

A Philosophical Study of the Concept of Concentration in Theravāda Buddhism

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Abstract

The aim of this research paper is to explain that "concentration is an actual power for human beings to live tranquilly and to avoid from danger in life". In fact, concentration is necessary both in *dharmā* affairs and in worldly conditions and affairs. The research question is "Why is concentration an important concept that controls one's life to lead a good living?" The researcher argues that one can overcome daily problems if he concentrates and he can also solve difficult problems more easily by means of concentration. Therefore people use to say 'concentration is like a dyke' and 'wisdom is like a breastwork'. Descriptive and Evaluative methods are used to solve this research question. In the affairs of economy, society, health, education, religion, and so on, without concentration, people will be in trouble. In other words, many people suffering with trouble is the lack of concentration in mind. When one is concentrated to mind-body processes, one's mind becomes to refrain from all evils deeds-greed, hatred and delusion. Indeed, concentration leads to become greater and stronger *sati*. That is why, concentration is an important concept to live tranquilly in human life and it can apply for oneself to get rid of any danger to both physical and mental phenomena.

Keywords: Attention, Concentration, Ontological problem

Introduction

Everyone has to know and realize his goal. It is true that goal is a roadmap for achieving success. Man needs to concentrate so he can avoid forgetfulness. Concentration is the standard of human's life. Concentration is a proper condition to the life of a rational being for goodness. Human beings are able to fulfill mental needs and lead a good life by means of concentration. In fact, concentration is the practice of purposely focusing one's attention on the present movement. The cultivation of concentration has roots in Theravāda Buddhism, but most religions include some types of meditation technique that helps shift one's thought away from one's usual preoccupations towards an appreciation of the moment.

Many people generally prefer to practise good deeds because it gives the peace of one's mind and also supports success in his work. Wise men practised a deed that bearing in mind of consideration properly. When one's mind imagines either good or evil deeds of action, he may act one of them. To become a good society, every man is to build up a concentration of good mind. So, each man will nurture a good mind for the sake of his benefit as well as others.

In a daily life, if the mind of a man is good to do with three *kammās-kaya* (body), *vaci* (razor), and *manau* (mind) - he will be straightforward. On the contrary, if the mind of a man is bad, his action is wrong. It is very important for a man to know himself, and to live and practise to be in goodness of him.

According to the Buddha's teaching, concentration is a spiritual or psychological faculty that is considered to be a great importance of all human beings. Concentration is an attentive awareness of the present moment. Besides,

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concentration can overcome to delusion of each man. As concentration denotes a dyke and wisdom is a breastwork (သတိတံ၊ ဥာဏ်မြေကတုတ်), it can help a man to overcome daily problems easily. In a nutshell, concentration can become greater and stronger *sati*. This is why concentration is necessary in *Dhamma* affairs as well as in worldly conditions and affairs.

Aim

The aim of this paper is to explain that "Concentration is an actual power for human beings to live tranquilly and to refrain from danger in life". Concentration can help solve daily problems. One starts to practise by concentration on simple objects; later on the ability to concentrate can be applied to any object. One keeps concentration in his mind to live happily in the present moment. Here, the human mind should be controlled towards creating a just, equitable and peaceful society in accordance with concentration. If a person does not exercise his mind to think rationally and humanely, he will not worthy of belonging to the humankind. So, concentration is an important concept for human beings and it partially reduces to concern in everything.

Research Methods

In this research paper, descriptive and evaluative methods are used to solve the question. Descriptive method will be used to state the concentration as recollecting, calling back to mind, remembering, bearing in mind. Concentration is not merely memory, but a lucid retention of both the past and the present. Evaluative method is used to analyze that concentration plays an important role in Theravāda Buddhism and every body should know the essence of it and applies it to live tranquility in life.

Research Question

"Why concentration is an important concept that controls one's life to lead a good living?"

Literature Review

1.1 What is Mind?

Mind, generally, is the part of a person that makes him able to be aware of things, to think and to feel. Moreover, mind has the ability to think and reason or intelligence. If the mind is free from the defilements then it becomes a pure mind and this wholesome quality is very peaceful and harmonious.

In "*The Manuals of Buddhism*", Ledi Sayādaw (1846-1923) expounds mind as follows:

"Mind (*Citta*) means both consciousness and cognition and also manifolds and variegated. Therefore, thought or *Citta* should be understood in the widest sense as "conscious of", "being aware of".¹

"All *dhammas* were product of concentration", said Buddha. It is true that mind is concerned with 'knowing'. Intention, consideration and concentration are the active states of mind.

¹Mahāthera Ledi Sayadaw. (1965) "*The Manual of Buddhism*" Yangon: Union Buddha *Sāsana* council, p. 187

Mind is here used as a collective term for the *cittas*, or moments of consciousness. *Citta* being identical with consciousness should not be translated as 'thought'.

