



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Yathābhūtañāṇadassana: Knowing And Seeing Things As They Really Are

Research by PHAM THI THU THAO

Pāli Course

ABSTRACT

The term *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana*, translated as “knowing and seeing things as they really are”, is a fundamental concept in insight meditation (*vipassanā*). This meditative method focuses on cultivating insight by directly observing the true nature of phenomena. This study investigates the term *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana* related to the context of two key discourses: the *Sona sutta* and the *Dhammacakkappavattana sutta*.

The *Sona sutta* emphasizes the realization of the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhā*) as impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anatta*), indicating how attachment to *pañcakkhandhā* lead to suffering. Meanwhile, the *Dhammacakkappavattana sutta* mentions *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana* as the knowledge and vision of the Four Noble Truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*), which are understood through three phases and twelve ways.

By examining these perspectives aspects within each *sutta*, this paper claims that *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana* is not only merely a theoretical concept but an experimental realization deeply connected to meditation and wisdom. Practicing this method leads to the cessation of suffering and the attainment of liberation.

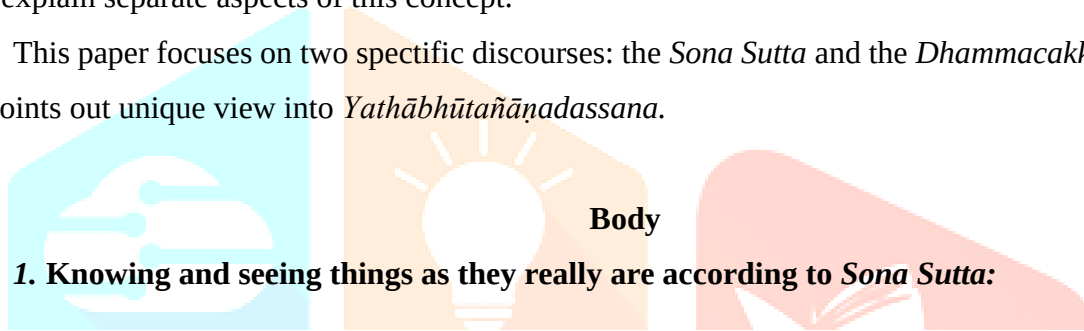
Keywords: *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana*, insight meditation (*vipassanā*), five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhā*), impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anatta*), the Four Noble Truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*).

INTRODUCTION

The term *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana* refers to the “knowledge and vision as they really are”, and is one of the eighteen chief kinds of insight (*vipassanā*)⁽¹⁾. This term is a compound of three *Pāli* words, “*yathābhūta*”, “*ñāṇa*”, and “*dassana*”, in which “*yathābhūta*” means conformity with the truth; “*ñāṇa*” is considered wisdom or insight, and “*dassana*” is defined as seeing or looking. This concept is directly connected to deep meditative realization, which achieves through powerful concentration (*samādhi*).

Ordinary individuals observe all phenomena indistinctly due to habitual misperceptions and cognitive distortion. This lack of awareness hinders the recognition of reality as they really are, thereby maintaining the cycle of eternally existence (*saṃsāra*). In Buddhist philosophy, *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana* is not simply intellectual knowledge but an experiential insight achieved through meditation. Several discourses in the *Pāli* canon explain separate aspects of this concept.

This paper focuses on two specific discourses: the *Sona Sutta* and the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, each points out unique view into *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana*.



In *vipassanā* meditation, *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana* is a refined level of wisdom attained through strong tranquility (*samādhi*). The *Sona Sutta* describes a detailed discussion on how ascetics unsucced to see things as they really are and how this insight can be cultivated.

