

# Features of Buddhist Methodology of Human Self-knowledge

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**Abstract**—The foundation of Buddhism, based on classic texts of the Pali Canon in the Satipatthana Sutta, is one of the most interesting and profound ways of self-knowledge among the various ways. Researching someone's "self-perception" is more existentially phenomenological in nature. With this approach, a person can go beyond the usual epistemological mindset and open the deeper dimension of his own personality.

**Keywords**—*Cognition; Epistemology; Buddhism; Self-consciousness; Thinking; Personality*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In philosophy it's often can be found an idea of a necessity of the self-knowledge. We can even say that it's one of the most common ideas of both Eastern and Western philosophy. But we cannot always clearly understand how to practically exercise this self-knowledge in the context of certain philosophies and based on which method. More often the Western philosophy refers to a philosophical, rational-reflexive study of human existence, which foundations were laid by antique classics, and then developed in Cartesianism, German classical philosophy and so on. But there is also its own method of self-knowledge in Christian philosophy; there are widely known examples of the deep self-exploration of St. Augustine, Gregory the Theologian, and St. Basil the Great. Another method of self-knowledge was formed in existentialism, where S.Kierkegaard and F.M. Dostoevsky set a new form of knowledge and human self-knowledge, genetically associated with the Christian tradition, but, at the same time, having serious differences and other goals. In the past century, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and their followers' method of self-knowledge, which makes it possible to uncover the most important layers of the unconscious, became very popular. Each of these ways of self-knowledge is a holistic way with its own methodology, cognitive goals and ideals.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main General philosophical methods of research are dialectical, hermeneutic and reflexive. This study uses General scientific methods of analysis, comparison and generalization, which were necessary to determine the theoretical basis of this work. In addition, genetic, structural-functional, comparative-historical, problem-thematic and other research methods were also used.

## III. DISCUSSION

In the Eastern philosophy, we can also find specific ways of self-knowledge, one of which is, contingently, the "Buddhist" path. Within the Buddhist tradition, you can make a whole range of ways of self-knowledge (the paths of Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, as well as the specific path of Chan or Zen Buddhism). These ways are, on the one hand, dissolving from each other, on the other, not contradicting each other and forming something like a multi-level system [1]. The spiritual path of the Hinayana and the whole Buddhist tradition is based on several important texts, and Satipatthāna Sutta occupies a special place among them [2]. This name of the text from the "Sutta Pitaka" collection is usually translated either as "The Arousing of Mindfulness" or "The Establishing of Awareness", the key word "sati" can be translated both as "mindfulness" and as "awareness", but the first option is more accurate in meaning. Sutra is a practical guide to personal self-exploration, which contains all the basic principles and the very method of self-knowledge. In recent decades, the Satipatthāna Sutta is a subject of great interest and detailed study not only in the East, but also in the Western world, as this is evidenced by new publications on this topic [3-4] and others.

This sutra describes the method, goals, and tasks of man's knowledge of himself in the context of the Buddhist religious-philosophical tradition. It is important to note that this method is not speculative and abstract, but fundamentally concrete and practical. In the process of self-exploration, the follower of this tradition must abandon the usual reflection and theorizing about himself, discard all the usual patterns of self-description,

and, in the language of E. Husserl's phenomenology, perform an "epoché" operation to the usual self-image for a some time. This operation must be done, because the habits of thinking and reflection at this stage will inevitably block a significant part of the potential of human cognitive abilities. As a result of such an epistemological procedure, a person can look at his own nature, at himself in a completely new way, over all stereotypes and mental habits. In some foreign languages, for example, in English, there is a special concept that conveys the meaning of the direction of this action quite accurately, this concept is "self". We can say that we must try to understand the existence of our own "self" or "subject" of existence in the process of self-knowledge. The feature and non-triviality of this epistemological operation also lies in the fact that in this method one cannot look at its own existence, at "self", in the usual way, as an object. If we really want to understand the internal dimension of our being, then we need to find such an approach in order to avoid the usual epistemological set-up, which includes the opposition of subject and object, automatic rationalization and objectification of the observations' content. In the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, a person must find a different way of perceiving his own being, to take a different position in relation to his own existence for a while. In a meditative attentive, unwise, holistic-intuitive contemplative state, a person re-opens his inner structure. Acquaintance with "self" in the sutra begins with the body, the observer becomes acquainted with how manifold sensations, breathing, internal bodily processes, etc. appear. But the sutra includes not only introspective and contemplative methods, it has an important section devoted to meditative contemplation of variability, impermanence of all things, the apogee of which is the contemplation of corpses and remains of human bodies. This is an important part of this method, apparently, it is necessary not only to understand the finiteness of existence, but also to comprehend the conditionality of the existence, to clearly see the basis of being, with all the features and limitations. The vision of such a "seamy side" of human existence frees from many illusions and allows to really reconsider one's value-semantic attitudes.

