



THE CONCEPT OF NEKKHAMMASUKHA IN THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

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ABSTRACT:-

The whole world is burning with lust, anger, greed which ignites the fire of passions. The more they want, the more they suffering. The Buddha compared sensual pleasures with piece of meat, a fruit of tree, a grass torch, a charcoal pit, etc.. The way to happiness is not only to achieve individual satisfaction in this very life but also to attain the good way for hereafter. The Buddha also instructed to the monks for removal of desire and lust, the abandonment of desire and lust for sensual pleasures by renunciation (Nekkhamma). Nekkhamma means renunciation, giving up home, to live a life of ascetic, renouncing attachment to sensual pleasure, renouncing thought of sensual pleasure. Nekkhamma practice, before Buddha's time, meant a retreat in the forest. At the time of the Buddha however the practice was quite different. Instead of a retreat in the forest, escape from sensual pleasures became the mark of renunciation. This practice can be done by making a retreat in the forest alone or at a vihara with others. The main object is to escape from the sensual pleasures. This thesis highlights the concept of Nekkhamma practice. This was practiced not only in Buddha's time but the disciples of the Buddha, monks and nuns as well as lay men and women still practice in these days.



KEYWORDS: Nekkhamma, Sukha, Kāmasukha, Nekkhammasukha, Upasamasukha.

INTRODUCTION :

Most people are always looking for happiness. They try their best in order to gain wealth, fame, long life, etc. which they think will bring happiness. The nature of happiness prized and longed by many people in the world can be observed in the words of the Gotamī when prince Siddhattha was returning to the palace from a park. She uttered thus: "Happy indeed is the mother who has such a son, happy indeed is the father who has such a son, happy indeed is the woman who has such a one as her husband." To have a satisfying family is considered to be the most important source of happiness.

The happiness one finds through family, wealth and other worldly things are temporary. They do not understand that all things are impermanent, suffering and non-self. Even a person like a king cannot escape from physical and mental sufferings though he may possess great wealth to enjoy sensual pleasures. Sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, much despair, and danger. It can bring happiness just for a short time, because such types of *sukha* will be followed *dukkha*, when *sukha* disappear at that time *dukkha* will appear. If one feels happy this is *sukha-vedana*, and if one feels unhappy this is *dukkha-vedanā*. If one feels neither happy nor unhappy then this is *upekkh-vedana*.

From one perspective all feelings are also dukkha. Whatever arises will pass away and anything that has such a nature is dukkha. Only *Nibbāna* is real *sukha*, because it is free from arising and passing away.

According to the Buddha's teaching, the happiness born of luxury, position, wealth, power is not real happiness, because they can also give suffering: "All that is subject to arising is subject to passing away." In so many discourses the Buddha showed ways to get happiness. The happiness of renunciation (*Nekkhammasukha*) can bring more stable happiness. Why Buddhists visit the monasteries (*vihāras*)? They go or visit there to escape from restraints and restrictions or to seek or explore peace of mind. At the *vihāras* they keep *sīla* and make efforts to explore themselves, i.e., then they can realize the true nature of three characteristics *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*, bringing them to live in real happiness, *Nibbāna*.

According to Buddhism, the true wisdom (*paññā*) is very important. Those who understand *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta* can work for welfare of himself as well as for his community. This *Nekkhamma* practice finally is able to help one to attain *Nibbāna*. By reading this thesis, one will understand very well the nature of *Nekkhamma* and the way how to get happiness of *Nekkhamma* and the benefits if one follows this practice.

The Meaning of Nekkhamma

According to the analysis of "*Nikkhamassa kammaṃ nekkhammaṃ*" the word *Nekkhamma* means the work of the one who renounces the world of household life.¹ It literally means 'departure' or 'setting out'. This term derives from combination of the prefix "ni", the root "kamu" and suffix is "ṇya" and as a whole means "renunciation". The synonyms of *nekkhamma* are *pabbajjā*, *upasampadā*, *brahmacariya*.

