



**About Paṭisambhidāmagga –
The Path of Analytical Discrimination**

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Paṭisambhidāmagga is a book of the Khuddakanikāya, the collection of shorter texts, the fifth collection of texts (*nikāya*) of the Sutta Pitaka (the basket of doctrinal discourses) of the three-basket Pāḷicanon. The English translation for Paṭisambhidāmagga would be:

The path of analytical discrimination.

The Pāḷi word *paṭisambhidāmagga* is composed of the word *paṭisambhidā* and *magga*. The word *paṭisambhidā* contains three parts, namely *paṭi*, *sam* and *bhidā*. *Paṭi* is a prefix meaning back, again, *sam* is also a prefix meaning together, complete, *bhid* is a verb root meaning to break, *ā* is a noun ending. So, we can say that the word means to break a thing open, to go back to its origin and look at everything together.

This book contains 3 divisions (*vaggo*), each with 10 chapters (*kathā*).

It is a systematic and detailed exposition of the entire Buddhist path of insight up to arahatship. The *vipassanā* meditation is systematically and analytically described in all aspects as we do not find it anywhere else in the Pāḷicanon. Similarly, all the supporting factors and prerequisites related to meditation are described in detail. However, it is not a book for beginners.

This book is attributed to one of the two chief disciples of Buddha Gotama, Venerable Sāriputta. He had attained arahatship and the Buddha singled him out for his wisdom.

The number of suttā of the Suttapitaka is very extensive and not arranged thematically. It is often difficult to find the essence on a subject, since each individual sutta was always given to a particular person or group of people in a particular situation or at a particular point of practice. In the Paṭisambhidāmagga, on the other hand, we find short, systematic treatises on the most important topics of the Buddha's teaching, and especially on those relevant to awakening through the four paths.

In the sutta The Hidden Treasure - Nidhikaṇḍasuttaṃ, KN, Khuddakapāṭha 8 the word *paṭisambhidā* is mentioned in the context of a comparison between material goods and spiritual treasures. Material goods can be lost, whether by fire, thieves, death, or other external causes. Therefore, a material treasure is always associated with worries.

*"At the same time, however, all the treasure,
which is probably hidden in the very deep pit,
is of no use to this man in any way."*

Treasures such as giving (*dāna*), ethics (*sīla*), restraint, self-control, on the other hand, do not leave one, thieves cannot steal them, even after death they do not leave one. It is enumerated what one can achieve by these:

*"The analytical discriminations (paṭisambhidā),
the liberations (vimokkhā),
all the perfections of a disciple (sāvakaṭṭhā),
the awakening of a single awakened one, and the stage of a Buddha:
Everything is attained through them."*

So giving, ethics, restraint (at the sense gates), and control of one's behaviour are prerequisites for analytical discrimination.

The prerequisite for wisdom is concentration. Right concentration is defined in DN 22 as attaining the four *jhānā*. The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* is a work based on a stable foundation of *jhāna* concentration. Through *jhāna* concentration, the mind becomes very calm and can see things as they really are without adding anything to them. This way of seeing and knowing is unusual for a mind that does not know these deep states of concentration and the associated purification of the mind. The non-purified mind thinks based on proliferated perceptions. These perceptions stop completely when the mind has dwelt for a long time in *jhāna* concentration.

From a lack of understanding of the purified states of mind caused by deep, long lasting concentration, the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* is often seen as scholastic, although it is just the opposite,

for it is based on direct experience without adding anything to the experience. When one dwells in *jhāna* concentration for a long time, proliferated, comparative thinking and also thinking based on remembering images ceases completely. If one has received instructions for *vipassanā* meditation and can practice it, the mind sees only the ultimate things and their arising and passing away. It no longer adds anything to them. This does not mean, however, that if one makes an effort, one cannot intentionally shift to another state of mind to explain *dhamma* and experiences to others in a language using images to motivate others to practice. For this, more brain activity is necessary. For pure *vipassanā* meditation, brain activities are eliminated to a large extent and consciousness arises only in the heart, recognizing and seeing directly (*abhiññā*). The trained mind can change the state of consciousness. By this ability one can also explain the different types of texts we find in the Pāḷicanon. These differences need not be due to a historically different time, but come from the flexibility of a well-trained mind.