Mind is like pure, clean water which can be mixed with anything. When it is mixed with mud, it becomes defiled. Mind is by nature clean, but it can become dirty and poisonous by ill use.

In "*The Pāli Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary*", *sati* is expressed as follows:

Sati: memory, recognition, consciousness.¹

The *Pāli* word '*sati*' known as in English is memory, recognition or consciousness, the active and watchful mind. *Sati* is manifested as guardianship, or as the state of confronting an objective field. It is one of the spiritual faculties and powers.

Concerning with the nature of mind, Ashin Janakābhivamsa (1900-1977) stated the mind in his work, "*Abhidhamma in Daily Life*", as follows;

"Mind can travel afar, it wonders alone it has no material form
and it generally dwells in the cave"²

The mind does not move physically away like a man walking but the mind can take in an object at a distance far away. So it can be said that the mind can perceive an object at a distance and can travel afar.

1.2 The Meaning of Concentration

In fact, concentration is the ability to think carefully about something. Concentration is an attentive awareness of the present moment.

Concentration means the narrowing of the field of your attention, or focusing your thoughts.³

If one does not concentrate his thoughts they are scattered and diffuses. One is thinking all the time whenever one is awake; whatever one is doing, this thought is floating, spreading and diffusing. One now intently concentrates on this object until he becomes so wholly absorbed in it that all adventitious thoughts get ipso facto excluded from the mind. Thus, the ability to the mind on one point is called concentration.

The concept of Concentration is both theoretical and practical contexts. As the practising of concentration is watching the object, one must remember to maintain attention on the object, and return back to refocus on that object whenever the mind wanders away from it. In fact, concentration is moment to moment awareness of present events.

¹T.V. David Rhys & William Stede. (1966) "*The Pāli Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary*" London: Luzac & Company Ltd, p. 672

²Ashin Janakābhivamsa. (1999) "*Abhidhamma in Daily Life*" Trans: U Ko Lay, Amarapura: New Burma Press, printer registration, Mahagandayone monastery, p. 3

³U Han Htay (Edited). (1997) "*Buddhism*", **Handbook**. Yangon: Tetlan Sarpay, p. 92

1.3 The Concentration May Lead to a Good Living

In fact, concentration is a central feature of a contemplative life. Concentration brings with a natural joy that arises as the mind settles. For example a teacher may love teaching, not because the classroom is a pleasant place to be, but because the task demands such complete attention, the mind is filled to associate with concentration.

The culture of concentration falls into two categories, tranquility meditation (*Samatha bhāvanā*) and insight meditation (*Vipassanā bhāvana*).¹

There are two kinds of *Bhāvanās* (meditation), namely, *Samatha* (concentration) and *Vipassanā* (insight). *Samatha* means calm; tranquility; and concentration. *Vipassanā* refers to insight that is seeing things as what they truly are.

Samatha, derived from sam, to lull, to subdue, denotes 'tranquility' or 'quietude', gained by subduing the Hindrances. It is synonymous with concentration (*samādhi*) which leads to the development of *jhānas*. By concentration passions are only temporarily inhibited.²

Samatha is tranquility, serenity and it is a synonym of *Samadhi* (concentration). It is one of the mental factors in wholesome consciousness. In the Buddhist scriptures, *samadhi* is the term that is most often translated into English as concentration. It refers to a calm, unification within the mind that occurs when the mind is profoundly undistracted.

Vipassanā derived from vi+ dis, to see, literally, means perceiving in diverse ways that is in the light of transiency, sorrowfulness, and soullessness. It is rendered by 'insight', 'contemplation', 'intuition'.³

Vipassanā is frequently found in the Buddhist *Sutra* Texts; also together with *Samatha*. *Vipassanā* is the intuitive light flashing forth and exposing the truth of the impermanency and mental phenomena exercise. Meditation practice can be accomplished adopting various postures such as sitting, standing, walking, lying, eating, breathing, etc. Nevertheless, the most common postures are sitting and walking. People usually start with sitting and then alternate to it with walking. It can be practised by various postures at anytime and anywhere.

Samadhi describes more than the narrow focus implied by the English term concentration. *Samadhi* is the beautiful state of an undistracted mind, and described as 'internally steadied, composed, unified and concentrated.

Findings

In Western philosophy, ontology is concerned with questions about the nature of reality. Besides, philosophy is a critical analysis of the concept. The

¹U Pandita. (1997) "*The Way to the Happiness of Peace*". Penang: Inward Path Publisher. p. 2

²Nārada Mahā Thera. (1956) "*A Manual of Abhidhamma*". Kuala Lumpur: The Buddhist Missionary Society. p. 394

³Ibid.

