

INTRODUCTION TO ABHIDHAMMA by Dr Mehm Tin Mon

1. What is Abhidhamma?

Higher teaching of the Buddha
More profound and more marvellous
Supreme Philosophy
Supreme Psychology
Supreme Science or Mental Science

2. The Wrong Vision and the Right Vision

Conventional Truth (Sammuti sacca)
Ultimate Truth (Paramattha Sacca)
Ultimate Realities (Paramatthas)
(i) consciousness (citta)
(ii) mental factors (cetasikas)
(iii) matter (rupa)
(iv) nibbana – eternal peace and happiness

3. The Mind that rules the World

Immoral minds >>>>>> bad kammas
Moral minds >>>>>> good kammas
Resultant minds >>>>>> no kammas
Four levels of moral minds
(i) sense-sphere moral minds
(ii) fine-material-sphere moral minds (5 Rūpāvacara jhānas)
(iii) immaterial-sphere moral minds (4 Arūpāvacara jhānas)
(iv) supramundane moral minds (Fourfold Path-Consciousness)

4. The Forces that influence the Mind

13 Neutral Mental Factors (feeling, perception, volition, effort, joy)
14 Immoral Mental Factors – Animal Nature

- Immoral roots – greed, anger, ignorance
- 10 Defilements – causes of all suffering
- 5 Hindrances – worst enemies

25 Beautiful Mental Factors – Human nature

- Moral roots – generosity, goodwill, wisdom
- 5 Powers – faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom
- 4 Divine qualities – love compassion, sympathy, equanimity

5. The Law of Karma and the Right View

Kamma – volitional action
Kamma seeds arise by billions in each action
Bad kammas produce bad results and bad existences
Good kammas produce good results and good existences

Abhinna Sutta – *Everyone is the owner of his kamma, the heir of his kamma, having his kamma as the cause of his suffering or happiness, kamma as his kin, kamma as his refuge, whatever kamma that he does, he will become the heir of that kamma.*

Everyone is the master of his fate and destiny through his kammass.

6. **Causal Relations and Samsāra**

The Discourse on Dependent Arising
Perpetual turning of the Wheel of Samsāra
Two Roots but no First Cause
The five causes of the present existence
The five causes of the future existence
Concrete evidences of life after life
Self verification in Insight Meditation

7. **The Right Way of Living**

The guiding torch for right living
True nature of things and true facts of life
Modern trend of living
Four kinds of happiness for householders
Sense pleasure is a low form of enjoyment
Good character is more valuable than wealth and power
Why are so many beings in woeful abodes
How to lead the noblest life and achieve eternal peace and lasting happiness

8. **The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Liberation**

The Noble Truth of Suffering
The Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering
The Noble Truth of the Extinction of Suffering
The Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering
The Training of Morality
The Training of Concentration
The Training of Wisdom
The Sevenfold Purification of the Mind
Ten Insight Knowledges
The Noblest Goal in Life
The Noble Liberation and the unique Bliss.

MAY ALL BE HAPPY AND WELL

Sādhu Sādhu.....Sādhu

INTRODUCTION TO ABHIDHAMMA

by

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1. What is Abhidhamma ?

Abhidhamma is regarded as the higher teaching of the Buddha, because it is more profound, more subtle, more excellent, and more marvelous than his other teachings.

The prefix '*abhi*' means profound, excellent, sublime and marvellous; and

'*Dhamma*' means the truth or the natural entities that really exist and bear their own respective characteristics.

'*Dhamma*' also means the teachings of the Buddha that can salvage those who abide by the Dhamma from falling into miserable abodes and that can purify the mind from defilements so as to achieve lasting peace and happiness.

Abhidhamma explains dhammas in detail and in an analytical way, analysing all animate and inanimate things into their most fundamental constituents called '*ultimate realities*' (*paramatthas*).

These ultimate realities provide the basic principles for explaining all the teachings of the Buddha rationally and logically. Abhidhamma brings to light the profound dhammas such as the Law of

Kamma, the Causal Relations of Paṭiccasamuppāda, and the Four Noble Truths. Without Abhidhamma, the penetrative and thorough understanding of these dhammas would be impossible.

2. Three Collections (*Tipiṭakas*)

All the teachings of the Buddha are classified as three collections called piṭaka:

(i) *Suttanta Piṭaka* - Conventional Teaching

It is the collection of the Buddha's discourses spoken by him on various occasions to listeners with different capacities for comprehension using common vocabulary to explain his doctrines and their objectives so that the listeners could easily understand them and practise them.

