

Aṭṭhāsila: Embracing Buddhist Virtues at Genta Dharma Prabhassa Monastery for Holistic Benefits

ABSTRACT

The practice of Aṭṭhāsila holds significant importance for Buddhists at the Genta Dharma Prabhassa monastery, becoming an eagerly awaited annual program before the Tri-Holy Vesak Day. This study aims to delve into Buddhist perspectives on Aṭṭhāsila, its implementation, and the benefits it offers. Employing a qualitative descriptive method with an ethnographic approach, the research showcases the profound enthusiasm of Buddhists at the monastery towards the Aṭṭhāsila program. The findings demonstrate that the practice of Aṭṭhāsila not only enriches the individual lives of practitioners but also exerts positive influences on the economic well-being of their households (gharavasa). This study sheds light on the holistic impact of Aṭṭhāsila, revealing its significance in fostering a meaningful and virtuous life within the Buddhist community at the Genta Dharma Prabhassa monastery. This study adds valuable knowledge to the field of religious studies, shedding light on the significance of Aṭṭhāsila in fostering spiritual growth, social harmony, and economic well-being within the context of the Buddhist community.

Keywords: *Aṭṭhāsila; Buddhists; spiritual growth; uposatha.*

ARTICLE INFO

Authors:

Widhiastuti¹
Santacari²

Affiliations:

¹ STIAB Smaratungga,
Boyolali, Indonesia
² University of
Peradeniya, Peradeniya,
Sri Lanka

Article History:

Received: 15-03- 2023
Revised: 25-04- 2023
Accepted: 20-05-2023
Published: 09-06-2023

Corresponding author:

widhiia22@gmail.com

How to Cite (APA Style):

Widhiastuti, W., Santacari, S. (2023). Aṭṭhāsila: Embracing Buddhist Virtues at Genta Dharma Prabhassa Monastery for Holistic Benefits. *Subhasita: Journal of Buddhist and Religious Studies*, 1(2), 97-106. DOI: 10.53417/jsb.97

Copyright:

© 2023. The Authors.
License: This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).

INTRODUCTION

Buddhism, as a profound spiritual tradition, encompasses not only philosophical teachings but also a deep-rooted sense of faith (*saddha*) in its followers (Ng, 2020). The social dynamics within the Buddhist community are intricately interwoven with the understanding and practice of Buddhist principles, which are fundamentally built upon this bedrock of faith. Buddhists hold steadfast belief in the Triple Gem – the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha – considering it to be the most precious treasure in their spiritual journey (Samyutta-nikaya, 1975). This unwavering faith has the power to foster virtuous thoughts and inner growth,

independent of external influences (Young, 2020). One such thriving community of devotees who firmly embrace this belief can be found at Genta Dharma Prabhassa Vihara. Here, religious activities are seen as a means to nourish and fortify their faith in the Triple Gem.

One form of understanding the belief in the Tri Ratna among Buddhists is through their regular participation in religious activities held at the monastery. These activities include Puja bhakti sessions on Monday night, Wednesday night, and Friday night *anjangsana*. Additionally, the monastery organizes annual programs such as Puja bhakti during holidays, *Dhammadesana*, Puja bhakti on auspicious nights, celebrations of monastery birthdays, year-end programs (new year), Dhamma quizzes for all, and the *Aṭṭhāsila* implementation program. These religious gatherings serve as a platform for Buddhists to gain insights, acquire new knowledge, and reinforce their beliefs. For the younger generation, these activities serve as a spiritual foundation and preparation for their future endeavors.

One of the religious activities that Buddhists at Genta Dharma Prabhassa Vihara look forward to is the implementation of *aṭṭhāsila*. *Aṭṭhāsila* usually coincides with the day of *uposatha*. *Uposatha* itself comes from the word "*upovasatha*" which etymologically means to dwell deeply, stay close, practice, guard, and care. *Uposatha-sīla* are the *precepts* practiced on the day of *uposatha*, usually specifically referring to *aṭṭhāsila* (Ratanadhiro, 2017). *Aṭṭhāsila* in Buddhism is the practice of self-control with eight disciplines including: 1) resolve to train oneself not to kill, 2) resolve to train oneself to avoid stealing or taking things belonging to others without being given, 3) resolve to train oneself to avoid sexual intercourse, 4) resolve to train oneself to avoid false speech or lying, 5) resolve to train oneself to avoid eating or drinking that leads to weakened consciousness, 6) to refrain from eating food after midday, 7) to refrain from dancing, playing music, wearing perfume, wearing flowers, and using cosmetics to beautify oneself, 8) to refrain from using luxurious seats and beds.

