

The Factor of Keen Investigation

(dhammavicaya)

as edited by

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Piyadassi Maha Thera, (1960) in *The Seven Factors of Enlightenment*, translates from the Pali and explains what the Buddha said about the enlightenmant factor of keen Investigation:

“The second enlightenment factor is 'dhammavicaya,' keen investigation of the Dhamma. It is the sharp analytical knowledge of understanding the true nature of all constituent things, animate or inanimate, human or divine. It is seeing things as they really are; seeing things in their proper perspective. It is the analysis of all component things into their fundamental elements, right down to their ultimates.

“Through keen investigation one understands that all compounded things pass through the inconceivably rapid moments of uppáda, phiti, and bhaóga, or of arising, reaching a peak, and ceasing, just as a river in flood sweeps to a climax and fades away. The whole universe is constantly changing, not remaining the same for two consecutive moments. All things in fact are subjected to causes, conditions, and effects (hetu, paccaya, and phala).

“Systematic reflection (yoniso manasikára) comes naturally through right mindfulness, and it urges one to discriminate, to reason and investigate. Shallow thinking, unsystematic investigation (ayoniso manasikára) makes men muddle-headed; and then they fail to investigate the nature of things. Such people cannot see cause and effect, seed and fruit, the rise and fall of compounded things.

“Says the Buddha:

'This doctrine is for the wise and not for the unwise.'

(AN 8.30)

“Buddhism is free from compulsion and coercion and does not demand of the follower blind faith. At the very outset the skeptic will be pleased to hear of its call for investigation. Buddhism from beginning to end is open to all those who have eyes to see and minds to understand. The Buddha never endeavored to wring out of his followers blind and submissive faith in him and his teaching. He tutors his disciples in the ways of discrimination and intelligent inquiry.

“To the inquiring Kálámas the Buddha answered:

'Right is it to doubt, right is it to question what is doubtful and what is not clear. In a doubtful matter wavering does arise.'

(Piyadassi 10, 1960)

“We find this dialogue between the Master and his disciples:

[The Buddha:] 'If, now knowing this and perceiving this, would you say: 'We honor our Master and through respect for him we respect what he teaches?'

'Nay, Lord.'

'That which you affirm, O disciples, is it not only that which you yourselves have recognized, seen and grasped?'

'Yes, Lord.'

(MN 38)

“And in conformity with this thoroughly correct attitude of true inquiry the philosophers of later times observed:

'As the wise test the purity of gold by burning, cutting and examining it by means of a piece of touchstone, so should you accept my words after examining them and not merely out of regard and reverence for me.'
(Jñānasāra-Samuccaya, p. 31)

“Thus blind belief is condemned in the analytic teaching (vibhajjavāda) of the Buddha. The truth of the dhamma can be grasped only through calm concentrative thought and insight (samatha and vipassanā) and never through blind faith. One who goes in quest of truth is never satisfied with surface knowledge. He wants to delve deep and see what is beneath. That is the sort of search encouraged in Buddhism. That type of search yields right understanding.

We read in the texts the following story: On one occasion Upāli, a fervent follower of Nigantha Nāthaputta, the Jain, visited the Buddha, thoughtfully listened to the dhamma, gained saddhā (confidence based on knowledge) and forthwith manifested his readiness to become a follower of the Master. Nevertheless the Master said: 'Of a truth, Upāli, make thorough investigation,' and thus discouraged him. This clearly shows that the Buddha was not keen on converting people to his way of thinking, and to his fold. He did not interfere with another man's freedom of thought; for freedom of thought is the birthright of every individual. (Piyadassi 11)

“It is wrong to force someone out of the way of life which accords with his outlook and character, spiritual inclinations and tendencies; compulsion in every form is bad. It is coercion of the blackest kind to make a man gulp down beliefs for which he has no relish. Such forced feeding cannot be good for anybody, anywhere. He that cultivates dhammavicaya, investigation of the dhamma, focuses his mind on the five aggregates of grasping, the pañcupādānakkhandha, and endeavors to realize the rise and fall or the arising and passing away (udaya-vaya) of this conglomeration of bare forces (suddha saókhāra puñja), this conflux of mind and matter (námarúpa santati). It is only when he fully realizes the evanescent nature of his own mind and body that he experiences happiness, joyous anticipation.

“Therefore, it is said:

*Yato yato sammasati — khandhānam udayabbayaí
Labhati pīti pámojjaí — amataí taí vijánataí*

“Whenever he reflects on the rise and fall of the aggregates, he experiences unalloyed joy and happiness. To the discerning one that (reflection) is deathless, Nibbāna. (Dhp 374)

“What is impermanent and not lasting he sees as sorrow-fraught. What is impermanent and sorrow-fraught, he understands as void of a permanent and everlasting soul, self, or ego entity. It is this grasping, this realization of the three characteristics, or laws of transience, sorrow, and non-self (soullessness) — anicca, dukkha, and anattá — that is known to Buddhists as vipassanā-ñāóa or penetrative insight, which, like the razor-edged sword, entirely eradicates all the latent tendencies

(anusaya); and with it all the varied ramifications of sorrow's cause are finally destroyed.

“A man who ascends to this summit of vision is an arahat, a perfect one, whose clarity of vision, whose depth of insight, penetrates into the deepest recesses of life and cognizes the true nature that underlies all appearance. No more can he be swept off his feet by the glamour of things ephemeral. No more can he be confused by fearful and terrible appearances. No more is it possible for him to have a clouded view of phenomena; for he has transcended all capacity for error through the perfect immunity which penetrative insight alone can give.”

Reference

Piyadassi Maha Thera. 1960. *The Seven Factors of Enlightenment*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.