The Paṭisambhidāmagga is both a practice guide and the result of profound practice.

If one wishes to follow the Buddhist path of insight, it is very helpful to use these expositions of the Paṭisambhidāmagga as a recitation text or, if *jhāna* concentration can be achieved, to use them to review one's practice. We find here a book which was obviously not written down to be read through, but a text which should be repeatedly brought to mind by oral recitation and which should stimulate practice, i.e., analysis. The entire Pāḷicanon was passed on only orally at the beginning.

There are many repetitions in the text because it is a recitation text. Thus, the content is memorized in a contemplative way. It is also a suggestion for meditation, whereby one learns what one should see and understand. Thus, through repeated recognition of things, profound insight comes about. During meditation, of course, there is not always a sentence to say, but the recognition, which is often expressed in the text as a sentence, happens mentally.

Many chapters of the Paṭisambhidāmagga are based on sutta texts that are quoted at the beginning of the chapters and then explained in an analytical manner.

The fourfold knowledge of analytical discrimination can be attained only by noble beings (*ariya*) who have attained path consciousness. The cause of it is not only in a present life. Therefore, if one wants to follow the Buddhist path of insight with the goal of ultimate liberation (arahatship), it is important to respect and value this knowledge and to support people who have attained or could attain this knowledge.

In the Paṭisambhidāmagga is presented what needs to be investigated and understood in order to achieve the only goal of the Theravāda Buddhist path that we find in the Pāḷicanon taught by the Buddha Gotama. The goal is arahatship, which leads to the final *Nibbāna* after the life in which it has been attained.

The first chapter thoroughly lists what kinds of knowledge are necessary for the goal of arahatship. Even if one does not have the opportunity in this life, and thus the kammical conditions have not been prepared, to practice full time, it is very helpful to study these subjects intellectually so that the mind can wish to go there and that the mind develops the wish to be able to practice in this way. If one does not know about the things that are the basis for attaining final liberation from unsatisfactoriness, the mind cannot strive there either. Then deluded ideas of liberation and the way to it arise, which become solidified in the stream of consciousness through repeated thinking. Thus, the Paṭisambhidāmagga has relevance at all stages of practice. Not all the details of the path as we find it presented in the Paṭisambhidāmagga must always be practiced for the attainment of arahatship. But we do not know without being in contact with a fully self-awakened Buddha what else is necessary for us individually. That is why it is useful to practice systematically. And also, when one has attained arahatship, the only satisfactory thing is to practice systematically again and again, thereby dwelling as long as possible in *nirodha*, the end of formations. Also, in order to

dwell in the fruition attainment of arahatship, systematic, clear practice is necessary to reduce the appearing of results of earlier unwholesome actions.

The first chapter deals with the question:

How does knowledge appear by applying the ear as wisdom, which is produced from what is heard?

The Buddha taught three ways for attaining wisdom:

1. by hearing/learning/reading (*sutamayā paññā*),
2. by reflecting (*cintāmayā paññā*),
3. by meditation (*bhāvanāmayā paññā*).

cf. DN 33 Saṅgītisuttaṃ.

It is described in detail in the first chapter what one should engage in through hearing (nowadays also reading) in order to develop wisdom. It enumerates essential factors of the Buddhist path of insight that one should know about. It is more important to intellectually know, consider, value the practice than to trivialize it. The latter is an obstacle for the mind to strive for a profound practice. Whereas appreciation and respect, as well as joy in hearing about a profound path of liberation based on understanding, are conducive for the mind, if not in this life but eventually in a later one, to strive towards right profound practice and also for finding appropriate conditions to practice.

In the Buddha's teaching, liberation from suffering lies in finding out, through analysis of our existence, that there is no such thing as a self, an ego, or a compactness of any kind, such as a soul, because this notion of a compact person is what leads to suffering. In the first chapter of the Paṭisambhidāmagga, all the factors that one should investigate for this purpose are enumerated. One must first hear about this approach and can then practice accordingly.