The practice of *aṭṭhāsila* of the Buddhists of Genta Dharma Prabhassa Vihara begins with gathering together in the afternoon in the bhaktisala room to commit to practicing *aṭṭhāsila*. The phenomenon is related to the absence of Sangha members who guide the practice of the *aṭṭhāsila*. In the evening, Buddhists at Genta Dharma Prabhassa Monastery will jointly perform Puja Bhakti, listen to lectures and end with a salvation prayer. After finishing the Puja bhakti there are people who donate drinks, such as hot tea, ginger tea, water, in turn.

Aṭṭhāsila is a program that the Buddhists of Genta Dharma Prabhassa Vihara look forward to. Based on the observations that have been made, the enthusiasm of the Buddhists of Genta Dharma Prabhassa Monastery is extraordinary, even though the work of the congregation is quite busy, the distance is limited, the transportation from home to the monastery is quite far but they still attend the *aṭṭhāsila* program, because with the *aṭṭhāsila* program people learn how to live according to the dhamma, appreciate food, learn to reduce greed, learn to control emotions, learn to refrain from sensual desires both from speech, thoughts and actions, increase insight into Buddhist teachings and always do virtue.

There are several previous studies relevant to the practice of *aṭṭhāsila* in the context of Buddhism. Based on the categorization technique, these studies can be grouped into two main categories: *First*, research on Buddhism's views and

understanding of aṭṭhāsila, and second, research on the benefits and effects of practicing aṭṭhāsila on individuals and society.

The first category of research focuses on Buddhism's view and understanding of aṭṭhāsila as an ethical and moral concept. For example, in the study by Lisniasari (2022), the author explores aṭṭhāsila as an integral part of the Middle Path in Buddhist Dhamma. The study examines how aṭṭhāsila serves as a means of adhering to the eight precepts, which include refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, consuming intoxicants, eating after the appointed time, indulging in adornment, and engaging in luxurious activities. By observing aṭṭhāsila, Buddhists aim to cultivate self-discipline, mindfulness, and restraint, thereby using fasting as a mindful practice to purify their intentions and actions. This practice leads to the development of moral virtues and spiritual growth along the path of Buddhism.

The second category of research explores the benefits and effects of the practice of aṭṭhāsila on the lives of individuals and society. For example, research conducted by Albastomi (2018), Malik (2016), Syukur (2007) and Kurnia (2018). From these studies it is said that Atthasila has a major impact on one's personality such as increasing the form of responsibility, improving spirituality, health, inner peace, peace of mind, getting rewards.

From previous research, it can be seen that there have been many studies that discuss the results of the implementation of Atthasila. but on the other hand it is still rarely found about the process of implementing Atthasila itself. therefore the researcher felt interested in looking at this and outlined in this study.

METHOD

The research used in this study uses descriptive qualitative research, which is research that describes a situation as it is so as to obtain real information that produces findings that cannot be achieved using statistical procedures or in quantitative ways. Qualitative research can show community life, history, behavior, organizational functionalism, social movements, and kinship relationships. Some data can be measured through census data, but the analysis remains qualitative data analysis (Moleong, 2021). This research uses qualitative methods with an ethnographic approach. This ethnographic approach is used in order to get an in-depth description and analysis (Koeswinarno, 2015).

Data collection techniques using observation, interviews, documentation. Data analysis used is the source of data and data validity techniques. Data analysis techniques in this study are data reduction, data presentation and conclusions (Sugiyono, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. *Aṭṭhāsila*

Aṭṭhāsila is the practice of avoiding the eight rules of discipline. It is not only avoiding eating and drinking but also avoiding wrongdoing. Aṭṭhāsila/ aṭṭhāngasila is also often referred to as fasting in Buddhism. Aṭṭhāsila has the meaning of refraining from doing evil and has the meaning of improving oneself, that is, increasing virtue and doing good that has never been done. Aṭṭhāsila is correcting a

habit; controlling oneself from all forms of unwholesome thoughts. Self-control is an effort to restrain and free oneself from all forms of root evil, namely lobha (greed), dosa (hatred), moha (ignorance) and irsia (envy).

