

# A Study on the Āvaraṇa Sutta of the Nīvaraṇa Vagga in the Aṅguttara Nikāya

Win Win Maw<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The first *sutta* of the Nīvaraṇavagga in the the Pañcakanipāta of the Dutiyapaṇṇāsaka is Āvaraṇa Sutta. The Buddha explained this *sutta* to the monks at Jetavana monastery in Sāvattī. *Āvaraṇa* means something that can block (the wisdom to arise), deter (the wisdom from arising), overwhelm the mind and weaken the wisdom. This paper purposes to encourage the readers to control the mind from swaying to sensual pleasure by contemplating on impurity of things, to keep the mind away from anger or ill-will by developing loving-kindness, to change the mind to active states when it gets dull, to remove restlessness and regret by the development of concentration, and to remove doubt through the development of wisdom. In this paper, analytical and descriptive methods are used. As the result of keeping the mind away from the hindrances, one will get mundane benefit for himself and others, and also supra-mundane benefits of *magga*, *phala* and Nibbāna. This research paper presents five *nīvaraṇa* that can hinder the mind from the realization of the truth, how to observe the *nīvaraṇa* that can arise in one's mind, how to eradicate them, and the opposite dhamma of the *nīvaraṇa*.

**Key Words:** hindrance, sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, doubt

## Aims

This paper aims at encouraging the readers to control the mind from swaying to sensual pleasure by contemplating on impurity of things, to keep the mind away from anger or ill-will by developing loving-kindness, to change the mind to active states when it gets dull, to remove restlessness and regret by the development of concentration, and to remove doubt through the development of wisdom.

## Materials and Methods

In this research paper, the five kinds of *Nīvaraṇa-kāmacchanda*, *byāpāda*, *thinamiddha*, *uddhaccakukkucca*, and *vicikicchā* are collected from the Pāli Canon, Commentaries, Sub-Commentaries and other Pāli texts. Analytical and descriptive methods are used. The materials used for the purpose of the research are *Pāli*, *Aṭṭhakathā* and *Ganthantara Texts*.

## Research Questions

- (1) Why should five *nīvaraṇa* (hindrances) be studied?
- (2) How should five *nīvaraṇa* be destroyed?

## Introduction

The Nīvaraṇa Vagga is the first *vagga* in the Dutiyapannāsaka, the Pañcaka Nipāta of the Aṅguttara Nikāya. The word “*nīvaraṇa*” means blocking completely. *Nīvaraṇa* are of six kinds- *kāmacchandānīvaraṇa*, *byāpādānīvaraṇa*, *thinamiddhānīvaraṇa*, *udhaccakukkuccānīvaraṇa*, *vicikicchānīvaraṇa* and *avijjānīvaraṇa*. The Dhamma that can hinder whole- some Dhamma such as *jhāna* are called *nīvaraṇa*. They prevent *jhāna* and *magga* from arising. They also prevent sense sphere wholesome Dhamma. The nature of *nīvaraṇa* is evident in the moment of the mind when *dosa* (hatred) arises. With *dosa* (hatred), the mind is absent of wholesome Dhamma.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Dr, Department of Oriental Studies, University of Mandalay

<sup>2</sup> အဘိဓမ္မတ္ထသင်္ဂြိုဟ်အဖွင့်(ဒုတိယတွဲ)(၁၉၈၅)၁၀၃။

### *Āvaraṇa Sutta* (A Check)

The first *sutta* of the *Nīvaraṇavagga* in the *Pañcakanipāta* of *Dutiyapaṇṇāsaka* is *Āvaraṇa Sutta*. The Buddha explained this *sutta* to the monks at Jetavana monastery in *Sāvattī*. The word “*āvaraṇa*” means covering, blocking, or stopping.<sup>1</sup> *Āvaraṇa* with this meaning works at the beginning. *Āvaraṇa* and *Nīvaraṇa* are the Dhamma that prevent one from the attainment of *Vipassanāpaññā* and *Maggapaññā*. *Nīvaraṇadhamma* weaken *paññā* by overwhelming the mind.