In *Dhammacakkappavattana sutta*, the Buddha mentioned, “Now this is the noble truth of suffering. Rebirth is suffering; old age is suffering; illness is suffering; death is suffering; association with the disliked is suffering; separation from the liked is suffering; not getting what we wish for is suffering. In brief, the five grasping aggregates are suffering.”⁽²⁾ (*Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ: Jāti’pi dukkhā, jarā’pi dukkhā, vyādhī’pi dukkhā, maraṇam’pi dukkham, bappiyehi sampayogo dukkho, npiyehi vippayogo dukkho, yamp’icchaṃ na labhati tam’pi dukkhaṃ, saṅkhittena pañcupadānakkhandhā dukkhā.*) The Buddha mentioned the five aggregates here and emphasized the suffering concerning the five aggregates. Human people are the presence of the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhā*), and the mass of suffering arises from these five aggregates. If we cannot see these five aggregates (*rūpapādānakkhandho; vedanpādānakkhandho; saññupādānakkhandho; saṅkhārūpādānakkhandho; viññāṇupādānakkhandho*) as they really are, we never escape from suffering. Furthermore, we attach these five

¹ MahaThera Nyanatilika, *Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, Buddhist Publication Society, first edition 1952.

² *Dhammacakkappavattana sutta*, SN 65.11.

aggregates as “I OR MINE”; it is the main root of suffering arises. So how can we see these five aggregates as they really are? Among these five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhā*), we can divide them into two groups: name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*). *Rūpakhandho* belongs to *rūpa*, and the four remaining aggregates belong to *nāma* (*vedanākhando*; *saññākhando*; *saṅkhākhando*; *viññāṇakhandho*). In *Sona sutta* (SN 22:49) mentioned obviously that how ascetics do not see things as they really are, and how they see things as they really are. The discourse states: “*Soṇa, when any ascetics and Brahmins do not, on the basis of form which is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change regard themselves thus: ‘I am superior,’ or ‘I am equal,’ or ‘I am inferior,’ what is that due to apart from seeing things as they really are? ‘When any ascetics and Brahmins do not, on the basis of feeling ... on the basis of perception ... on the basis of volitional formations ... on the basis of consciousness which is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change regard themselves thus: ‘I am superior,’ or ‘I am equal,’ or ‘I am inferior,’ what is that due to apart from seeing things as they really are?’*”⁽³⁾ (*Ye ca kho keci, soṇa, samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā aniccena rūpena dukkhena vipariṇāmadhammena ‘seyyohamasmī’tipi na samanupassanti; ‘sadihamasmī’tipi na samanupassanti; ‘hīnohamasmī’tipi na samanupassanti; kimaññatra yathābhūtaṃ dassanā? Aniccāya vedanāya ... aniccāya saññāya ... aniccehi saṅkhārehi ... aniccena viññāṇena dukkhena vipariṇāmadhammena ‘seyyohamasmī’tipi na samanupassanti; ‘sadihamasmī’tipi na samanupassanti; ‘hīnohamasmī’tipi na samanupassanti; kimaññatra yathābhūtaṃ dassanā?*). In this *Sona sutta*, the Buddha emphasized that anyone attaches to these five aggregates and regards these five aggregates thus “I am superior, I am equal, I am inferior”; they do not see things as they really are. Because of clinging to these five aggregates and thinking that they are mine, so people cannot see the nature of these five aggregates which are impermanent, suffering, and non-self. They cannot see the changing and moving of the five aggregates continuously, so these five aggregates have inherently unstable and have no intrinsic nature. This body is just the combination of these five aggregates (*rūpa, vedāna, saññā, saṅkhāra, viññāṇa*). Therefore, these name and form (*nāma-rūpa*) are constantly rising and falling at every single moment as their nature “*Impermanent are all component things, they arise and cease, that is their nature: they come into being and pass away, release from them is bliss supreme (Aniccā vata saṅkhārā - uppāda vā dhammino - Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti - tesam vūpasamo sukho)*.”⁽⁴⁾ Nevertheless, we always consider them as ourselves, as our properties. Moreover, we put an ego inside these five aggregates and think they are permanent, happy, and self. We attach and stick these five aggregates as our own individual.

