

Five Controlling Factors : A Unity Amidst Varieties

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Like other systems of Indian Philosophy, the Buddhist Philosophy starts with the definite problem and devotes itself in finding a suitable solution of it. Its problem is very clear from the statement of Buddha like "I see the beings of this world trembling in the snare of desire passing from one state of existence to another and experiencing the same feeling. Where there is joy, where there is laughter, when all things are burning",¹ Such statements make it clear that the state of suffering of the beings attracted the mind of the Buddha and being very much moved by it, he endeavoured for about 45 years of his active life to find out a remedy for this. He wandered throughout the country, met people and gave sermons according to the elevation of mind of the persons' concerned. Being ripe in his experience, he tried to find out a quick and unfailing remedy for this universal ailment of suffering. In this context, we find several solutions prescribed by him. Among them there is one which appears to be a very effective remedy and that is the practice of the five-fold controlling factors (Pañcindriya bhāvana). This is an independent practice for bringing harmony not only in the present life but in the life to come and also helpful in realization of the Summumbonum of life, i.e., Nibbāna.

The five controlling factors are the following :

1. Faith as a controlling factor (Saddhindriyaṃ).
2. Energy as a controlling factor (Viriyindriyaṃ).
3. Mindfulness as a controlling factor (Satindriyaṃ).
4. Concentration as a controlling factor (Samādhindriyaṃ).
5. Understanding as a controlling factor (Paññindriyaṃ).

These five factors appear in the list of Bodhipakkhiya-dhammas twice, once as controlling factors (indriyas) and again as powers (bala). They function in controlling the mind and directing it to the right direction in making a smooth way-faring, beginning from the moment of practice till realization of Nibbāna. They also function as power in exercising predominant influence on mind in a particular state. The difference of the two may be understood there in two-fold functions namely, right direction and proper maintenance of the mind in spiritual pursuit. In this context when we speak of the practice of five controlling factors, we examine their function in controlling and regulating the mind.

Before going into detail of the practice, it seems desirable to add few words about the purpose of such controlling. It is said that the mind is luminous, pure and free from stains in its nature, but it is polluted by in-coming polluting factors. They arise again and again and put the coverings on the mind and as such, it loses its natural form. It is then bewildered and fall in the strong snare of ignorance, generating various types of sufferings for itself. Therefore, with a view to remove the covering of defilements from the mind and help it to emerge in its pure form, there is the need of a practice and for this, there is a practice of the five controlling factors.

1. Sn. 389, D.P. 31.

What is it ? It may be seen as under :

1. *Faith as a controlling factor (Saddhindriyam) :*

Saddhā generally means faith. It has a special meaning too. It refers to a mental state which has two functions—purifying the mind and making it to exert for higher realization—*Sempasādanalakkhaṇā*, *Sampakhandaṇa*—*lakkhaṇā* ca.¹ While functioning as purifying factor, it removes the hindrances and makes the consciousness pure, tranquil and free from disturbances. It may be understood as a water-purifying gem, which when put into dirty water makes the water pure, tranquil by removing the dust particles from it. While functioning as exerting for higher realization, it inspires confidence and generates endeavour in the stream winner (*Sotāpanna*) for attainment of higher states like 'Once returner fruit' (*Sakadāgāmiphala*), 'Never returner fruit' (*Anāgāmiphala*) or 'Emancipated being fruit' (*Arahatphala*). In short, it inspires confidence and generates endeavour for attainment of that which is not achieved, as well as for realization of that which is not realized. It is defined as believing or confiding having its characteristic, purifying as function, freedom from pollution as manifestation and object worthy of faith or factors stream winning such as hearing the good law and so on as proximate cause.²

2. *Energy as a controlling factor (Viriyindriyam) :*

The literal meaning of *Viriya* is energy. It in its technical sense is a mental support. All the good qualities supported by it, remain firm and do not fall away. As a man finding a thatch falling, erects a pillar and being supported by it, the roof does not fall, similarly having inner support generated by it, the moral states remain firm and function properly.³ It is just like the reinforcement of the small army, granting support for further endeavour.⁴ It may further be defined as a state of strengthening as its characteristic, supporting the co-existent states as function. Opposition to giving way is its manifestation and agitation is its proximate cause.⁵

3. *Mindfulness as a controlling factor (Satindriyam) :*

The third controlling factor is the mindfulness—*Satindriyam*. It is the name of a mental state which is nothing but awareness. It has two functions—reminding of the good qualities and pointing out the beneficial and otherwise mental states.⁶ While functioning as reminding it creates awareness at mind door. As a door-keeper standing on the door of the house remains alert, similarly it creates alertness at the mind door. Further it reminds of all moral states like four-fold mindfulness, four-fold right efforts, four-fold feet of occult powers, five controlling factors, five powers, seven factors of enlightenment, eight-fold noble path, meditation, insight, wisdom and freedom. Being reminded of it, one exerts for practising and developing the moral states and acquiring the higher achievements. It is just like reminding of the wealth to a king by his treasurer.⁷