(ii) *Vinaya Piṭaka* - Authoritative Teaching

Here the Buddha used his authority over the monks to lay down rules and disciplines for them to follow. These disciplines embody the highest code of ethics and can purify one's action, speech and thought, thus making one noble, virtuous and worthy of respect.

(iii) *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* - Ultimate Teaching

Here the Buddha employed abstract terms to describe the ultimate realities that really exist in the universe and that make up our body and mind.

Abhidhamma provides the basic principles for explaining and understanding all psychophysical phenomena in the universe. Just as the atomic theory and the electronic structures of atoms can explain satisfactorily all the experimental findings

in science, so can Abhidhamma and its underlying principles explain all psychophysical phenomena in the universe.

3. Who is the Buddha?

The Buddha is called the Fully Enlightened One (*Sammāsambuddha*) because he has fully understood well by himself all things that should be understood, and he possesses the direct knowledge of all realities.

All his teachings can also be verified by any one by his own direct knowledge if he can follow the practical instructions of the Buddha for verifying the teachings. The Buddha's teachings consist of principles and practicals just as science.

The Buddha is also called '*the Peerless One*' (*Atula*) because his qualities and attributes cannot be matched by any other living beings.

The Buddha attained Buddhahood in 588 B.C. in India. King Asoka erected a stone pillar with stone inscription at the place of his enlightenment.

4. Two Kinds of Truth or Reality

Abhidhamma describes two kinds of truth or reality:

(1) *Sammuti Sacca* - Conventional Truth or Conventional Reality,

(2) *Paramattha Sacca* - Ultimate Truth or Ultimate Reality.

Conventional Truth refers to conventional realities which are referents of ordinary conceptual

thought and conventional modes of expression. They refer to things and beings which people think to really exist and give names to them so that they can be referred to in speech or in communication.

Examples: men, women, boys, girls, persons, animals, dogs, cats, houses, tables, etc.

The names can be formulated as we like and different names are used in different languages to designate a particular thing or being. So names do not really exist in nature; they are just concepts (*paññatti*).

The things and beings, which the names refer to, seem to exist according to ordinary conceptual thought, but they do not really exist in the ultimate sense for they disappear on further division into simpler things.

For example, a 'man' can be divided into head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, blood, bones, lungs, heart, etc. As none of these components can be called a man, we cannot say that a man really exists. The concept 'man' arises only when these components are combined or compounded together.

Again the separate components — hairs, nails, teeth, skin, etc. — do not really exist for they turn to ashes when a corpse is cremated.

According to science, all animate and inanimate things are made up of atoms and all atoms are made up of electrons, protons, neutrons and energy. So in science too, in the ultimate sense, man, woman, table, house, etc., do not exist; only

protons, electrons, neutrons and energy exist in the whole universe.

In Abhidhamma, electrons, protons, neutrons, etc., are not ultimate matter yet. They are called '*rūpa kalāpas*', meaning 'material groups' consisting of eight or more fundamental elements:

- (i) *Pathavī* - the element of extension with the characteristics of hardness and softness.
- (ii) *āpo* - the element of cohesion with the characteristics of cohesiveness and fluidity,
- (iii) *tejo* - the element of heat or heat energy,
- (iv) *vāyo* - the element of motion or kinetic energy,
- (v) *vanṇa* - visible form,
- (vi) *gandha* - smell,
- (vii) *rasa* - taste,
- (viii) *Oḍḍā* - nutriment, etc.

These fundamental elements are no longer divisible into simpler entities. So they are taken as the ultimate forms of matter and they belong to the category of ultimate realities.

Ultimate Truth refers to ultimate realities which, in contrast to conventional realities, really exist by reason of their own intrinsic nature. They are the final irreducible components of existence, the ultimate entities which result from a correctly performed analysis of all psychophysical phenomena. They cannot be further reduced to simpler entities since they are the final terms of analysis, the true constituents of the complex manifold of

existence.

Hence the word '*paramattha*' is applied to them; this word is derived from '*parama*' - ultimate, final, and '*attha*' - reality, thing.

So by *paramattha* or *ultimate reality* we mean something which cannot be changed into another thing or divided up into other things. It can neither be created nor destroyed by man. It really exists in nature and it holds on its characteristics till it perishes. It can stand the test or investigation by any method about its reality and real existence.

Philosophers and scientists have been searching for the ultimate realities that really exist in the universe. They could not penetrate into the ultimate or innermost nature of things with their reasoning power or scientific instruments. For example, they could not see or detect the mind yet; so they do not know what the mind really is. Not only did the Buddha see the mind he also showed others how to observe the mind and analyse it into its components called consciousness and mental factors.