The Buddha taught five kinds of Dhamma that can overwhelm the mind and weaken *Paññā*. They are:

1. *kāmacchanda* (sensual desire),
2. *byāpāda* (ill-will),
3. *thinamiddha* (sloth and torpor),
4. *uddhacca* and *kukkucca* (restlessness and remorse) and
5. *vicikicchā* (doubt)<sup>2</sup>.

Craving for sensual pleasure (*kāmacchanda*) motivates the aggregate of clinging (*upādānakkhandha*) that causes covetousness (*abhijjhā*).

It also causes ill-will, that is either present or absent in the mind, with which one wishes for the destruction of a particular being.

Sloth and torpor (*thina* and *middha*) weaken unprompted mind (*asaṅkhārika*) that is strong enough to motivate one to do wholesome acts. It also creates prompted mind (*sasaṅkhārikacitta*) that is so weak that one cannot do a wholesome act with this attitude.

As the surface of the water is disturbed by the wind, *uddhacca* (restlessness) causes disturbance in the mind.

*Kukkucca* (remorse for unwholesome acts that have been done and for wholesome acts that one has missed to perform) can upset the mind.

*Vicikicchā* (doubt) is a mental factor due to which one cannot determine the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, and the nature of *sikkhāpada* (the moral precepts), *khandha* (aggregates), *āyatana* (bases), *dhātu* (elements), and *paṭiccasamuppāda* (causal relation).

### How to Observe the *Nīvaraṇas* That Arise in the Mind

A person observes the *nīvaraṇa* that arise in his mind thus:

When *kāmacchanda* is present in his mind, he knows that *kāmacchanda* is present in his mind. When it is absent in his mind, he knows that it is absent in his mind. He also knows what causes *kāmacchanda* to arise. He also knows how to eradicate *kāmacchanda* that has arisen in his mind. Moreover, he knows how to prevent *kāmacchanda* from arising in his mind.

When *dosa* is present in his mind, he knows that *dosa* is present in his mind. When it is absent in his mind, he knows that it is absent in his mind. He also knows what causes *dosa* to arise. He also knows how to eradicate *dosa* that has arisen in his mind. Moreover, he knows how to prevent *dosa* from arising in his mind.

When *thina* and *middha* is present in his mind, he knows that *thina* and *middha* is present in his mind. When it is absent in his mind, he knows that it is absent in his mind. He also knows what causes *thina* and *middha* to arise. He also knows how to eradicate *thina* and *middha* that has arisen in his mind. Moreover, he knows how to prevent *thina* and *middha* from arising in his mind.

When *uddhacca* and *kukkucca* is present in his mind, he knows that *uddhacca* and *kukkucca* is present in his mind. When it is absent in his mind, he knows that it is absent in his mind. He also knows what causes *uddhacca* and *kukkucca* to arise. He also knows how to

<sup>1</sup> တဝိဋ္ဌကပါဠ-မြန်မာပြန်အဘိဓာန်၊ အတွဲ-၄၊ အပိုင်း-၁၊(၁၉၈၀)၊၄၁၈။

<sup>2</sup> Anguttara Nikāya Pāli (Pañcaka Chakka Sattaka),(1959),56.

eradicate *uddhacca* and *kukkucca* that has arisen in his mind. Moreover, he knows how to prevent *uddhacca* and *kukkucca* from arising in his mind.

When *vicikicchā* is present in his mind, he knows that *vicikicchā* is present in his mind. When it is absent in his mind, he knows that it is absent in his mind. He also knows what causes *vicikicchā* to arise. He also knows how to eradicate *vicikicchā* that has arisen in his mind. Moreover, he knows how to prevent *vicikicchā* from arising in his mind.<sup>1</sup>

### **How to Eradicate the *Nīvaraṇas* That Arise in the Mind**

Having eradicated *abhijjhā* that craves for *loka* (the world) of *upādānakkhandha*, a person dwells with the mind absent of *abhijjhā*. He clears the mind of *abhijjhā*.