Hence, to see and know these five aggregates as they really are, we must see their characteristics of impermanent, suffering, and non-self. Furthermore, we should consider these five, whether past, future, or

³ Sona Sutta, SN 22.49.

⁴ *Mahāparinibbana Sutta*, DN 16. In the *Mahāsudassana Suttanta* (*Digha Nikaya*), this verse is ascribed to the Buddha himself; in the *Mahāsudassana Jātaka* (No.95), it is ascribed to the Bodhisatta, in his rebirth as King *Mahāsudassana*. In the *Theragāthā* (V.1159), *Mahāmossallāna Arahant* recites it, after mentioning the passing away of *Sāriputta Arahant* that preceded his own only by two weeks.

present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, all form, feeling, perception, volitional formation, and consciousness should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’ We must see that these five aggregates are just the five aggregates that build this body up, and the attachment should not arise or grasp these five collections as a self.

The Buddha also asserted how to see these five aggregates as they really are in this discourse (SN 22:49) that: *“Therefore, Soṇa, any kind of form whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, all form should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self. Any kind of feeling whatsoever ... Any kind of perception whatsoever ... Any kind of volitional formations whatsoever ... Any kind of consciousness whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, all consciousness should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’ (Tasmātiha, soṇa, yaṃ kiñci rūpaṃ atītānāgatapaccuppannaṃ ajjhattaṃ vā bahiddhā vā oḷārikaṃ vā sukhumaṃ vā hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā, sabbaṃ rūpaṃ ‘netaṃ mama, nesohamasmi, na meso attā’ ti evameva yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ. Yā kāci vedanā ... yā kāci saññā ... ye keci saṅkhārā ... yaṃ kiñci viññānaṃ atītānāgatapaccuppannaṃ ajjhattaṃ vā bahiddhā vā oḷārikaṃ vā sukhumaṃ vā hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā, sabbaṃ viññānaṃ ‘netaṃ mama, nesohamasmi, na meso attā’ ti evameva yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ)*⁵. To realize the concept of *Yathābhūtañāḍassana* mentioned in this Sutta, one must recognize that these five aggregates, whether past, present, or future, internal or external, gross or subtle, are not “I”, not “me”, not “mine”, and not “myself.” This is the way to see and know things as they really are (*Yathābhūtañāḍassana*).

2. Knowing and seeing things as they really are according to *Dhammacakkappavattana sutta*:

The *Dhammacakkappavattana sutta* emphasizes *Yathābhūtañāḍassana* in a different aspect. It does not just see things in the way of impermanent, suffering, and non-self to realize the nature of things. In this *sutta* the Buddha mentioned the knowledge and vision that arise in him regarding the four noble truths in three phases and twelve ways. The Buddha describes his knowing in the following passage: *“But when, Bhikkhus, as my knowledge, and vision of reality regarding these four noble truths, in three phases and twelve ways, was fully clear to me, I declared to the world with its devas and māras, to the mass of beings with its devas and humans that I understood incomparable, perfect enlightenment. Knowledge and vision arose in me. Unshakable is the deliverance of my mind; this is the last birth, now there will be no birth. (Yato ca kho me, bhikkhave, imesu catūsu ariyasaccesu evaṃ tiparivaṭṭaṃ dvādasākāraṃ yathābhūtaṃ ñāḍassanaṃ suvisuddhaṃ ahosi, ath’āham, bhikkhave, sadevake loke samārake sabrahmaniyā pajāya sadevamanussāya anuttaraṃ sammā*

⁵ “Sona Sutta”, SN 22:49.

sambodhiṃ abhisambuddho paccaññāsiṃ. Nāṇaṃ ca pana me dassanaṃ udapādi, akuppā me cetovimutti ayaṃ antimā jāti, natthi' dāni punabbhavo'ti.)⁽⁶⁾