It is important for Buddhists to understand the aṭṭhāsila. Understanding the meaning of practicing aṭṭhāsila we also need to try and practice it. So that we know how it feels, whether there are any benefits and so that we can control ourselves not to do actions that deviate from the Buddha's teachings. Aṭṭhāsila consists of eight precepts (practices) that are practiced by Gharavasa devotees (householders) as a form of training that is higher than the five moral trainings (Pancasila). Some factors that support the implementation of aṭṭhāsila include internal factors within each individual and external factors that come from outside, namely; romo pandita who always guides, environmental factors and among Buddhists. Buddhists themselves are not obliged to practice aṭṭhāsila, but they try to do so, both on Uposatha days and in the month leading up to the Triumph of Vesak. The eight practices are:

a) *Pānātipātā veramanī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (I am determined to avoid killing living beings)

Once a person is determined to avoid killing, he or she will be more careful in various matters, respecting oneself and the lives of other beings. Implementing the first precept means that one tries to protect life. One instills feelings of love and compassion for others as well as for other beings and hopes that all beings can live happily and free from misfortune and evil. Murder can occur due to several factors; there is a living creature, knowing that the creature is alive, having the intention to kill the creature. The severity of the consequences of our actions depends on our intention and the object of the killing.

b) *Adinnādāna veramanī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (I resolve to abstain from stealing or taking another's property without permission or without being given it).

A person has the right to protect their property. Practicing the second precept means that a person shows a feeling of appreciation for what others have. Theft or taking goods that are not given can occur due to several factors, namely; there is someone else's property, knowing that the goods have an owner, there is an intention to steal it, make an effort to take it, succeed in taking the goods with that effort. The severity of the harm done depends on the strength of the intention. It is not based on the size of the stolen goods but the intention and effort made.

c) *Abrahmacariya veramanī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (I resolve to train myself to avoid sexual intercourse)

For householders who are practicing Aṭṭhāsila, they are not allowed to have conjugal relations because it can arouse desire and unable to control themselves. Abrahmacariya refers to the total absence of sexual intercourse, while Pancasila still allows sexual intercourse as long as it is with their respective legal partners.

d) *Musāvādā veramanī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (I resolve to train myself to avoid lies, false speech and nonsense)

Lying can occur due to several factors, namely; there is something that is not true, there is an intention to cover up the truth, trying to mislead others. In addition to lying and nonsense, untrue speech includes slander, harsh words and words that are useless or useless. The consequences of what has been done can cause harm to others.

- e) *Surāmeraya majjapamādatthānā veramanī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (I resolve to train myself to avoid food or drink that can lower consciousness).

The use of substances that cause loss of consciousness can occur due to several factors, namely; there is distilled liquor (sura), fermentation (meraya), something that reduces to eliminate consciousness such as narcotic substances (majja), there is an intention to use it, consume these items symptoms of decreased consciousness or weakened consciousness.

- f) *Vikālabhojanā veramanī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (I resolve not to eat after 12.00 noon).

Buddhists when practicing Atthāsila avoid eating after 12:00 noon. Lay Buddhists only eat two simple meals between dawn and midday and avoid eating outside of these times.

- g) *Nacca-Gita-Vādita-Visūkadassanā-Mālāgandha Vilepana Dhārana Mandana Vibhūsanatthānā veramanī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (I resolve to avoid inappropriate dances, music, performances, the wearing of garlands, perfumes, and the use of cosmetics that tend towards enchantment).

- h) *Uccāsayana Mahāsayana veramanī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (I resolve to train myself to avoid the use of luxurious and high seats).

2. Practice of Atthāsila.

Based on the results of preliminary observations, the implementation of the atthāsila at Genta Dharma Prabhassa Vihara is influenced by the participants of the atthāsila, the process of implementing the atthāsila and the motivation for implementing the atthāsila.

- a) Participants of atthāsila

Participants are people who take part in an activity. The atthāsila participants at Genta Dharma Prabhassa Monastery are Gharavasa devotees (householders). Gharavasa devotees are Buddhists who choose family life. Gharavasa people have or make a living with the chosen occupation, such as being traders, farmers, craftsmen, employees, laborers and others..life as a gharavasa aims to create a happy and prosperous family (hitaya sukkhaya) that adheres to the teachings of the Buddha.

- b) The process of atthāsila

The atthāsila process is a series of activities that will be carried out during the atthāsila program. The atthāsila process is usually carried out according to a schedule that has been determined by the monastery management, because each monastery must have a different process. Making a schedule of activities must have been arranged according to the busyness or work of the community, so that people are not burdened with atthāsila activities organized by the monastery.

Activities during the implementation of atthāsila include several activities, one of which is religious activities in the monastery. Religious activities, not just puja bhakti every day. Afternoon only, but the eight precepts or atthāsila recitation for the whole month. Uposatha precepts or atthāsila are usually taken in the morning before sunrise. They can be taken from a Bhikkhu or a person who observes the ten precepts. However, if it is not possible or there is no Bhikkhu, you can take the precepts yourself, by reciting the precepts one by one.

- c) Motivation to perform atthāsila

Motivation is a form of encouragement that exists within an individual who is consciously taking an action with a specific purpose. Motivation is also defined as an activity to provide encouragement to someone or oneself to take a desired action.