However, in order to find interest in this path of liberation from suffering at all, preparations must have been made in the stream of consciousness. For this purpose, there are 10 perfections (*pāramī*) in the Buddha's teachings. These can be practiced on a conventional level and thereby gain access to levels of meditation, direct seeing and understanding. The first perfection is *dāna*, which can be translated as giving, but which also includes the aspect of service. In this comprehensive realm lies an essential preparation for finding access at all, also on the level of thinking, to the deeper analytical levels of the mind training of the Buddha's teachings. Giving and serving are possibilities to weaken egoism, self-centeredness, selfishness and pride on the gross level of being and only through this, space is created in the mind for deeper understanding and the associated overcoming of suffering.

Today, most people in the West come to the Buddha's teachings with a fundamentally wrong view, as it was spread by other religions in the Buddha's time in India. The wrong view is that one wants to strengthen the personality through meditation in order to be able to live better with the problems that life inevitably produces. The religious aspect of wanting to understand and overcome existence is not considered. This path can only produce bad results in the future, because it is based on wrong view. The Buddha said that wrong view is the largest evil and that it leads to painful experiences according to the law of cause and effect. Some people, cultivating this view, go from one teacher to another, constantly looking for new experiences, instructions, new teachers, without understanding that it is the wrong view that they keep reinforcing and that is also reinforced by the way meditation courses are often offered. Thus, through wrong approach and wrong teaching presentation, a new branch of *samsāra*, the cycle after useless pursuit of happiness, also called Buddhism, results.

Paṭisambhida as analytical discrimination is a view of things that takes place in four steps:

- analytic discrimination of meanings (*attha*),
- analytic discrimination of things (*dhamma*),
- analytic discrimination of (word) explanations (*nirutti*),
- analytical discrimination of clear comprehension (*paṭibhāna*).

The ability attained with the knowledge of analytical discrimination, in summary, is that the ultimate realities, which are matter, consciousness, mental factors, Nibbāna, and which, except Nibbāna, constitute our life, are directly seen and understood, and their causes are recognized. These realizations can be expressed in language and lead to a clear comprehensive understanding.

Applied to the four noble truths, the first noble truth, which represents the unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), is the analytical discernment of meaning, which is equivalent to knowing (*ñāṇa*) about the unsatisfactory. The second noble truth is equivalent to the analytical discrimination of things. It shows the cause of meaning. The third noble truth is also analytic discrimination of meaning, and the fourth truth is analytic discrimination of things.

From this it follows that meanings are equivalent with effects and things are equivalent with causes. Or in other words, the meanings are things that have been produced and the things are the things that have produced or caused them. The result is more obvious, such as the unsatisfactory itself, while only on closer examination do the causes, the things that caused the result, become clear. That is why this order is used.

The third analytical discrimination then gives explanations or terms for the first two discriminations through language, that is, the cognitions are verbalized to distinguish them from each other. The fourth analytical discrimination is the result of the first three. Through the systematic practice of the first three, the fourth analytical discrimination, that of clear cognition of the things under investigation, is arrived at.

In chapter 2. 7. for example, eye, insight, wisdom, knowledge, light are called things (*dhamma*), and seeing, knowledge, understanding, penetration, rays are called meanings (*attha*). That is, through the things, such as seeing, etc., as cause, the former things, such as eye, insight, wisdom, etc., are caused.

The Paṭisambhidāmagga shows that one must consciously recognize and differentiate the individual factors that we experience in meditation and that make up our lives. This preliminary approach brings a great deal of clarity and awareness to life. Proliferated thinking is prevented by this clear way of cognition, if practiced again and again, thus suffering (*dukkha*) caused by thinking is cut off. Emotions, as a kind of unclear state of consciousness that obscures the present situation by linking it to past experiences, also cannot prevail if one practices this kind of practice again and again. The mind becomes calm and content through awareness and seeing things as they are. However, this approach is not easy and therefore requires patient practice and an open but focused mind.

Vipassanā in the Buddhist sense is an analytical method of analysing our existence and the world around us. In the Paṭisambhidāmagga, the analytical method is explained in detail in four steps.

When this method is applied to all things that make up our lives, internally and externally, it leads to awakening.

It needs a teacher who knows this method and has successfully walked the path to apply this method in *vipassanā* meditation.

In the *Parivāra* of the *Vinaya*, the rules for bhikkhus and bhikkhunis and the explanations of them, it is said that a bhikkhu may only discuss with bhikkhunis, that is, teach them, if he is endowed with five things. These five are:

- he is endowed with the ethics of one who is no longer in training (*asekha*),
- with the concentration of one who is no longer in training,

- with the wisdom of one who is no longer in training,
- with the liberation of one who no longer in training,
- the knowledge and seeing of liberation of one who no longer in training.