How do the knowledge and vision arise regarding the Four Noble Truths in three phases and twelve ways? Here, when the knowledge and vision arose in the Buddha in three phases; firstly, the Buddha has to see and accept the Four Noble Truths. He sees that this is the Noble Truth of suffering (*Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ*), this is the Noble Truth of the cause of suffering (*Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkha-samudayaṃ ariya saccaṃ*), this is the Noble Truth of cessation of suffering (*Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ*), and this is the Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering (*Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ*). Secondly, the Buddha advises people to accept and cultivate these Four Noble Truths. Thirdly, the Buddha proves himself as evidence of contemplating and experiencing the Four Noble Truths and completely understanding them. The knowledge and vision arise in the Buddha, he clearly recognizes that only after seeing these Four Noble Truths, he can advise other people to believe these Four Noble Truths through his attainment as evidence.

After the knowledge and vision arose in these three phases, the Buddha applied these three phases in the Four Noble Truths, so it became twelve ways. The Buddha asserts that he saw the Noble of suffering, the Noble Truth of the cause of suffering, the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering, and the Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. After that, he advises people this is the Noble of suffering should be seen, this is the Noble Truth of the cause of suffering should be cut, this is the Noble Truth of cessation of suffering should be achieved, and this is the Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering should be practised. Finally, the Buddha proves his achievement as the Noble of suffering that he had seen, the Noble Truth of the cause of suffering that he had cut off, the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering that he had attained, and the Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering that he cultivated and completely understood.

So here, *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana* is the knowledge, and vision of reality regarding these Four Noble Truths, in three phases and twelve ways, was fully evident to the Buddha. The Buddha sees the Four Noble Truths, he himself experiences them, and he advises others to cultivate these Four Noble Truths. By applying these three phases to each Truth, the Buddha mentions twelve ways of realization. This structured form demonstrates that *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana* is not just an intellectual concept but a spiritual training process aimed at liberation from death and rebirth.

⁶ “Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion” (SN56.11), translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.than.html>.

As Jon Schreiber mentioned in his book that “you can only see things as they really are when you see yourself as you are in relation to them. It means to see things as a part of your existence, not as separate phenomena.”⁽⁷⁾ In other words, to get the knowledge and vision of things as they really are, we must first contemplate and experience our nature as impermanent, suffering, and non-self. After that, we will also see the external world's impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and non-self (*anatta*). We must experience everything inside ourselves first; then, we can examine others.

Conclusion

In conclusion, according to the *Sona Sutta*, we can attain the wisdom of “knowing and seeing things as they really are” by comprehending the five aggregates as they truly are impermanent, suffering, and non-self. We should regard them with the understanding that “this is not mine, this is not myself.” To eliminate our attachment to these five aggregates as a sense of self, we must apply this method of seeing them as they really are. Furthermore, in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, the term *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana* is explained in another context, referring to the insight of seeing and knowing things as they really are. In this *Sutta*, the Buddha describes his knowledge and vision of reality regarding the Four Noble Truths through three phases and twelve ways. Thus, across different *Suttas*, *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana* conveys various approaches to perceiving and understanding reality as it is. Therefore, we realize that *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana* mentions a mental cultivated experience of deep insight, achieved through strong concentration and profound wisdom, rather than theory perception. To cultivate this knowledge and vision of reality, we must cultivate ourselves in a deep meditation, developing tranquility and wisdom in our daily lives.

Reference

1. Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw. 1999. *Knowing and Seeing*. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Wave publications.
2. Matara Sri Nanarama. 1993. *The Seven Stage of Purification and The Insight Knowledges*. 2nd ed. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.
3. Phrakhrughositbuddhisat (Theerapan Vajirañāno). *Sixteen Insight Knowledges*. Edited by Ben Heffer.
4. Nyanatiloka Mahathera. 1952. *Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.
5. Schreiber, Jon. 2020. *Seeing Things as They Really Are*. Breema Center.
6. “*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*.” SN 56.11.
7. “*Sona Sutta*,” SN 22.49.

⁷ Schreiber, Jon. 2020. *Seeing Things as They Really Are*. Breema Center.