According to the *Nissaraṇiya Sutta*, renunciation means departure or disappearance of sensuality.² In *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha declared: "Monks, there are two types of happiness; what are they? They are happiness of sensual pleasure and happiness of renunciation. But the happiness of renunciation is the higher of the two."³ In the *Rāhula Sutta*, the Buddha said, "Having renounced lay life through faith and giving up five cords of sensual pleasure that are pleasant and please the mind, made the end of suffering."⁴ Thus, *Nekkhamma* refers to renouncing five cords of sensual pleasure.

Nekkhamma means renunciation which is here synonymous with emancipation. Emancipation is of two kinds: emancipation from cycle of existences (*saṃsāra*) and emancipation from sense-desire (*kāma*), the former being the result of the latter. Only when emancipation from sense-desire has been achieved through practice, can one gain emancipation from *saṃsāra*. Of these two kinds of emancipation, it is for the purpose of the resultant emancipation (from existences) that the Buddha expounds in the *Buddhavaṃsa* Text, likening the three states of existence to prisons.⁵

The real meaning of renunciation is not just getting ordained as monks and nuns. The Buddha also taught the right renunciation to monks: "Destroy monk, craving for human and divine sensual pleasures; overcoming existence and understanding *Dhamma*, he dwells rightly in the mind."

"*Rāgaṃ vinayetha mānusesu, dibbesu kāmesu cāpi bhikkhu;*

Atikkamma bhavaṃ samecca dhammaṃ, sammā so loke paribbajeyya."⁶

This verse shows how a person who has renounced the world should practice and live the holy life. Hence, actually *Nekkhamma* means renouncing craving and other defilements. In fact, all wholesome states are *Nekkhamma* because they renounce unwholesome states.

¹ D. A. III. p. 65; S. A. III. p. 245.

² It. P. 60: "*Kāmānametaṃ nissaraṇaṃ yadidaṃ nekkhammaṃ*"

A. I. p. 80.

⁴ Sn. p. 58: "Pañca kāmagaṇe hitvā, piyarūpe manorame; Saddhāya gharā nikkhamma, dukkhassantakaro bhava.

⁵ Mingun Sayadaw, *Vicittasāra bhivamṃsa*, "The Great Chronicle of the Buddhas". Vol. 1, Part. I, Tr. U Ko Lay and U Tin Lwin. Ti-Ni Press, Yangon, 1990. p. 213.

⁶ Sn. p. 62.

In the *Tipiṭaka Pāḷi-Myanmar Dictionary*,⁷ *Nekkhamma* (renunciation) defines the first *Jhāna*, the state of monkhood, *Vipassanāpaññā*, four *Maggañāṇa*, *Arahatta Phala*, *Nibbāna*, All *Kusala Kamma*, *Alobha*, *Nekkhamma Pāramī*, *Nekkhamma Vitakka*, and *Sīla*. Furthermore, it means Going away (from home)⁸ and Leaving household life.⁹

Nekkhamma is a *Dhamma* which is necessary in order to become a noble person and attain *Nibbāna*, to be free from suffering and *saṃsāra*. *Nekkhamma* is also called “the life of going forth”. The going forth signifies leaving the householder’s life in order to lead an ascetic life and forsake the worldly, sensual pleasures. In another word, *Nekkhamma* is giving up the world, renunciation. The word *gihi* and *gahapati* means the person who is the possessor of the house, the head of the household, lead the domestic life.¹⁰ In the *Potaliya Sutta*,¹¹ the Buddha said that one is not a renunciation just by giving up wealth and active professional engagement. One is a renunciation by practicing *Sīla* cultivating samadhi, and cultivating wisdom. Hence, *Nekkhamma* not only refer to giving up family, property, sensual pleasure, but also practice of good *Dhamma*.