Having eradicated *dosa* that is ill-will, a person dwells with the mind absent of ill-will and full of good wishes for all beings. He clears the mind of *dosa*.

Having eradicated *thina* and *middha* that is sloth and torpor, a person dwells with the mind absent of *thina* and *middha*, concentrating on the light, and developing *sati* (mindfulness) and *paññā* (wisdom).

Having eradicated *uddhacca* (restlessness) and *kukkucca* (remorse), a person dwells with the mind that is calm and focus. He clears the mind of *uddhacca* and *kukkucca*.

Having eradicated *vicikicchā* (doubt), a person dwells with the mind that has overcome *vicikicchā* and thus that is free from doubt. He clears the mind of *vicikicchā*.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Opposite Dhammas of the *Nīvaraṇa***

#### ***Samādhi* (concentration) and *Kāmacchanda* (sensual desire)**

*Samādhi* (concentration) burns up *kāmacchanda-nīvaraṇa*. *Kāmacchanda* is *lobha* or *taṇhā* that attaches to sensual pleasure, and therefore the mind with *kāmacchanda* runs after the objects that are pleasant to the senses, and becomes unstable and uncontrollable. When *kāmacchanda* disturbs the mind, *vitakka* (initial application), *vicāra* (sustain application), *pīti* (zest) and *sukha* (happiness) becomes weak. The mind goes off the meditation object. On the other hand, *samādhi* (concentration) or *ekaggatā* (one-pointedness) focuses on the object firmly. Therefore, *kāmacchanda-nīvaraṇa* and *ekaggatā* are direct opposite to each other. With strong *ekaggatā* in the mind, *kāmacchanda-nīvaraṇa* cannot enter into the mind. This *jhāna* factor helps the other four *jhāna* factors fixed on the object of meditation. Therefore, as the Buddha taught, "*Paccanīkadhamme jhāyati*" *vitakka* and the other four mental factors are called *jhāna*.<sup>3</sup>

#### ***Pīti* (zest) and *Byāpāda* (ill-will)**

*Pīti* burns up *byāpāda-nīvaraṇa*. *Byāpāda* is *dosa* that is gross and of the nature of rejecting the object. Therefore, it can disturb *vicāra* that tries to dwell on the object so that the latter fail to perform its function. The mind will go off the object. *Pīti* is the mental factor due to which the meditator finds the object pleasant to focus on. Therefore, *byāpāda* is the direct opposite to *pīti*, and *pīti* can protect the mind from *byāpādanīvaraṇa*. Moreover, *pīti* finds pleasant nature of the object that is brought to the mind by *vitakka* and dwell on the mind by the power of *vicāra*.<sup>4</sup>

#### ***Vitakka* (initial application) and *Thina-middha* (sloth and torpor)**

*Vitakka* burns up *thina-middha-nīvaraṇa*. *Thina* and *middha* are of the nature of sloth and torpor. They are like a dull person. *Vitakka* is the mental factor that takes the mind together with associated mental factors to the object. It is like a person who can think well. Therefore, *thina-middha* and *vitakka* are direct opposite to each other. Consequently, *vitakka* as the *jhāna*

<sup>1</sup> Vibhaṅga Pāḷi ,(2007), 206-7.

<sup>2</sup> Vibhaṅga Pāḷi,,(2007),253.

