : Mahā-satipaṭṭhāna-sutta

regarding each Truth: *kiccañāṇa* ; knowledge of accomplishment of that task: *katañāṇa*. He identified all the three dimensions for each of these Truths, as enunciated below:

Truth	Knowledge of Truth	Knowledge of the task to be accomplished regarding the Truth	Knowledge of accomplishment of that task
First	Truth of unhappiness	To be understood	Has been understood
Second	Truth of origin of unhappiness	To be abandoned	Has been abandoned
Third	Truth of cessation of unhappiness	To be realized	Has been realized
Fourth	Truth of the way leading to cessation of unhappiness	To be developed	Has been developed

Thus comprehensive ‘knowledge’ of the four noble truths involves this three-fold assimilation of each of them. The way to do it, as indicated briefly in the exposition is ‘*yathābhūtaṃ nāṇadassanaṃ*’, observation of phenomena as these actually happen, with wisdom. Let us understand what it implies for each of the truths.

Thus to “understand” the first noble truth, one should first understand the statement of the First Noble Truth intellectually. Anyone with a discerning intellect can easily understand that the experience of unhappiness is a reality of human realm, and realize the veracity of the full statement, discussed in detail in [chapter 3](#). The second dimension involves direct experiential understanding of the truth by actually letting the unhappiness, whenever it is experienced, permeate into one’s being and observe what it does to the body-mind complex, what it feels like to suffer. This is what is meant by ‘*yathābhūtaṃ nāṇadassanaṃ*.’ It is the non-judgmental acceptance of this ‘actual experience’ that creates an inner repugnance towards the sordid state of mind which is responsible for unceasing unhappiness through repeated births in human (and possibly other) realms. One comes to naturally realize what the true cause of unhappiness is – viz. the attachment to the body-mind complex which gives rise to cravings and aversions of various kinds; and gradually the motivation to work for abdication of this attachment is strengthened. The third dimension - ‘The noble truth of unhappiness has been understood’- is essentially a culmination of ardent practice of the second insight, and can be said to have been fully cultivated when the ‘understanding’ has actually permeated into daily life. The touchstone for this is: one is able to ‘see’ the vicissitudes of life as a validation of the first noble truth, in the true spirit of ‘*yathābhūtaṃ nāṇadassanaṃ*’. So, whether it be the arising of unpleasant experiences like falling ill, getting hurt physically or mentally, failing to achieve ‘success’, or the fading away of pleasant experiences like meeting a dear one after a long time, getting

respect, achieving success, getting cured of an illness, etc.; if all these experiences remind one of the first noble truth, rather than making one morose, one can feel confident: 'the first noble truth has been understood'.

In a similar vein, the first insight of the second noble truth arises from the intellectual understanding that *taṇhā* or 'wanting' – wanting sense pleasures of various kinds; wanting to achieve great name and fame, power, wealth, authority, or even great purity of mind; or 'wanting' not to become poor, ill, or even wanting not to be reborn etc. – is the real cause of unhappiness. It naturally gives rise to the second insight – the *taṇhā* should be abandoned. The third insight arises when during the experience of unhappiness, this cause is actually abandoned. This again points to the need for practice—whenever *taṇhā* arises and unhappiness is experienced, one becomes cognizant of the arising of *taṇhā*, and knowing its impermanent nature, abandons it. Abandoning implies, giving up something that we hold on to- it doesn't mean pushing it away or destroying it. Let us understand it through a few rather simple examples.

I am walking inside a shopping mall – casually observing the goods displayed attractively. I see a shirt, like it very much and get excited about the prospect of buying it. I become aware of the arising of the desire, and just observe it with a mental note 'a desire has arisen' and soon the desire loses its grip on me. I neither make a big issue of the fact that a desire has arisen, nor take it personally. The desire has been 'abandoned'. I can then calmly analyze, whether I really need an additional shirt, and take appropriate decision. Suppose, I decide to buy it, since I do feel it would help to have one more shirt. I go inside the shop, and find it exorbitantly costly, way beyond my budget. My response to this new situation would depend upon the intensity of the 'desire'. If the desire is not grasped, I can just walk out of the shop, without any bad feelings. If the desire is grasped, inability to buy the shirt would cause quite a bit of negativity and unhappiness.

Or take another example. A heated discussion is going on at the workplace. During the discussion one of the participants, makes a stinging remark apparently questioning the motive behind an important decision taken by me. I observe the arising of disgust and anger⁴⁶ and finding it too strong, just excuse myself and go out of the meeting room⁴⁷ remaining mindful of the effect that anger has on my body – increased heartbeat, unpleasant 'burning' sensations on the face⁴⁸ etc. Within two or three minutes,

⁴⁶ The cause of unhappiness

⁴⁷ Or even remain in the meeting room, but close my eyes for a few minutes to direct my attention to what is happening 'inside me'

⁴⁸ The experience of first noble Truth

while I remain aware⁴⁹ of the strong aversion, these sensations abate and so do the emotions, and I walk back into the cauldron with a more equanimous mind ready to take the comments more objectively and contribute to bringing down the temperature of the meeting. The third insight has shown its effect.