So philosophers and scientists could not see the ultimate realities and they are blind to the ultimate truths.

5. Classification of Ultimate Realities

In Abhidhamma the ultimate realities are grouped into four categories: consciousness, mental factors, matter and Nibbāna.

1) Citta - Consciousness

Citta is the consciousness or awareness of a sense object. It is the agent or activity of recognizing a sense object. It is not a permanent self or ego. It arises one after another and dissolves soon after it has arisen.

Since we are aware of sense objects, we have *cittas*. As all living beings are aware of sense objects, we can say that *citta* is present in every living being including tiny insects like ants or fleas.

To elucidate the nature of any ultimate reality, the *Pāṭi* commentators propose four defining devices by means of which it can be distinguished from others. These four devices are:

- (i) *Lakkhana* – the characteristic or salient quality of the ultimate reality,
- (ii) *Rasa* – its function, that is, its performance of a concrete task (*Kicca*) or achievement of a goal (*sampatti*),
- (iii) *Paccupattiāna* – its manifestation or the way it presents itself in a mediator's experience, and
- (iv) *Paḍaṭṭhāna* – its proximate cause or the principal condition upon which it depends for its arising.

In the case of *citta*, its characteristic is the awareness of an object (*viñāna*), its function is to be a 'forerunner' (*pubbangama*) of the mental factors in that it presides over them and is always accompanied by them;

its manifestation is a continuity of processes (*sandhāna*),

its proximate cause is mind-and-matter (*nāma-rūpa*), because consciousness cannot arise alone in the complete absence of mental factors and material phenomena.

(2) *Cetasika* – mental factor, mental state or mental concomitant

Cetasikas arise together with *cittas* depending on *cittas*, in close association with the *cittas* and influencing the *cittas* in various ways. The combination of *citta* and *cetasikas* is called 'mind'.

There are 52 *cetasikas* with different characteristics and different functions. *Cetasikas* are defined by way of four characteristics that are common to them all.

- (i) They arise together with consciousness.
- (ii) They cease together with consciousness.
- (iii) They take the same sense object which the consciousness takes.
- (iv) They have the same material base as consciousness.

The *cetasikas* assist a *citta* by performing more specific tasks in the total act of cognition. The mental factors cannot arise without *citta*, nor can a *citta* arise in complete segregation from *cetasikas*. Though the two are functionally interdependent, *citta* is regarded as primary because the mental factors assist in the cognition of a sense object depending upon the *citta* which is the principal cognitive element.

Many *cetasikas* are already familiar to us. The pleasant feeling or unpleasant feeling or neutral

feeling that we experience all the time is the work of the *cetasika* called 'vedanā' (feeling).

Perceiving and remembering various words and objects is done by the *cetasika* 'saññā' (perception). It functions as memory.

Mental concentration or the state of one-pointedness of the mind is brought about by the *cetasika* 'ekaggatā' (concentration). It makes the mind surprisingly very powerful.

The three notorious evil mental factors which are designated as evil roots (*akusala mūla*) or the roots of all evil actions in the world are 'ignorance' (*moha*), 'greed' (*lobha*) and 'anger' (*dosa*).

Moha makes us ignorant of the true nature of sense objects, that is, it makes us ignorant of the ultimate realities that constitute the sense objects.

The ultimate realities – *cittas*, *cetasikas* and *rūpas* – that make up all worldly sense objects in the entire universe are arising and dissolving very rapidly depending on causes. So they are 'impermanent' (*anicca*) and unsatisfactory. The process of being incessantly tortured by the dissolution of the ultimate realities that constitute our mind and body really amounts to 'suffering' (*dukkha*).

Again the nature of having no core or no permanent entity that may be called a 'self' or 'ego' or 'soul' or 'atta' in all animate and inanimate things is called *non-self* (*anatta*).

These three characteristics – *impermanence*, *suffering* and *non-self* – are common to all sense objects as well as to all living beings and to all

existences. They are called the 'three characteristics of existence'. They play a very important role in insight meditation (*vipassanā*) in developing insight knowledges.

There is a fourth characteristic common to all living beings and that is 'loathsomeness' (*asubha*). If we analyse a beautiful lady or a handsome man as head-hair, body-hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, blood, bones, intestines, lungs, heart, etc., and examine each part, we find that none is beautiful or desirable. Remember the saying: '*Beauty is skin deep*'.