The associated idea of ‘total renunciation of household life’ or *Pabbajjā* coupled with *Nekkhamma*, is not necessarily an illogical derivative. But it must be remembered that *Nekkhamma* is not the exclusive prerogative of the monk (*Pabbajjā* or *Bhikkhu*). The Buddhist has to begin his religious life founded on this psycho-ethical basis of *Nekkhamma*. As the *Muni Sutta* of the *Suttanipāta* puts it, the difference between the *Gihi* and the *Bhikkhu* who is bent on his spiritual aspirations in only of speed, as they both travel towards the same goal.¹²

The Meaning of Sukha (Happiness)

Happiness is a mental state which people experience when they get what they desire for such as wealth, fame, money, properties etc. It is the nature of all beings to try to find happiness. The *Pāḷi* term for happiness is *sukha*. According to Buddhist Dictionary, the word *Sukha* is translated as happiness, pleasure, joy and bliss. It is one of the three feelings (*vedanā*) and may be either bodily or mental.¹³

The *Tipitaka Pāḷi Myanmar Dictionary*¹⁴ shows at least four ways of etymological explanation of the term *sukha*:

1. ‘√ *Sukha*’ root and ‘a’ suffix.
2. ‘*Su*’ is prefix, and ‘√ *khāda*’ is root; it means ‘eats very well the mental and physical pain’.
3. ‘*Su*’ is prefix, and ‘√ *khanu*’ is root; it means ‘digs out mental and physical pain’.
4. ‘*Su*’ is prefix, and ‘√ *khamu*’ is root; it means it is easy to bear.

Happiness is a mental state of mind that a people always seek up to end the span of life and even in life thereafter. Regarding its object, happiness can be divided into three kinds: *Kāmasukha*, (happiness of sensual pleasure), *Nekkhammasukha*, (happiness of renouncing sensual pleasure), and *Upasamasukha*, (happiness of mental peace).

Kāmasukha (Happiness of Sensual Pleasure)

Kāmasukha means happiness that arises through the five cords of sensual pleasures. In the *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta*¹⁵, the Greater Discourse on the Mass of Suffering, the Buddha said thus: ‘forms cognizable by eye that are wished for, desired, agreeable, and likable, connected with sensual

⁷ “Tipiṭaka Pāḷi-Myanmar Dictionary,” Vol, 12. Department of Religious Affair, Yangon, 2002. P. 1008-1010.

⁸ M. I. p. 402; MA. III. p. 116: “*Nekkhamme ānisaṃsanti yo nesaṃ akusalato nikkhantabhāve ānisaṃso, yo ca vodānapakkho visuddhipakkho, taṃ na passanti attho.*”

⁹ Cp. P. 86; CpA. p. 132: “*Nekkhammaṃ abhinikkhamīti nekkhammatthāya gehato nikkhami, pabbajīti attho.*”

¹⁰ Ibid. 251.

¹¹ M. I. p. 358.

¹² Sn. p. 37: *Sikkhī yathā nīlagīvo vihaṇṇo gamo, haṃsassa nopeti javaṃ kudācanaṃ; Evaṃ gihi nānukaroti bhikkhuno, munino vivittassa vanamhi jhāyatoti.*

¹³ Nyanatiloka. Buddhist Dictionary (6th ed.). Yangon: The Buddhist Missionary Society, 2003. P. 174.

¹⁴ “Tipiṭaka Pāḷi-Myanmar Dictionary,” Vol, 24. Department of Religious Affair, Yangon, 2022. P. 155.

¹⁵ M. I. p. 85.

desire and provocative of lust; sounds cognizable by ear that are wished for, desired, agreeable, and likable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust; odours cognizable by nose that are wished for, desired, agreeable, and likable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust; flavours cognizable by tongue that are wished for, desired, agreeable, and likable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust; tangibles cognizable by the body that are wished for, desired, agreeable, and likable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust; these are the five cords of sensual pleasure. The pleasure and joy that arise dependent on these five cords of sensual pleasure are called sensual pleasure (*kāmasukha*).