<sup>3</sup> သဂြိုဟ်အာသာဒိကာ(၂၀၀၄)၊ ၇၃။

<sup>4</sup> သဂြိုဟ်အာသာဒိကာ(၂၀၀၄)၊ ၇၂။

factor keeps *thina-middha-nīvaraṇa* off the mind. With *vitakka*, the mind can easily take the object of *kaṣiṇa*, etc. It means that when a meditator enters into *aggijhāna*, the objects are burnt up, and in the same way, *vitakka* burns up *thina-middha*.<sup>1</sup>

### **Sukha (happiness) and Uddhacca-kukkucca (restlessness and remorse)**

*Sukha* burns up *uddhacca-kukkucca-nīvaraṇa*. *Uddhacca* is restlessness of the mind and *kukkucca* is the remorse. Therefore, although the mind, with *pīti* in it, finds the object of *kaṣiṇa* pleasant, if pleasantness is not distinct, it cannot focus on the object stably. Being disturbed by *uddhacca-kukkucca*, the mind goes off the object very quickly. *Sukha* is the mental factor that enjoys the taste of the object, and it is stable and peaceful. Therefore, *uddhacca-kukkucca* and *sukha* are direct opposite. *Sukha* protect the mind from *uddhacca-kukkucca* so that the latter cannot come into the mind, and enjoys the taste of the object that is focused by the mind with the power of *vitakka*, *vicāra* and *pīti*.<sup>2</sup>

### **Vicāra (investigation) and Vicikicchā (doubt)**

*Vicāra* burns up *vicikicchā-nīvaraṇa*. *Vicikicchā* is a mental factor due to which the mind becomes doubtful and cannot determine on only one object. The mind that is taken to the object by *vitakka* will withdraw itself if it is disturbed by *vicikicchā*. *Vicāra* is a mental factor due to which the mind dwells on the object. Therefore, *vicikicchā* and *vicāra* are direct opposite. *Vicāra* as a *jhāna* factor can remove *vicikicchā-nīvaraṇa* and keep the mind on the object.<sup>3</sup>

A person, as long as he is not able to eradicate these above mentioned Dhamma, can only know very little of what is advantageous for oneself and others. He will not be able to attain the extraordinary wisdom that excels *kusala-kammāpathadhamma* (wholesome actions) of ordinary people and that belongs to noble ones. The Buddha gave a simile to explain this. A river flows down very fast from a high mountain. But if ditches are dug up on both sides of the river, the water scatters to different directions. It will not reach very far, nor will it flow fast.

A person who has eradicated these five Dhammas can see what is advantageous for oneself and others. He will be able to attain the extraordinary wisdom that excels *kusala-kammāpathadhamma* (wholesome actions) of ordinary people and that belongs to noble ones. The Buddha gave a simile to explain this. A river flows down very fast from a high mountain. And if ditches on both sides of the river are blocked, the water does not scatter to different directions. It will flow very far and fast.

There is an *nīvaraṇa* that is not mentioned in this discourse: that is *avijjā-nīvaraṇa*. *Kāyaduccaritas* (unwholesome bodily actions), *vacīduccaritas* (unwholesome verbal actions), and *manoduccaritas* (unwholesome mental actions) are the actions that should not be performed. But with *avijjā*, one tends to perform those unwholesome actions. On the other hand, *kāyasucaritas* (wholesome bodily actions), *vacīsucaritas* (wholesome verbal actions), and *manosucaritas* (wholesome mental actions) are the actions that should be performed. With *avijjā*, one neglects the performance of those wholesome actions. This mental factor is called *avijjā* since it does not know the nature of *khandhas* (aggregates), *āyatanas* (bases), *dhātus* (elements), *indriyas* (faculties), and *catusaccā* (the Four Noble Truths). It is also termed as *avijjā* since it drives beings running round and round in the circle of rebirths. It is also termed as *avijjā* since it takes the conventional terms such as man or woman as the ultimate realities. It is also termed as *avijjā* since it is not able to realize the nature of the ultimate realities such as *khandha*, etc. In other words, it is termed as *avijjā* since it covers up the truth of causal