So all living and non-living beings have the four common characteristics of impermanence, suffering, non-self and loathsomeness. As *moha* blinds us to be ignorant of these common characteristics, we have the wrong vision seeing them as permanent (*nicca*), pleasant (*sukha*), self or person (*atta*) and beautiful (*subha*). So we have the wrong and oppsite view of the world!

Thus *moha* makes the 'wrong view' (*diṭṭhi*) to arise, taking that 'person', 'man', 'woman', 'dog', 'table', etc., really exist. The basic wrong view which has plagued men for aeons is 'personality-belief' (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), taking that 'I really exist'. Personality-belief makes men selfish, having little or no consideration for others. It represents a '*ticket to hell*'.

Moha also makes 'greed' (*lobha*) very greedy. *Lobha* has the characteristic of 'craving' and 'attachment'. It craves for sense objects, money,

wealth, honour, power, social happiness or anything which appears to be beautiful and desirable under the influence of ignorance (*moha*).

For the question: 'How much is enough?' the Buddha said that the whole wealth on earth cannot satisfy a man's greed. *Lobha* never gives up its characteristic of craving for some more.

The Indian leader, Mahatma Gandhi, also said: "The world has enough for everyone's need but not enough for one man's greed."

In fact, the Buddha singled out *lobha* to be the cause of all suffering in the world. The Buddha said:

"*Nathi rāga samo aggi*"

"There is no fire as hot as craving and attachment".

The Dhammapada, verse 216, states:

"*From craving springs grief,*

From craving springs fear,

For him who is wholly free from

craving, there is no grief, much less fear."

'*Anger*' (*dosa*) is the most destructive element in the world. Normally, when one encounters a desirable sense object, craving and attachment (*lobha*) arises, and when one encounters an undesirable object, anger or aversion (*dosa*) arises.

The stress and strain, generated by modern living, also generates anger, hatred or dissatisfaction (*dosa*) which severely endangers physical and mental health.

There are also three wholesome mental fac-

tors which represent 'moral roots' (*kusala mūla*). They are the direct opposites of the three evil *cetasikas* which represent 'evil roots'. The three moral roots are:

alobha - greedlessness, non-craving,

non-attachment,

adosa - hatelessness, forbearance, loving-

kindness, goodwill

amoha - wisdom, non-delusion.

These beautiful mental factors are really our good qualities. *Alobha* has no craving for others' properties and no attachment to one's wealth. So one can give away money and things in charity. Here *alobha* manifests itself in the form of 'generosity'. It is opposed to *lobha* and it can overcome *lobha*.

Adosa is opposed to *dosa* and it can overcome *dosa*. *Dosa* has the characteristics of roughness and cruelty whereas mildness and forgiveness is the chief characteristics of *adosa*.

As the saying goes: '*Forgiveness is divine*'; *adosa* is a very noble quality. When *adosa* turns its attention to living beings wishing them to be happy and free from danger, it is known as "*loving-kindness*" (*metta*) which is also a divine quality according to the saying: "*God is love*".

Amoha is opposed to *moha* and it can overcome *moha*. *Amoha* is the penetrative knowledge of the ultimate realities and the psychophysical phenomena. It manifests itself as the right understanding of *Kamma* and its result, as insight

knowledges and as the Path-wisdom (*maggāñāna*) which enlightens one to the four noble truths.

We should be aware that we possess both "animal nature" and "human nature". The evil or unwholesome mental factors constitute our "animal nature" and beautiful mental factors represent our "human nature". By developing beautiful mental factors, we can suppress our animal nature and become fully human.

Of course when we can develop the fourfold Path-wisdom, we can eliminate and destroy all unwholesome mental factors and become perfect men (*Arhants*) who can enjoy eternal peace and happiness in this very life.

(3) Rūpa - matter, corporeality or material quality 'Rūpa' is defined as that which undergoes or imposes alteration owing to adverse physical conditions such as cold and heat. (*Vibhāvin Tikā*)

So *rūpa* is that which changes its state, form or colour on account of heat or cold or other adverse or contrary conditions.

For example, wax or iron melts on heating and solidifies on cooling. Water freezes to ice on cooling, and turns to vapour on boiling.

Abhidhamma enumerates 28 types of *rūpa*, which comprise two general categories: the four great essentials (*mahābhūta*) and 24 material qualities (*upādārūpa*) derived from the great essentials.

The four great essentials are the four primary elements called *pathavī*, *āpo*, *tejo* and *vāyo*, which

have been described above. These primary elements are not earth, water, fire and air as proposed by early Greek philosophers. They are real fundamental elements which embody the properties of matter and energy described in science.