#### IV. RESULTS

In the method of this sutra, a person observes the flow of his own bodily sensations, how they arise, how they are found, how they transform and disappear. Practicing this method, it is necessary to move from the usual mental image of oneself to the experience of the complex of bodily sensations and internal, psychosomatic states. It is assumed that person's own usual self-images, developed from social practice, are naturally weaken through such an observation. Our understanding of one's essence or "self" is most often constructed on the basis of the practice of social statuses and roles, and usually it is social life that forms our self-identity, which in many respects is not only relative, but also simply distorted, and sometimes even illusory [5]. So, a person endowed with power, is experiencing his "self-perception" differently than a person deprived of power, for example. This situation is natural and understandable, but in reality it seriously conditions the human consciousness, blocking its ability to adequately assess everything that is happening, to realize the real situation, to an adequate understanding of his

place in the world. The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta method is a profound way of transforming the existential-personal structure of a human, all of his mental-cognitive, perceptual, ideological views. It has a much greater depth and quality than modern methods, which have become very popular psychological and psychoanalytic ways of inner work. The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta method gives an opportunity to work with errors and limitations in one's own being, it allows the mind to focus on the deepest levels of human consciousness that remain implicit in a normal situation or when using other epistemological practices.

In the sutra Gautama Buddha explains his disciples that in order to advance on the path of self-knowledge and spiritual liberation, which primarily meant liberation from the fundamentally false consciousness and the corresponding mode of being, where suffering is always an attribute, they need to develop four main aspects of awareness. Like most methods of Buddhist practice, this process is based on transforming the mind through contemplation. At the beginning of this process, students had to master the awareness of their body and breath. The task is set in such a way that the body becomes an object of attentive contemplation, and is considered empirically, without interpretation, reflection, any judgments or evaluations. In the text of the sutra, the thought is expressed simply and concretely: "to recognize the body as a body". After this stage, contemplation is directed to the feelings experienced by the spiritual practitioner, and then to the mental processes and objects of their own thinking. At each stage, the task is to continuously monitor all bodily, mental, emotional-volitional processes as a detached observer. In the course of this practice, the Buddha's disciples learned to understand how the object's perception of the sense organs occurs, how this object is recognized, how the emotional and sensory reaction arises, and how the mental interpretation of the perceived is formed. Awareness of all these processes leads not only to a clearer understanding of them, but most importantly, leads to the transformation of the spiritual abilities of the individual. It is important to note that observation and awareness in this case do not occur in the context of the work of ordinary empirical consciousness (as, for example, happens at various modern psychological trainings with very limited goals and values), but in the context of the elevated spirit of Buddhist ethics and the four Noble Truths. Such a practice of spiritual contemplation can entail a profound transformation of all existential-personal characteristics of a person.

This Buddhist method also includes attentive observation and awareness of feelings and emotions, how they arise, how they develop or fade away, how these feelings determine the train of thought and inner state. In the course of this epistemological practice, a person discovers various qualities of his emotional and psychological state in his procedurality and heterogeneity, and then goes to the level of awareness of his cognitive attitudes, some of which, as a rule, always remain in the shadows without special practice, even using higher forms of theoretical reflection. In the Buddhist tradition, it is believed that the application of the method considered here leads a person to a higher level of consciousness and to the reorganization of his value-motivational sphere. This type

of consciousness to representatives of modern culture focused on efficiency and productivity in practical activities may seem somewhat redundant or insufficiently valuable from the point of view of social practice. But we think that the method laid down in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta actually has a real cognitive value. With the help of this kind of self-knowledge, the reconsideration of “self-perception” and discovery of the relativity of its subjectivity is discovered. This creative process of self-knowledge of the individual inevitably turns to a self-creation. Making a step towards deepening his own consciousness, a person begins to notice and to realize how much he is dependent on, how much he is involved in the complex and non-transparent game of his own mental and psychological projections, cognitive attitudes and value preferences.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The work of clarifying one’s own “self” leads to overcoming this involvement and freeing one’s consciousness. Moving in this direction, we start creating a new mental-cognitive space where there is the potential for a different, freer and more creatively oriented consciousness and a different being. The ideas of the Buddhist method of self-knowledge, manifested in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, are developed and refined in the understanding of some modern Buddhist or near-Buddhist authors who write on the subject of spiritual development, for example, by Osho Rajneesh, who writes about the essence of meditation and its basic steps in the process of human comprehension of himself. The Indian thinker saw such a comprehension in the confluence of knowledge, being, values and lifestyle in a person who practices the spiritual path of comprehending his own depths of psychic life, which appears not as an activist who creates or changes something in or outside himself, but as an observer engaged in a continuous process of vigilance, awareness and awareness in this way. A connoisseur of the spiritual paths of the East, Osho also talked about four interrelated steps of man’s awareness: awareness of his body; awareness of his thoughts; awareness of his feelings, emotions and moods; the ultimate awareness is the awareness of your awareness, “... making a person awakened,” or enlightened ”[6].

The Buddhist methodology of self-knowledge cannot be regarded as a museum relic and has great prospects for its application in the modern scientific and technical era. It can be a good addition to the traditional scientific methods of human nature studying. It gives a person an opportunity for better understanding his own “self-perception”, “self”, and allows him to go beyond all the usual mental images of his own identity and get the great existential experience of comprehending his own depths. As a result, a person acquires not only a deeper understanding of himself, but also gets the opportunity to move to a different level of awareness and everything that happens.

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