Again while pointing out the beneficial states, it reveals the nature of moral states showing clearly that these are beneficial in this way and these are not beneficial in any way. Knowing them so, one acquires and develops the beneficial ones and gives up those which are harmful. With a view to make it more clear, it is further said that reminding is its characteristics, fighting of forgetfulness is its function, guarding or directing the mind to face the object is its manifestation and firm perception is its proximate cause.⁸

1. Q.K.M. 1, (M.P.) 52.

2. V.M. 324.

3. V.M. 323.

4. Q.K.M. 1, (M.P.) 57.

5. V.M. 324.

6. Q.K.M. 1, (M.P.) 58.

7. Ibid. 59.

8. V.M. 324.

4. Concentration as a controlling factor (*Samādhindriyam*) :

The fourth controlling factor is concentration *Samādhindriyam*. *Samādhi* is a very important term in Buddhist tradition. It plays a vital role in curtailing the mental misdeeds in particular, and physical and vocal misdeeds in general.

The literal meaning of the word may be seen by breaking the word into its three components—*Sam*+*ā*+*dhā*, which means keeping the mind completely and properly. It means, it is the name of complete and proper absorption of mind on a particular object. Here, proper means with moral consciousness. Thus *Samāddi* is the name of concentration of moral consciousness. It draws the mind from different directions and trains it to remain on one object, and doing so it functions as a controlling and guiding factor.¹

The word *Samādhi* has been discussed in Buddhist Texts very elaborately. Nāgasena has defined it as—being the leader. It is said that all good qualities have meditation as their chief,² They incline to it and lead themselves up towards it, like the steps leading to the peak of the mountain. To illustrate the same view, it has been further said that, as the rafters of the house go to the apex, as the four-fold army leans towards the king, similarly all the good qualities lean towards *Samādhi*. What does it mean? It means that *Samādhi* functions as becoming the centre of moral states and attracts them, as a powerful magnet does and thereby regulates and directs the mind properly.

Buddhaghosa has also commented upon the word *Samādhi* and says that it puts the consciousness rightly on the object. It is like collecting of the mind. Its characteristic is non-wandering or non-distraction. Its function is to conglomerate the moral state, as the water puts the soap powder into a paste. It manifests as peace. The bliss is stated to be its proximate cause.³

Samādhi has also been described in several ways in which *Rūpa-samādhi* and *Arupa-samādhi* are very commonly quoted in both scriptural texts and in practical endeavour. The former is controlling of mind and developing one-pointedness on objects having form and colour. The latter does so on the formless objects. Both consummate in suppressing the hindrances, having association of required *jhāna* factors, developing concentration and making the mind pure, serene, tranquil, free from disturbance and subtle. With it, the mind becomes pliable so as to enter into the domain of understanding.

5. Understanding as a controlling factor (*Paññindriyam*):

The fifth controlling factor is the understanding—*Paññindriyam*. Here like *Samādhi*, *Paññā* also occupies an important place in Buddhist tradition. It means understanding. But this differs from perception (*Saññā*) as well as knowing (*Viññāna*).

What does it mean? By perception (*Saññā*) one can know only the apparent form of the object as blue, yellow, red, white or rectangular, circular etc. One cannot go deeper than this. Knowing (*Viññāna*) goes one step further, penetrates into the nature of the object and understands it as impermanent, subject to suffering and substanceless. Understanding (*Paññā*) advances one step further in the process, and knowing the nature of the object creates detachment therefrom. Thus understanding consists in the knowledge of the object as it appears, going into its nature and realizing as it really is and there-after creating detachment therefrom. Doing so it trains the mind in this direction and makes it to realize properly the nature of reality.⁴

1. V.M. 58—60.

2. Q.K.M. 1, (M.P.) 60—61.

3. V.M. 324.

4. V.M. 304—305.

This has also attracted the attention of the great Savant Nāgasena who did not check his temptation of explaining the term. He says that the understanding (*Paññā*) has two characteristics—cutting off and shedding flood of light. It differs from attention (*manasikāra*). While appearing, it removes the darkness of ignorance and generates light of wisdom, whereby the Four-Noble Truths together with three-fold nature of reality become crystal clear. It is just like holding a lamp in the dark room whereby one can clearly see the things lying therein. It has further been also explained in four-fold method by pointing out its characteristic etc. Here its characteristic has been shown as penetrating into the nature of Dhamma, just like penetration of an arrow sought by a skillful archer. Its function is to illuminate the objects like a lamp and it manifests as non-bewilderment, similar to a perfect guide in a forest. Understanding in this way is the proper vision of an ardent (*Yogāvacara*) to view the things as they appear and as they really are.¹