These four primary elements always occur together and dissolve together along with their derived material qualities known as visible form, smell, taste and nutriment in the form of very minute material groups called '*rūpa katāpas*', which are comparable to electrons, protons and neutrons in size.

Thus the Buddha's way of analyzing matter into its ultimate constituents is very scientific. The Abhidhamma description of the 28 types of *rūpa* covers the properties of matter and energy down to science today.

In other words, science knows only about matter and energy which belong to *rūpa* and does not know yet about the *mind (nāma)* which includes *cittas* and *cetasikas*.

Since the mind controls men's thoughts and actions, it determines the fate and destiny of each individual. So it consequently controls the whole world. As science is totally ignorant about the mind it has to cooperate with the teachings of the Buddha for promoting the welfare of humanity and world peace.

The great scientist, Albert Einstein, has already made the following statements:

* Science is blind without religion, and religion is lame without science.

* If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism.

* A Cosmic Religion

The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description.

(Albert Einstein)

(4) Nibbāna – the extinction of suffering and absolute lasting peace

'Nibbāna is the extinction of greed, anger and delusion which are the worst worldly fires.

Nibbāna is the extinction of defilements (*kilesās*) and suffering. *Kilesās* comprise *lobha*, *dosa*, *moha* and seven other evil mental factors; *kilesās* defile, debase and burn the mind. They are the root causes of all suffering.

Nibbāna is the emancipation from the entanglement of craving and from the endless cycle of birth and death called *samsāra*.

Nibbāna is perfect peace and everlasting supreme happiness called '*santisukha*' that can be enjoyed starting from this very life.

The Pali word 'nibbāna' is derived from the verb 'nibbāti', meaning 'to be blown out' or 'to be extinguished'. It thus signifies the extinguishing of the worldly 'fires' of greed, hatred and delusion.

Greed, hatred and delusion are the roots of all evil actions and the basic causes of all suffering. When they are totally eliminated or eradicated, no more suffering arise in the mind. There will be only peace and bliss (*santisukha*) which is *Nibbāna*.

Nibbāna is supramundane (*lokuttara*), that is, beyond the 31 planes of existence beyond the world of *nāma* (*cittas, cetasikas*) and *rūpas* (i.e. five aggregates). It is unconditional (*asaṅkata*) whereas *nāma* and *rūpas* are conditioned (*saṅkhata*).

Nibbāna is the ultimate goal in Buddhism. It is realized by the knowledge of the four Paths (*maggānaṇa*) and the knowledge of the four Fruits (*phalaṇṇa*).

As an ultimate reality, *Nibbāna* always exists in nature. But we cannot see it because our minds are blinded by defilements. It is just like the moon in the full-moon day. Though the moon surely exists in the sky, we cannot see it when it is shielded by thick clouds.

However, when the wind blows all the layers of clouds away, the moon becomes visible immediately. Similarly, when the defilements (greed, anger, delusion, etc.) are totally destroyed by the fourfold Path-wisdom, *Nibbāna* becomes clearly

visible with Path-consciousness and its Fruition-consciousness.

The Buddha himself discovered the Noble Eightfold Path or the Middle Path (*Majjhima Paṭipadā*) on the night of his full enlightenment. This Path, consisting of the Noble Threefold Training of morality, concentration and wisdom, can really develop the fourfold Path-wisdom to eradicate all defilements and to realize *Nibbāna*.

Nothing to surpass Buddhism

Buddhist or not Buddhist, I have examined every one of the great religious systems of the world, and in none of them have I found anything to surpass, in beauty and comprehensiveness, the Noble Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths of the Buddha. I am content to shape my life according to that path.

Prof. Rhys Davids, English Scholar

No Assumptions in Buddhism

*It is a glory of Buddhism that it makes intellectual enlightenment an essential condition of salvation. In Buddhism morality and intellectual enlightenment are inseparable from one another, while in the higher life, knowledge and wisdom complete it. Without a perfect understanding of the law of causality and transformation (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*), no one can even be said to be truly moral if he does not possess the necessary insight and knowledge.*

In this respect Buddhism differs from all other religions. All monotheistic religions start with certain assumptions, and when these assumptions are contradicted by the growth of knowledge it increases sorrow. But Buddhism starts with no assumptions. It stands on the firm rock of facts, and can therefore never shun the dry light of knowledge.

Prof. Lakshmi Narasu, "the Essence of Buddhism"