

# The Significance of Āhāra for Physical and Spiritual Development in Buddhism

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## Introduction

*Āhāra* (food, nutriment) is necessary for every animate being because all living beings subsist on nutriment (*sabbe sattā āhāraṭṭhitikā*). Animate beings are busy in seeking *āhāra* in daily life. Beings without nourishment *āhāra* are unable to live alive. To utilize *āhāra*, Buddhism suggests to consume proper *āhāra*, comprehend its moderation, contemplate on the perception of loathsome on *āhāra* and clear comprehension of *āhāra*.

## Research Objective

The purpose of this research paper intends to analyze the concept of *āhāra* and its utilization for physical and spiritual development.

## Research Methodology

Data collections were gathered from *pāli* canon such as *Sammādiṭṭhi sutta*, etc., the *sekhiya* rules including *Visuddhimagga*. The collected data are exposed in the cultivation of physical and mental development. This observation approaches to the analytical and practical way.

## Research Problems

Over-eating and consuming unsuitable meals generate to get diseases such as indigestion, physical discomfort etc. To solve this problem, what are the concept and practice of *āhāra* in Buddhist literature?

## Research Literature Review

Nyanaponika Thera in his Article entitled “**The Four Nutriments of Life**” has analyzed the Four concept of *āhāra*, namely *kabaliṅkārahāra*, *phassāhāra*, *manosañcetanāhāra* and *viññāhāra* and also provides a full translation of the *Puttamamsūpama sutta* (S II 98). His observation neglects

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to investigate the *āhāra* as causality and *āhāra* meditation. This remaining fact is required to investigate thoroughly. Our observation will examine the remaining fact regarding *āhāra*.

### **Research Framework**

This study approaches to the utilization of *āhāra* to cultivate physical health and mental development, examined within Theravāda Pāli canon including *Visuddhimagga*.

### **Research Discussion/ Finding**

In Buddhist attitude towards *āhāra*, the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (M I 48) identifies four kinds of nutriment which are maintenances for living beings. They are eligible nutriment (*kabalinkāra-āhāra*), nutriment of contact (*phassa-āhāra*), nutriment of mental volition (*manosañcetanā-āhāra*) and nutriment of consciousness (*viññāṇa-āhāra*). Among the four *āhāras*, the first edible nutriment is for physical development, whereas the rest nutriments of contact, volition and consciousness are for mental development. Further, this fourfold *āhāra* also deals with nutriment condition (*āhārapaccaya*) one of twenty-four conditions of the *Abhidhamma piṭaka*. The nutriment condition can be classified as twofold: (1) material nutriment and mental nutriment. The *Paṭṭhāna* provides that edible food is related to this body by nutriment condition. The immaterial nutriments are related to their associated states, and the matter produced thereby, by nutriment condition (paṭṭha I 5). The *āhārapaccaya* sustains physical nutriment and mental nutriment like parents support their children.

In respect of the arising and ceasing of *āhāra*, the *Upādānaparivatta sutta* (S III 59) signifies that with the arising of nutriment (*āhārasamudayā*), there is the arising of body (*rūpasamudayo*). In contrast, with the cessation of nutriment (*āhānirodhā*), there is the cessation of body (*rūpanirodho*). This identifies the factual appearance and disappearance of *āhāra* as causal process. Besides, the four types of *āhāras* are also relevant to the Four Noble Truths described in the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (M I 48). The fourfold *āhāra* stands for *dukkha*. *Taṇhā* that craves for the four *āhāras* is the origin of *dukkha* (*dukkhasamudaya*). The cessation of physical and mental nutriment is the cessation of *dukkha* (*dukkhanirodha*). The Noble Eightfold Path is both the path leading to the cessation of *āhāra* (*āhāranirodhagāminīpaṭipadā*) and the path leading to cessation of *dukkha*. Hence the *āhāras* are also interrelated to the Four Noble Truths.

To be healthy and happy, you should consume suitable food, clean and fresh meals. You should also avoid unsuitable food, expired food, and un-refresh vegetables and meats because they generate diseases: stomachache and hypertension. You should also be aware of food whether it is comfortable and uncomfortable for your health. Consuming appropriate food with your health is better. Despite of suitable meals, you should know moderate in eating (*bhojane mattaññutā*) because immoderate in eating meals brings physical discomfort and various diseases: undigestion, stomachache and obesity. An evident can be seen in the case King Pasenadī of Kosala as reflected in the *Doṇapāka sutta* (S I 185-7). King Pasenadī of Kosala had eaten a bucket measure of rice and curries. After taking his meals, the King always felt very sleepy and uncomfortable. Once the King approached to the Buddha and complained his condition. The Buddha advised him to be moderate and contented in his food intake. After following the Buddha's advice, King Pasenadī became more comfortable, energetic, healthy and happy. Similarly, you should also consume suitable food and know its moderation when eating and drinking to be healthy.

In Buddhist monastic life, monks and novices have to reflect on *āhāra* wisely not for enjoyment but for the fulfillment of holy religious life (*brahmacariya*). The Buddha in the *Sekha sutta* (M I 355) encouraged the novices and monks to contemplate on *āhāra* not for amusement but for the maintenances of body, for the ending of old feelings without arousing new feelings and for the assisting the life of purity. Furthermore, among the (75) *sekhiyas* rules (*Patimokkha* 233-43), thirty rules from 27 to 56 expose how monks and novices should cultivate polite behaviors when accepting alms-food and eating meals. Accepting and consuming meals in accordance with the *sekhiyas* rules show the way how to cultivate polite physical culture and purification of morality.

Buddhist *āhāra* meditation directs to the cultivation of spiritual development. To develop detachment on *āhāra*, you should contemplate on the perception of loathsome on *āhāra* (*āhāre-paṭikūla-saññā*) in *samathabhāvanā* (Vism 341). Attachment to *āhāra* (*rasa-taṇhā*) stands for craving which is the origin of *dukkha*. What you are eating and drinking, you should contemplate on the perception of loathsomeness on *āhāra*. This contemplation suppresses the attachment on *āhāra*, then develops concentration and strengthens wisdom to arise. In *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, the contemplation of *āhāra* involves clear comprehension in a part of the contemplation on the body (*kāyanupassanā*). The *satipaṭṭhāna* sutta presents that a monk is one who acts in clear

comprehension when eating, drinking, chewing food and tasting (M I 57). When you observe it with clear comprehension, the clear comprehension of non-delusion will take place. You will see that there is only this body eating and this mind willing to eat. There is nothing more. The physical phenomena generated by nutrition are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

## Conclusion

Consuming appropriate food and discerning its moderation should be followed to be healthy. Accepting and consuming *āhāra* in the *sekhiya* rules are cultivating polite physical behavior regarding morality (*sīla*). Reflection of the perception of loathsome on *āhāra* leads to develop concentration (*samādhi*) and detachment on *āhāra*. Next, the contemplation of clear comprehension of *āhāra* in a part of *kāyanupassanā* directs to the enrichment of wisdom (*paññā*). Hence, Buddhist attitude of *āhāra* plays significant role in the cultivation of physical and spiritual development in respect of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*.

**Keywords:** *āhāra*, physical, mental, development, Buddhism.

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