

YATHĀBHŪTAÑĀÑADASSANAM: A STUDY OF KNOWLEDGE & VISION OF THINGS AS THEY ARE

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Abstract

Based on the basic teachings of Buddhism in the Sutta Pitaka, this article is written to clarify the meaning of Yathābhūtañāñadassana (seeing things as they are) in the Theravada Buddhist tradition. Through research, the writer wishes the reader to gradually become aware of the real nature of the world as ever-changing, unstable, and ephemeral. Moreover, by understanding the true nature of all things, each person knows how to live peacefully in the present moment as well as has one's capacity to face the disadvantages of daily life with a peaceful mind.

Keywords: *Yathābhūtañāñadassana, seeing things as they are, real nature of all things*

INTRODUCTION

When learning about Buddhism, we often hear a lot about the phrase "seeing things as they are" (*Yathābhūtañānadassana*). So how should we understand this concept? Usually, suppose we don't study the scriptures. In that case, it's easy for us to misunderstand this concept, with simple understandings like seeing as accurate is seeing things as they appear before our eyes, or simply seeing things without judging or evaluating them, a mere seeing. But when we study the sutras well than that, the Buddha taught about this concept in many suttas. And in different suttas, this concept will be understood differently. Here the writer will refer to some important discourses in *Sutta Pitaka* that explain the concept of "seeing as real." Thereby helping readers have a different view of this unique concept.

Contents

The *pāli* word "*Yathābhūtañānadassana*" is translated as "knowledge and vision of things as they actually are" in this: "*yatha*" means "as or like," "*bhūta*" means "true", "*ñāna*" means "knowledge" and "*dassanam*" means "vision". So we come to consider the meaning of seeing things as they really are.

The *pāli* word "*Yathābhūtañānadassanam*" is also translated as "seeing things as they really are". Starting from the word "*Dassana*", seeing with two meanings, seeing with the naked eye and seeing with the eye of wisdom. In this case, we don't talk about seeing with the physical eyes, but seeing or penetrating with the eyes of wisdom, in order to see the true nature of things. According to *Kimattha sutta*, the basis of seeing by wisdom is the concentration (*sammādhi*). Only by concentration, one can see things as they really are. So the word "seeing" here means observing, visualizing discerning from wisdom. It also means "insight".

According to *Kimattha sutta*, the Buddha taught:

"Iti kho ānanda kusalāni sīlāni avippaṭisāratthāni, avippaṭisārānisamsāni. Avippaṭisāro pāmojjattho pāmojjānisamso. Pāmojjam pītatham pītānisamsam. Pīti passaddhatthā passaddhānisamsā. Passaddhi sukhathā sukhānisamsā. Sukham samādhattham samādhānisamsam. Samādhi yathābhūtañānadassanatho yathābhūtañānadassanānisamso. Yathābhūtañānadassanā nibbindatham nibbidānisamsam, nibbidā virāgatthā virāgānisamsā, virāgo vimuttiñānadassanattho vimuttiñānadassanānisamso. Iti kho ānanda kusalāni sīlāni anupubbena aggāya parentīti."¹

This sutta was translated as follows:

"Thus in this way, Ananda, skillful virtues have free from remorse as their purpose, freedom from remorse as their reward. Freedom from remorse has joy as its purpose, and joy as its reward. Joy has rapture as its purpose, and rapture as its reward. Rapture has serenity as its purpose, and serenity as its reward. Serenity has pleasure as its purpose, and pleasure as its reward. Serenity has pleasure as its purpose, and pleasure as its reward. Pleasure has concentration as its purpose, and concentration as its reward. Concentration has knowledge and vision of things as they actually are as their purpose, and knowledge and vision of things as they actually are as their reward. Knowledge and vision of things as they really are disenchantment as their purpose and disenchantment as its reward. Disenchantment has dispassion as its purpose and dispassion as its reward. Dispassion has knowledge and vision of release as its purpose, knowledge, and vision release as its reward."²

So seeing things as they really are in this *sutta* means the practitioner sees the truth that *sīla* is the foundation of practicing meditation and attaining concentration. And based on concentration, one develops wisdom and gets liberation. Here *sīla* is the basic which keeps the practitioner from evil things. Based on that, one will have no remorse while practicing meditation. From here, one can attain joy, tranquility, and happiness, which are the foundation for the arising of concentration. The knowledge and vision of things will emerge from concentration which leads to disenchantment and dispassion. This is the way one can attain liberation.