<sup>1</sup> သဂြိုဟ်အာသာဒဋ္ဌိကာ(၂၀၀၄)၊၇၂။

<sup>2</sup> သဂြိုဟ်အာသာဒဋ္ဌိကာ(၂၀၀၄)၊၇၃။

<sup>3</sup> သဂြိုဟ်အာသာဒဋ္ဌိကာ(၂၀၀၄)၊၇၃။

relations of the *dhammas* as taught in the *Paṭiccasamuppāda*. This *avijjā* is one of the *nīvaraṇas*.<sup>1</sup>

In the *Avijjānīvaraṇa Sutta* of the *Itivuttaka Pāli*, the Buddha taught, concerning *avijjā*, that those whose wisdom is hindered with *avijjā-nīvaraṇa* that is also called *moha* will be reborn again and again in the round of *samsāra*. The Buddha taught that there is nothing like *avijjā-nīvaraṇa* that can hinder the wisdom of beings. *Ariyasāvakas* (the noble disciples) eradicate *moha* and destroy the darkness of delusion. They will not be reborn in any other life. There is no reason for them to be reborn in another life.<sup>2</sup>

However, *avijjā-nīvaraṇa* does not hinder *jhāna*; it only hinders *magga* and *phala*. Therefore, *avijjā-nīvaraṇa* is not a mental factor that needs to be removed with the *jhāna* factors. When the first five *nīvaraṇa* are removed, the strength that might disturb *jhāna* is removed, too.<sup>3</sup>

In this *Āvaraṇa Sutta*, the Buddha taught that five kinds of *Nīvaraṇa* – *Kāmacchanda*, *byāpāda*, *thinamiddha*, *uddhaccakukkucca*, and *vicikicchā* are the Dhamma that can block up the way to Nibbāna.

### Finding and Discussion

When five *nīvaraṇa* are eradicated, perfect wisdom will arise, and one will be able to see one's own benefits and those of others. One will also attain special wisdom that can directly experience Nibbāna. A story of *Ekasāṭaka Brahmin* that appears in *Pāpavagga* on *Dhammapada* will be presented for an instance. While the Buddha was dwelling at *Jetavana Monastery*, there was a couple of Brahmin in *Sāvattthi*. Each of them had one lower garment, but they both possessed just one upper garment. This couple is known to people as "*Ekasāṭaka*" because they both have only one upper garment. Since they have only one garment, both of them could not go out together or at the same time. One day, they went to go to the Buddha to listen to the Dhamma. So they agree that the wife will go there during the day and the husband at night. The husband, wearing the upper garment, went to the monastery and listened to the Dhamma taught by the Buddha. Zest arose in him while learning the Dhamma and wanted to donate the garment to the Buddha. But he hesitated that if he donated it, they would not have any other garment to wear. Generosity and stinginess arose in him in turn. This way, he passed through the first and second watches of night.

Then Brahmin thought, "If stingy this much, I will never be able to come out of four woeful plains of existence. I will donate this upper garment." With this generosity, he put the garment at the feet of the Buddha and shouted, "I have done it! I have done it!" King *Kosala* who was also in the audience heard him and sent a man to enquire what happened. When he knew about the Brahmin, the king thought, "This Brahmin did what was difficult to do." The king awarded the Brahmin a garment. The Brahmin donated it to the Buddha. The king gave him double number of the garments he donated to the Buddha. The Brahmin kept donating the garments to the Buddha until the king gave him thirty-two garments. The Brahmin knew that he should stop donating all the garments, so he kept two garments aside for himself and his wife, and donated the others to the Buddha.

The king, admiring the act of the Brahmin, awarded him two woolen garments. The Brahmin donated them to the Buddha, one for the ceiling at the Buddha's cottage (*Gandhakuṭi*) and the other for the ceiling at the place where the Buddha have meals. When the king came to know about this donation, admiring the Brahmin's sincere donation, he gave elephants, horses, female slaves, male slaves, servants, four villages and four thousand to the Brahmin. The award was called *sabbacatuṅka* because each present was four in number.