Happiness born of position, luxury, wealth, power is just an intermediate happiness, because they can give also suffering. All things are impermanent 'all that is subject to arising is subject to passing away'¹⁶. In the first discourse, the Buddha preached that those who want to attain Nibbana should avoid the two extremes of indulgence in sense pleasure and self-mortification. Ordinary person is so much deluded, he or she cannot recognize the difference between real happiness and fleeting happiness. Because of this much value is given to *kāmasukha*.

In the *Potaliya Sutta*¹⁷, the Buddha compared sensual pleasure with fleshless bone. Just as a dog that would eventually reap weariness and disappointment if it tries to gnaw such a fleshless bone, a person hankering after sensual pleasure meets similar fate. Sensual pleasures provide much suffering and much despair, while the danger in them is great. Sensual pleasure has also been compared to a flesh of meat pursued by various flesh eating birds such as vulture, crow, hawk; to a blazing grass torch held against the winds; to a dream that is empty and meaningless.

In so many discourses the Buddha explained that the sensual pleasure provides little gratification, much suffering, and much despair. In the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*,¹⁸ the Buddha gave a simile comparing sensual pleasure with the skeleton, with the simile of the piece of meat, with the grass torch, with the pit of coals, with the dream, with the borrowed goods, with the tree laden with fruit, with the slaughterhouse, with the sword stake, with the snake's head.

For an ordinary person worldly happiness becomes an important quest of life. But one should not seek happiness through improper means. In the Buddha and His teachings, many ways are mentioned regarding how to righteously attain happiness by practicing the Noble Eightfold Path: with right view or the knowledge of truth one can know about the four noble truth and the way to attain happiness; with right thought such as thinking good one can renounce sensual pleasures and avoid harming others; with right speech one can abstain from telling lie, slandering, unkind words, and frivolous talks; with right action one can abstain from destroying life, stealing and from improper gratification of the senses; with right livelihood one can live by honest and truthfulness means; with right effort one can endeavor to perform good actions and abstain bad actions; with right mindfulness one can be mindful of bodily, verbal and mental action every time, everywhere. In brief, by practicing the noble eightfold path one can fulfill morality, concentration and wisdom completely. This practice leads to the happy life now and hereafter. In the different way, one can seek happiness by making charity (*dāna*), that is donation, keeping precept (*sīla*) and practicing insight meditation (*bhāvanā*).

Nekkhammasukha

Nekkhammasukha is the happiness of renouncing sensual pleasure which is higher than *kāmasukha*. It can be achieved through renouncing sensual pleasure, especially through attainment of *jhāna*. By keeping *sīla*, and then practicing one of forty meditation subjects, one can attain *jhāna*. According to the *Samaññaphala Sutta* the Buddha points out three benefits to being a life of homelessness, which can be seen here, and in this very life. One who lives by the restrained unwholesome actions through body, speech, and mind, living happily with nothing more than food and clothes. The first two benefits we can considered as the benefits in mundane, because we can see that

¹⁶ D. I. p. 102.

¹⁷ M. I. p. 364.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 132.

the king Ajātasattu pay homage, respect with four requisites those who going forth, which are also called as *anavajjasukha*¹⁹ happiness of blamelessness. Which can be explained three ways are:

1. Free from slavery: the first benefit is free from slavery to renounce and become homeless, according to the first benefit of *Samaññaphala Sutta*, it is clear that one is respectful and worshipped by the king, instead of being a worker for the king, who went forth.
2. Free from Taxes: According to the discussion between the Buddha and king Ajātasattu, it is understood that those who begin homelessness no need to pay their own capital as taxes, which are earned by doing hard work. This is the second benefit of being homeless, which leads to spiritual life and pure, after understanding the danger of sensual attachment.