Keeping in view the fact that for all these Truths the Buddha advises the approach of '*yathābhūtaṃ nāṇadassanaṃ*', the importance of wise (right) mindfulness, *sammā sati*,⁵⁰ becomes obvious. The abandonment of *taṇhā* as well as the experience of the cessation of unhappiness, all become possible under the penetrating gaze of bare attention, i.e. right mindfulness.

Thus the insight knowledge of the dukkha (or unhappiness) would not emerge from a mere intellectual understanding and analysis of the statement of the first noble truth but would need, in addition, allowing the truth of unhappiness, when being actually experienced, to sink into the psyche. Mindful observation of the same allows one to discover the *taṇhā* responsible for this unhappiness, and its subsequent abandonment. With repeated practice the third insight gains strength and it becomes self-evident that the path to the cessation of unhappiness includes a practice of ethical self-restraint and increasing the concentration of the mind. The repeated practice of 'understanding' the experience of unhappiness in daily life reveals that violation of any ethical precept, viz. abstaining from violence, stealing, telling lies, sexual misconduct and intoxication, or indulging in occupations harmful to the society, is sure to bring unhappiness. If we tell lie, or take something that does not rightfully belong to us, or indulge in sexual misconduct, we suffer immediately at the time of doing the misdeed, (could be due to anger, fear, worry etc.) and others suffer later. The practice of '*yathābhūtaṃ nāṇadassanaṃ*' thus reveals to us various constituents of the path for cessation of unhappiness, - the Insight of the fourth noble Truth.

We can understand it through a simple example.

A young boy is asked by his father: I have learnt that you have started smoking? Is it true? Flabbergasted, to save his skin, he hurriedly replies 'No' and then adds 'Who told you so?' The father just says, 'Good! Please don't do it; it will harm your health', and walks away. As soon as the father is out of sight, the boy quickly scans his backpack, and the jeans for any marks created due to the cigarettes that he has been smoking over last few weeks. He is worried lest his lie should be revealed by these marks. Instant unhappiness! And then a chain of thoughts starts: 'Who could have informed Papa? It must be that holy cow Ganesh. His father

⁴⁹ '*yathābhūtaṃ nāṇadassanaṃ*'

⁵⁰ Discussed in chapter 10

is a friend of Papa. I will settle it with this nerd tomorrow itself. What does he think of himself? Lord Ganesh?' Continued unhappiness... as he is constantly worried now lest his lie should be revealed. And after a month the Truth is out and he has to face 'humiliation' before his wailing mother and angry father. The fruit of that lie has ripened.

Replace 'telling lie' by any other dimension of violation of the ethical precepts, violence, stealing, sexual misconduct, intoxication, and one can easily visualize that at the very moment of committing that unwholesome act, the mind is defiled and we suffer. Eventually the 'fruit' of these actions will also manifest in myriad unpredictable ways: as punishment by law enforcing agencies, revenge from the aggrieved party, humiliation, deterioration in physical and mental health etc.

As we sow, so shall we reap is the Law of nature applicable not just in agriculture but in everyday life. If we act with an impure mind we suffer, and if we act with a pure mind we become happy! In the Dhammapada⁵¹ we find two apposite similes:

Mental natures are the result of what we have thought, are chieftained by our thoughts, are made up of our thoughts;

If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, sorrow follows him (as a consequence) even as the wheel follows the foot of the drawer (i.e. the ox which draws the cart).

Mental natures are the result of what we have thought, are chieftained by our thoughts, are made up of our thoughts;

If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him (as a consequence) like a shadow that never leaves him.

This is often termed as the Law of Karma (kamma in Pāli). Understanding and internalizing it after due reflection is also a part of right view. Simply put, it implies all that we experience in our life today, is a result of our past karma, and how we respond to it now would determine our future. The Buddha puts it very forcefully:

"I am the owner of my kamma, the heir of my kamma; I have kamma as my origin, kamma as my relative, kamma as my resort; I will be the heir of whatever kamma, good or bad, I do"⁵²

In fact he advises all his followers to reflect on this Truth often, along with four other Truths: of aging, illness, eventual death, and impermanence of all sensory pleasures. Such repeated reflection reduces the grip of materialistic world view - the tendency to view life as a pleasure seeking trip, and creates the sense of urgency and inner aspiration to follow the path to liberation from all

⁵¹ Dhammapada, verses 1 and 2. Radhakrishnan Translation, Oxford University Press, Delhi.

⁵² Anguttara Nikaya, 5.57, Upajjhātthāna Sutta

unhappiness. Reflection on the Law of karma gives a great hope – we are not at the mercy of any capricious god, but can change our destiny by good deeds. It is not a fatalistic doctrine. Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in today are the result of past karma, and our response to these circumstances will be our present karma which will make or mar our future.

The investigation of the experience of dukkha also reveals that a wayward mind, constantly in the grip of digressive thoughts is a sure ground for mindless unwholesome actions which invite unhappiness – another constituents of the Insight of the fourth noble Truth. We shall discuss its various facets in the following chapters.

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