In *Upanisa Sutta* - The discourse on supporting conditions, the Buddha also taught:

"Iti kho bhikkhave, avijjūpanisā sañkhārā. Sañkhārūpanisam viññānam. Viññānūpanisam nāmarūpam. Nāmarūpūpanisam salāyatanaṁ. Salāyatanaṁ phasso. Passūpanisā vedanā. Vedanūpanisā taṇhā. Taṇhūpanisam upādānam. Upādānūpaniso bhavo. Bhavūpanisā jāti. Jātūpanisam dukkham. Dukkhūpanisā saddhā. Saddhūpanisam pāmujjam. Pāmujjūpanisā pīti. Pītūpanisā passaddhi. Passaddhūpanisam sukham. Sukhūpanisso samādhi. Samādhūpanisam yathābhūtañānadassanam. Yathābhūtañānadassanūpanisā nibbidā. Nibbidūpaniso virāgo. Virāgūpanisā vimutti. Vimuttupanisam khayeñānam."³

This *sutta* was translated as follows:

"Thus, bhikkhu, with ignorance as proximate cause, volitional formations come to be; with volitional formation as proximate cause, consciousness; with consciousness as proximate cause, name-and-form; with name-and-form as proximate cause, the six sense bases; with the six sense bases as proximate cause, contact; with contact as proximate

¹ Pāli Text of AN 11.1, SuttaCentral, "Kimattha sutta", accessed January 27, 2023, <https://suttacentral.net/an11.1/pli/ms>.

² Kimattha Sutta: What is the Purpose, translated by Tranissaro Bhikkhu, 1997

³ Pāli Text of SN 12.23, SuttaCentral, "Upanisa sutta", accessed January 27, 2023, <https://suttacentral.net/sn12.23/pli/ms>.

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cause, feeling; with feeling as proximate cause, craving; with craving as proximate cause, birth, with birth as proximate cause, suffering; with suffering as proximate cause, faith, with faith as the proximate cause, gladness, with gladness as proximate cause, rapture; with rapture as proximate cause, tranquility; with tranquility as proximate cause, happiness; with happiness as proximate cause, concentration; with concentration as proximate cause, the knowledge and vision of things as they really are; with the knowledge and vision of things as they really are as proximate cause, revulsion; with revulsion as proximate cause, dispassion; with dispassion as proximate cause, liberation; with liberation as proximate cause, the knowledge of destruction.”⁴

Here, seeing things as they are, means realizing the twelve links of dependence origination as the root of suffering. Ignorance is the reason for *Kamma* formation, *Kamma* formation is the cause of consciousness... birth is the cause of suffering. From that, the practitioner raises faith in the *dhamma* and practices meditation to attain concentration, wisdom, and liberation.

This is the meaning of seeing things as they really are according to the Buddha's teaching in some *suttas*. So how do we apply this teaching in our daily life and its benefits?

With *Kimattha sutta*, we know that the way to liberation starts from *sīla*; without *sīla*, we cannot practice meditation and cannot attain concentration and wisdom. Without wisdom, we cannot attain liberation. So in order to get the result in practicing meditation, we must keep *sīla* first. For example, when we do an evil thing, sometimes we can forget our evil action which we had done. But when we start to practice meditation, our mind will start to remember all things we have done because, in meditation time, only the consciousness works. Because of unwholesome *Kamma*, remorse will arise again and again in our minds. We regret what we had done, and the thought of why we do that, how to suffer the other must get because of us, and so on arise in our mind. Because of that, we cannot attain the state of joy and happiness in practicing meditation as well as wisdom and liberation. So we must keep *sīla* carefully by always keeping mindfulness in our daily life. Before doing something, we should consider that this thing can bring benefit for us, and others and for both. If our action brings benefit for us, for others, and for both, we should do it. By contrast, if it brings harm to others, harm to ourselves, and harm to both, we should not do it. Moreover, keeping *sīla* is the first step, but we also should spend our time practicing meditation, so we can attain concentration, wisdom, and liberation. So seeing clearly that the way to liberation starts from keeping *sīla*, we try to live carefully, avoiding unwholesome *Kamma* and practicing meditation to attain liberation.

Upanisa Sutta taught that seeing things as they really are means seeing the twelve links of dependent origination lead to suffering, from which the practitioner raises faith in practicing meditation in order to attain happiness, concentration, wisdom, and liberation. In our daily life, we see that our life is a circle from birth to death. We must suffer a lot; we must suffer by the pain when we were born, we must suffer when we are ill, and we must suffer as we older.... In each life we live, we must suffer in the same way. So if we want to stop suffering, we must cut the round of rebirth by practicing meditation. From here, we can attain concentration and wisdom, and liberation.

Conclusion

To sum up, seeing things as they really are according to the Buddha's teachings has many ways of explaining. It means seeing the way of practicing beginning with *sīla* as the foundation and then is *sammādhi* and *pañña* in *Kimattha sutta*. Or it means seeing that the twelve links of dependent origination are the cause leading to suffering, and by way of practicing meditation, one can attain wisdom and liberation. That is what *Upanisa Sutta* said. By applying these teaching in daily life, we will reduce suffering in the present life, and it becomes the cause for our liberation in the future.

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