The above two benefits are considered as mundane, because this is the step to be purify oneself by practicing monastic rules, and conduct themselves. Because when the Buddha ask to king Ajātasattu replied very clearly that;

“No indeed, Lord. For we should pay homage to him, we should rise and invite him and press him to receive from us robes, food, lodging, medicines for sickness and requisites, and make arguments for his proper protection.”²⁰

3. *Catuttha Jhāna*: The benefits of more and excellence benefit by the practice of renunciation as being a monk in the *Samaññaphala Sutta*. Another benefit has been mentioned in the *Samaññaphala Sutta* that the practitioner can achieve eight kinds of higher knowledge, the first insight knowledge *vipassanañāṇa*. The second is *iddhividdha*, the power of mind over matter. The third is *manomayiddhi*, the power of mind-made images. The fourth is *dibbacakkhu*, clairvoyance. The fifth is *dibbasota*, clairaudience. The sixth is *cetopariyañāṇa*, the ability to read minds. The seventh is *pubbenivāsanussatiñāṇa*, knowledge of previous lifetimes. And the eighth, *āsavakkhayañāṇa*, knowledge of the ending of mental fermentations. The achieving and the attainment of Nibbāna is considered as the supramundane benefits of renunciation.²¹

Upasamasukha (Happiness of Cessation)

Upasamasukha is the happiness that arises depending on mental peace or final liberation which end suffering, is free from sorrow, and on attainment of Nibbana. This *Upasamasukha* is higher than *Kāmasukha* and *Nekkhammasukha*. Because *Kāmasukha* is like the delicious food that has sand mixed together, like drinking water mixed together with salt. After drinking it one becomes thirstier. The happiness of mental peace can be experienced only by those who attain *Magga*, *Phala* and *Nibbāna*. Since the Buddha's lifetime up to now the method of vipassana-bhavana can be practiced. Before that only *Samatha-bhāvanā* appeared. If a person follows this method according to the Buddha's teachings one can attain and enjoy the real happiness that is free from danger and goes away far from suffering.

Venerable Sāriputta mentioned that the *Nibbāna* is the highest happiness. In the *Nibbāna Sutta*,²² he said:

“The monk who, aloof from sense desire, enters and abides in the first musing: if, while he abides in that abiding, perceptions and thoughts accompanied by sense desire beset him, it is indeed for him a disease. Just, sir, as some ill, amounting to a disease, might arise in a happy person; even so those perception and thoughts accompanied by sense desire. Now disease is called ill by the Exalted One. Verily, reverend sir, it is just in this way that the cool ought to be understood as happiness.”

The *Sutta* then goes on to explain how the happiness of Nibbana is supreme, after having explained the nature of *jhāna* happiness. In order to attain *Upasamasukha*, one must practice *Vipassanā-bhāvanā* (insight meditation). ‘*Vipassanā*’ is the *Pāḷi* term and is translated often as ‘insight’. It is a combination of two words ‘*Vi*’ and ‘*Passana*’. It means seeing in various ways. According to the Buddhist

¹⁹ A. II. p. 69.

²⁰ D. I. p. 60-62.

²¹ Ibid. p. 73-84.

²² A. III. p. 213.

Dictionary²³ *Vipassanā* is defined as the intuitive light flashing forth and exposing the truth of the impermanency, the suffering and the impersonal and insubstantial nature of all corporeal and mental phenomena of existence. It is Insight-wisdom (*Vipassanā-paññā*) that is the decisive liberating factor in Buddhism, though it has to be developed along with the two other trainings such as Morality and Concentration. The culmination of insight practice leads directly to the stages of Holiness.

Furthermore, the Buddha enumerated four ways to achieve mundane happiness for a layman.²⁴ They are (1) *Saddhā* - a person should keep guard himself in moral, spiritual and intellectual virtues. (2) *Sīla* - a man should avoid the things such as destroying and harming life, stealing and cheating, adultery, falsehood, and intoxicating drinks. (3) *Cāga* - a man should have charity, generosity without attachment and craving for his possessions. (4) *Paññā* - one should develop wisdom. It can lead to the destruction of evil, and it guides to the realization of *Nibbāna* as the ultimate goal of Buddhist people.