In addition to these five things, the Buddha enumerates five other things:

He has

- the analytical discrimination of meanings,
- the analytical discrimination of things,
- the analytical discrimination of (word) explanations (language), and
- the analytical discrimination of clear comprehension;
- and he thus looks back (*paccavekkhitā*) to the liberated consciousness.

The basis for the application of the Paṭisambhidā method is deep concentration. The view from deep, sustained concentration is different from that of the intellectually proceeding mind. Through concentration from the fourth *jhāna*, analytical discriminations are easily seen and directly understood.

This book gives valuable descriptions to guide one's practice.

In AN 7.37 Analytical Knowledges - Paṭhama-, Dutiya-Paṭisambhidāsuttaṃ, the prerequisites for the analytical discriminations are enumerated:

"Bhikkhus, when he possesses seven things (dhamma), a bhikkhu might soon realize for himself with direct knowledge the four analytical knowledges and acquire mastery over them. What seven? (1) Here a bhikkhu understands as it is: 'The mind is dull.'

2. When his consciousness is internally contracted, he understands as it is: 'My consciousness is internally contracted.'

When his consciousness is distracted externally, he understands as it is: 'My consciousness is distracted externally.'

(4) He knows feelings as they arise, as they remain present, as they disappear.

(5) He knows perceptions as they arise, as they remain present, as they disappear.

(6) He knows thoughts as they arise, as they remain present, as they disappear.

(7) Then, among qualities suitable and unsuitable, inferior and superior, dark and bright along with their counterparts, he has grasped the mark well, attended to it well, reflected upon it well, and penetrated it well with wisdom.

When he possesses these seven things, a bhikkhu might soon realize for himself with direct knowledge the four analytical knowledges and acquire mastery over them."

In the next sutta, in the same manner it is spoken about Sāriputta.¹

Good right mindfulness (*sammā sati*), through which the impermanence of things is seen, is thus another important condition for attaining the analytical discriminations.

¹ Cf. also AN 4. 173, the Venerable Sāriputta speaks there about his attainment of the four analytical discriminations.

Result of the practice of Paṭisambhidāmagga:

AN 5.95 the Unshakable I – Akuppasuttaṃ.

"Bhikkhus, possessing five things, a bhikkhu in no long time penetrates to the unshakable. What five?"

Here, a bhikkhu has attained the analytical discrimination of meaning, the analytical discrimination of things (dhamma), the analytical discrimination of (word) explanations, and the analytical discrimination of clear comprehension; and he reviews the extent to which the consciousness is liberated. Possessing these five things, a bhikkhu in no long time penetrates to the unshakable."

Results of analytical discriminations for living in a community of fellow monks:

AN 5.86-87 Analytical Knowledges, Virtuous - Paṭisambhidāpattasuttaṃ, Sīlavantasuttaṃ.

"Bhikkhus, possessing five qualities, an elder bhikkhu is pleasing and agreeable to his fellow monks and is respected and esteemed by them.

What five?"

He has attained the analytical discrimination of meaning, the analytical discrimination of things (dhamma), the analytical discrimination of (word) explanations, and the analytical discrimination of clear comprehension; and he is skillful and diligent in attending to the diverse chores that are to be done for his fellow monks; he possesses sound judgment about them in order to carry out and arrange them properly."

In the commentary on the Vibhaṅga, the second Abhidhamma book, it is said that the analytical discriminations can be attained by both, those not in training anymore (arahats) and those who are still in training (having attained at least one path). Names are given of arahats: the Venerable Sāriputta, Mahāmoggallāna, Mahākassapa, Mahākaccāya, Mahākoṭṭhita, as well as of disciples who had not yet attained arahatship: the Venerable Ānanda, the householder Citta, the follower Dhammika, the householder Upāli, the follower Khujjuttarā.

In the commentaries one can often find the remark that a bhikkhu attained arahatship along with the four analytical discriminations.

The commentaries based on the Pāḷikanon, Visuddhi Magga and Vimutti Magga, are based on Paṭisambhidāmagga. Many explanations of the particular chapters of the Paṭisambhidāmagga are given here.