These are the five controlling factors which when developed and practiced properly bring purity of mind and enable one to realize the goal of life. Here one should know the process of that development and practice. In this context the tradition says that firstly, the five controlling factors should be understood with their four-fold ways of examination. Knowing them so, they should be observed again and again and should be treated as the amicable factors for bringing harmony in life. They should be harboured in mind repeatedly with a wish that they should develop so as to help in the right endeavour. They should also be bifurcated from other states and should be nourished with friendliness in our mind. In this way in course of time, there should be development of these five factors in an effective manner, capable to control and regulate the mind,

In this connection, the tradition makes a suggestion based on a practical experience about the practice of five-fold controlling factor. It says that the equanimity of the five faculties should be maintained, and put into a balanced state. One should neither be made too strong, nor too weak. If one becomes too strong then the proper function of the other is not possible. For instance, if Faith becomes strong and others weak, then the Energy faculty cannot perform its function of exerting, the Mindfulness faculty its function of creating awareness, the Concentration faculty its function of not distracting and the Understanding faculty its function of visualizing. Therefore, the Faith faculty should be modified and kept in a balanced state. Similar attention should also be paid with reference to other faculties. It is also seen that if the Energy faculty becomes strong, the Faith faculty cannot perform its function of inspiring confidence nor the other faculties have their proper functions. Therefore, its modification is essential.²

There is also a process of balancing of these faculties. All the faculties should not be mixed while making modifications with respect of their functions for balancing. The Faith and the Understanding faculties should be put together in one group for balancing. Why it is so? It is seen that when the Faith becomes strong, it does not allow Understanding to function well and thereby makes it weak. As such the confidence, which is developed, is uncritical and lean towards superstition. Again when Understanding becomes strong and Faith weak, then there is the development of distraction and also bewilderment of consciousness. The mind leans towards madness. It is just like becoming unable to cure a sick person diseased of medicine itself. It is also said that when Concentration becomes strong and Energy weak, then there is the predominance of idleness, as the Concentration starts favouring laziness and not the efforts. When Energy becomes strong and Concentration weak, the Energy leans towards distraction and the latter becomes disturbed.

Then what one should do? One should maintain the balanced state of Faith faculty and Understanding faculty on one hand the Concentration faculty and Energy faculty on the other. When there shall be the

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1. Q.K.M. 1, (M.P.) 61—62.
 2. V.M. 87—88.

balancing of Faith and Understanding faculties, a man has proper confidence saturated with understanding, where and when required. Similarly Energy faculty coupled with Concentration faculty in a balanced state, does not lapse into agitation. As a result of this the proper absorption emerges wherever and whenever desired.

Then what should be the role of Mindfulness ? It is realized on the basis of practical experience that a strong Mindfulness is needed in all instances. The reason behind it is obvious. It protects the mind from lapsing it into agitation through Faith, Energy and Understanding. It also protects it from lapsing into idleness, through Concentration. Therefore it is a desirable factor in all instances, as a seasoning of salt in all sauces and as the presence of the Prime Minister in all the business of the right king. It is truly remarked by the Buddha that Mindfulness is universal or invariably common factor with all.

Then how the practice of five controlling factors is helpful in balancing the life here and hereafter and finally in realization of Nibbāna ? It is now obvious that Mindfulness generates a congenial atmosphere for aspiring for the higher spiritual gain or inculcation of sublime human values. Faith generates confidence in that. Energy helps and guarantees support for preserving that atmosphere in mind. The Concentration mars the hindrances and give rise to the constituents of *Jhāna*. Understanding finding such congenial atmosphere penetrates into the nature of reality and knows and visualizing it face to face—that all things are impermanent subject to suffering and substanceless. Knowing them so, the man curtails the attachment. The greater is the curtailment of attachment, the more is the minimisation of suffering. When there is the total curtailment of attachment, there is total elimination of suffering. Attainment of such a state is the attainment of *Nibbāna*—a state of eternal bliss.

Now coming to theme of the topic, it can be said that though these five factors apparently appear functioning in five different ways, yet they consummate in only one function and that is the helping of the emergence of a blissful state which we may say unity amidst diversity. Perhaps this question also disturbed the King Milinda who could not check himself in clarifying the doubt.

“These qualities which are so different, O’ Nāgasena do they bring about one and the same result ?”

“They do so, O’ King, by putting an end of all evil dispositions. They are like the various parts of army—elephants, cavalry, chariots and soldiers—who all work to one end, *i.e.*, the conquest in battle over the opposite army.”¹

Similarly, though they are five appearing working in five ways, consummate in one action and that is the total negation of suffering and attainment of a state of eternal bliss.

Abbreviations

D.P.—Dhammapada—Nālandā edition.

QKM. (M.P.)—Questions of King Milinda (Milinda Pañho)—S.B.E. edition.

Sn.—Suttanipāta—Nālandā edition.

V.M.—Visuddhimagga—Bombay edition.

1. Q.K.M. 1, (M.P.) 62.