<sup>1</sup> Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā, (1958), 54.

<sup>2</sup> Itivuttaka Pāli, (1997), 200-1.

<sup>3</sup> သင်္ဂြိုဟ်တော် (၂၀၀၄)၊ ၇၃။

If the Brahmin could have made the donation at the first watch of the night, he would have received *sabbasoḷasaka* (every present was sixteen in number), and if he could have made the donations at the second watch of the night, he would have received *sabbaṭṭhaka* (every present was eight in number). The Buddha taught that if one wishes to do something wholesome, one should do it immediately because if one postpones the wholesome deeds, the results will also come late. Therefore one should do wholesome deeds as soon as one wishes to do them. The Brahmin was unable to remove five hindrances from his mind during the first watch and second watch of the night. He was able to do it only at the last watch of the night and donated the garment to the Buddha. As a result of keeping the mind away from hindrances, one will get mundane benefits for himself and others, and also supra-mundane benefits on *magga*, *phala* and *Nibbāna*.

### Conclusion

In the *Āvaraṇa Sutta* of the *Nīvaraṇa Vagga* in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha taught that five kinds of *Nīvaraṇa* – *kāmacchanda* (hindrance of sensual desire), *byāpāda* (hindrance of ill will), *thinamiddha* (hindrance of sloth and torpor), *uddhaccakukkucca* (hindrance of restlessness and worry), and *vicikicchā* (hindrance of doubt) are the dhammas that can block the way to *magga*, *phala* and *Nibbāna*. As long as one is unable to eradicate these *Nīvaraṇas*, one's wisdom is weak and is unable to know one's own benefit as well as that of others. Moreover, one will not attain the supreme wisdom which has direct realization of *Nibbāna*. One who is able to eradicate these five hindrances will have perfect wisdom that makes him know his own benefit as well as that of others. And through this wisdom, he will attain supreme wisdom that realizes *Nibbāna*.

### Acknowledgement

I would like to express my thanks to Dr Thein Win; Director-General and Rector of University of Mandalay and Dr Kay Thi Thin, Dr Myint Zu Min and Dr Mi Mi Gyi, Pro-rectors University of Mandalay, for their permission to present my research paper. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Thant Thant Nwe, Professor and Head of the Department of the Oriental Studies, University of Mandalay, for her suggestion, permission and encouragement to perform this research paper. Finally, special thanks go to all my colleagues and cooperation during my research paper.

### References

Aṅguttara Nikāya Pāli (Pañcaka Chakka Sattaka), Department of Religious Affairs Press, 2003. Yangon: Union of Myanmar.

Khuddaka Nikāya, Itivuttaka Pāli, Department of Religious Affairs Press, 1997. Yangon: Union of Myanmar.

Abhidhamma Piṭaka, Vibhaṅga Pāli, Department of Religious Affairs Press, 2007. Yangon: Union of Myanmar.

Dhammapāla, Ashin, Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā, Department of Religious Affairs Press, 1960. Yangon:

Union of Myanmar.

နောက်ဘိဝံသ၊ အရှင်၊ သင်္ဂြိုဟ်ဘာသာဋီကာ၊ (၂၀၀၄) စကားသမအကြိမ်၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ နယူဘားမားအေ့မ်ဆက်ပိဋကပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။

တပိဋကပါဠိ-မြန်မာပြန်အဘိဓာန်၊ (၁၉၈၀) အတွဲ-၄၊ အပိုင်း-၁၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ သာသနာရေးဦးစီးဌာနပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။

မြင့်ဆွေ၊ ဦး၊ အဘိဓမ္မတ္ထသင်္ဂြိုဟ်အဖွင့်၊ (၁၉၈၅) ဒုတိယတွဲ၊ မန္တလေး၊ နဝရတ်စာပေ။