Myanmar term for philosophy is *darsana* which means "vision of truth". According to both East and West, philosophy is a quest of wisdom in order to lead a good life. Rene Descartes (1596-1650) was the French thinker. In "*The Dictionary of Philosophy*", Descartes said "Cogito ergo sum", "I think, therefore I am". It is the famous aphorism and also it is one of the important concepts in Western sense. He asserted that if there is thinking, then there must be thinker. In this way, he reached a self-evident principle to the test of truth.

In Eastern view, concentration is essential in Theravāda Buddhism, especially, Eight-fold Noble Path. Concentration is *samatha* in Buddhism as well as it is a mental process in Western philosophy. In the teaching of the Buddha, concentration is important to mental development of human beings. Similarly, concentration can inevitably fulfill one's mental development and can help and protect the interests of oneself and others. So, concentration is a mental training for reducing suffering and developing a healthy mind, such as self-awareness, self-regulation.

To keep the body physically healthy, one goes to gym for an exercise, which is to make the body stable and physically strong. In the same way, to have a stable and strong mind, one may practise concentration, which is mental exercise. Generally, concentration in Buddhism is a mental training. An uncontrolled mind is dominated by the unwholesome thoughts of selfishness, greed and attachment to worldly fame, gains and possessions. If these tendencies are not checked, the mind will turn into defilement.

Concentration is the indispensable basis of right living and right thinking at anytime, everywhere for everyone. Concentration is not only moment-to-moment awareness of present events but also remembering to be aware of something in the past. Indeed, concentration can reduce negative emotions such as anxiety, worry, frustration, and fear, as well as it can promote to enjoy life. It can be metaphorically said that if one bears with concentration in mind, he will see clearly a mist, but if he does not concentrate, he cannot see a cave (သတိမဂ္ဂုမမြင်၊ သတိမဂ္ဂုမမြင်). Therefore, it can be said that a man with concentration can get rid of any danger both physically and mentally. In fact, concentration is very valuable in reducing the body's response to stress and also it is able to perform the purification of mind. By living with concentration, most people are mindful in everything and their mind is caught in their worries, their fears, their angers and their regrets.

Discussion

Nowadays, People in the world are mostly interested in the practise of Yoga. Here, Yoga, Hindu discipline, aimed at training the consciousness for a state of perfect spiritual insight and trainquility. In fact, Yoga practice can promote to bear concentration in mind. Just as Yoga practice can become humanity a path of peace and co-existence in times of conflict, concentration engenders a man's insight knowledge to see the characteristics of conditioned phenomena. Such man can build a tranquil, peaceful and harmless society only by practising concentration.

Many scholars wrote treatises on the Buddhist teaching of concentration that leads to guide a worthy living of life. There are many scholars; either laymen or monks. This research paper is based on the works of eminent monks in Myanmar, especially, Ledi Sayadaw, Ashin Janakābhivamsa, Ashin Nārada.

Many people actually pray for peace, but there can be no peace in the world until the conflicts within among people get resolved. There is an urgent need to train the mind can be accomplished towards creating a just, equitable and peaceful world. If a man does not use his mind to think rationally and humanely, then he will not worthy of belonging to the mankind.

Nevertheless, whatever one neglects the practice of concentration, he misses the right path. And also whatsoever one practices concentration he indubitably founds the right path. For both '*loki*' and '*lokuttara*' interest, the practise of concentration can become to feel comfortable body and mind as well. Concentration is the only way for the purification of mind and for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation. It can be said that *samatha* helps *vipassanā* to a great extent and *vipassanā* helps *samatha* to a great extent in vice-versa.

Conclusion

Nowadays, everywhere in the world, there are actually wars, violence, and bloodshed. So, the existence of mankind is characterized by constant struggle: protesting against to nuclear war-head, asking for equality and justice, demanding the human right and freedom, condemning rape and abuse on children and women, and objecting against to some life style and sexuality which influence the society.

Many people try to keep up their external appearances but they neglect their internal development. They work hard for their wealth, power and position. It is possible that humans are born into this world to do some good, not to pass the days in idleness and become a burden to society. Thus, concentration will contribute to live happily and peacefully in his life as well as in his society.

It is noted that the essence of the Buddha's teaching is the purification of the mind. A conscious person can understand the mind-body concentration to attain the good life. One can overcome daily problems and difficult problems easily by the practice of concentration. Without concentration, people will be troubled in the affairs of economy, society, health, education, and religion. In other words, many people suffering with trouble is the lack of concentration in mind. When one is concentrated to mind-body processes, one's mind refrains from all evils deeds- greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*). Therefore, concentration is an important concept to live in tranquility in the human life and control one's life to lead a good living.

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