According to the Buddha, in the way to striving for real happiness, fleeting happiness brought about by material gain, praise, honour and fame obtained by wrongful means is one of the great armies of *Māra*.²⁵ The *Pāsādika Sutta*²⁶ describes that one can quest for happiness from two sources. Each source consists of four kinds. The first group is quest for happiness from killing, stealing, telling lie and indulging in enjoyment of the pleasure from the five sense doors. The reasons of trying to quest for such happiness is putting great value on fleeting happiness. The Buddha taught that happiness taken from these four is low, vulgar, worldly, and ignoble for it breaks basic precepts. It is also not conducive to one's welfare, does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to tranquility, to realization, to enlightenment and to *Nibbāna*. Besides, such happiness pulls him down to the states of misery as it involves breaking the fundamental standard of morality. The second group is quest for happiness from the attainment of the first *jhāna*, the second *jhāna*, the third *jhāna* and the fourth *jhāna* through mental concentrations. According to the Buddha, they themselves are under the scope of fleeting happiness, but they can serve as a leader for the ascending real happiness of *Nibbāna*. In this *Sutta* the Buddha declared that his disciples were dedicated to quest for happiness from second source.

Though the Buddha urgently encouraged all his disciples to quest for real happiness, He never rejected importance of worldly happiness. For lay persons, He preached 'the way to happiness' in a number of places in the Pali cannon. He prescribed two kinds of happiness for one who is still in household life - happiness in this life and happiness in future life. The former happiness can be brought about by four accomplishments: (1) diligence in doing business; (2) watchfulness of his worldly possessions; (3) association with good friends who has faith (*saddhā*), morality (*sīla*), liberality (*cāga*) and wisdom (*paññā*); (4) leading right livelihood, balancing one's income and outcome. For the happiness of future life, one should rely on another four factors: faith, morality, liberality and wisdom.²⁷

CONCLUSION

Nekkhamma is renunciation of worldly activities such as family life, fame, and wealth. By renouncing them all, one can get happiness of renunciation (*Nekkhammasukha*). In order to get it one has to depart from household life to the homelessness and understand what the *Nekkhamma* really is and practice the right way according to the Buddha's teaching. By practicing and getting real happiness one will be free from suffering.

Leaving home life is just the beginning. The principal aim is renunciation of five cords of sensual pleasures and thought of sensual pleasures. The most important being engagement in Threefold Training, in order to get established in the foundation of the Buddha's teaching, one should renounce sensual pleasure carefully by practicing pure holy life. In fact, if one leaves the home life but the mind does not renounce yet. It cannot give the real benefit even he or she is already ordained. *Nekkhamma*

²³ Nyanatiloka. Buddhist Dictionary (6th ed.). Yangon: The Buddhist Missionary Society, 2003. P. 197.

²⁴ S. Walpola. "What The Buddha Taught". England: Diemer and Reynolds Limited Bedford, 1959. P. 83.

²⁵ Sn. 341.

²⁶ D. III. p. 130.

²⁷ A. III. p. 107.

can bring so many benefits whoever practices it whether he is a Buddhist or not. He or she would surely enjoy so many benefits such as amazing power, psychic power (*abhiñña*), attain *jhānas*. Finally, one can also attain *Nibbāna*.

At the time of Buddha one who practiced *Nekkhamma* in order to enjoy happiness failed to attain it. *Nekkhamma* practices by the Buddha's contemporaries were not correct. So, it is not true happiness. Only Buddha's way can lead to true happiness. According to Buddha's teaching, to enjoy this sort of benefits it should have strong base of morality and should follow Buddha's instructions. Only then one will gain real happiness, *Nibbāna*.

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