3. Functions and Benefits of Practicing *Aṭṭhāsila* for Householders Stairs.

Function of *Aṭṭhāsila*

Aṭṭhāsila is a self-restraint against sensual gratification. The mental attitude of *aṭṭhāsila* manifests in the form of simplicity, humility, willingness to accept all conditions without complaint, and ego loyalty. Practicing *Aṭṭhāsila* wholeheartedly will provide peace of mind like no other in the world. (Ratanadhiro, 2017). By practicing the perfect *aṭṭhāsila*, it means that one has been able to practice the eight precepts. The form of ethical self-discipline is purity, purity in speech, thought and action through the physical body.

Benefits of *Aṭṭhāsila*

Precepts are the initial stage to enter a more sublime life and those who practice them will attain worldly and heavenly happiness. In the Mahaparinibbana sutta the Buddha points out the benefits of practicing ethical discipline; 1) Precepts can make one increase in wealth and property, 2) bring a good name or in the sense of fame and a good image will be widespread, 3) create a sense of confidence in socializing in various groups of people, not feeling anxious and afraid or hesitant.

The *aṭṭhāsila* have many benefits for those who practice them earnestly. For householders, practicing *aṭṭhāsila* can provide benefits in terms of health, spirituality and morality. The essence of *aṭṭhāsila* is to assess and correct oneself so that it becomes a habit; to be able to restrain oneself; to reduce attachment, to avoid bad deeds; and to suppress or extinguish what is bad. *Aṭṭhāsila* when practiced well, the results will be very great. One will be reborn in heavens of various levels. Bringing benefits to oneself as well as to other beings. One who performs uposatha *aṭṭhāsila* with virtuous behavior, his mind becomes tranquil, joy arises, and defilements are abandoned.

4. *Buddhists of Genta Dharma Prabhassa Monastery's views on the program aṭṭhāsila.*

Based on the results of interviews, the views of Buddhists at Genta Dharma Prabhassa Vihara regarding the *aṭṭhāsila* program are that Buddhists at Genta Dharma Prabhassa Vihara understand *aṭṭhāsila* well, know the implementation of *aṭṭhāsila* and also know the benefits of *aṭṭhāsila* itself.

Buddhists of Genta Dharma Prabhassa Monastery have the view that *aṭṭhāsila* is a self-control by practicing the eight precepts which aims to train themselves to reduce attachment to objects and things, live in simplicity. *Aṭṭhāsila* is not only a practice of control, but people will also learn the teachings of the Buddha and always do virtue and if done seriously, peace will always follow. Wholeheartedly practicing *Aṭṭhāsila* will bring peace to the heart like no other in the world (Ratanadhiro, 2017).

5. Buddhist practice of *Aṭṭhāsila* at Genta Dharma Prabhassa Monastery.

Based on the results of interviews with subjects regarding the implementation of *aṭṭhāsila* at Genta Dharma Prabhassa Monastery, it can be concluded that the implementation of *aṭṭhāsila* at Genta Dharma Prabhassa Monastery is quite unique where almost all *aṭṭhāsila* participants participate in the *aṭṭhāsila* implementation program. Every year the number of *aṭṭhāsila* participants always increases, the congregation has high enthusiasm for the *aṭṭhāsila* implementation program. This enthusiasm is shown through attitude, behavior and in its implementation. The results of this study are in accordance with research conducted by Ariyanto, (2020) that the interest of Buddhists in practicing the *aṭṭhāsila* has developed and increased from year to year.

The practice of *aṭṭhāsila* at Genta Dharma Prabhassa Vihara begins with gathering together in the bhaktisala room in the afternoon to commit to practicing *aṭṭhāsila* guided by romo pandita. In the evening it will be continued by doing puja bhakti reading the holy parittas, listening to dhamma lectures and practicing meditation. Activities in the monastery are closed with the recitation of salvation prayers and people will donate drinks such as warm tea, wedang ginger or others. The donation of drinks is not without purpose, but romo panditta hopes that people can do good to others, establish a good sense of kinship and certainly get merit or blessings.

6. The benefits of practicing *aṭṭhāsila* for Buddhists of Genta Dharma Prabhassa Vihara.

The benefits of practicing *aṭṭhāsila* for Buddhists at Genta Dharma Prabhassa Vihara have been found to be significant, encompassing both personal well-being and household economics. The results of the interviews conducted reveal that *aṭṭhāsila* practice fosters inner calmness, gratitude, and emotional control, which align with the teachings of Buddhism (Nikaya, 1977). By abstaining from harmful actions and cultivating ethical conduct, individuals experience a sense of tranquility and contentment, while also developing a deeper appreciation for their current circumstances. Furthermore, the practice of *aṭṭhāsila* empowers practitioners to reduce attachments and manage their cravings, leading to greater self-discipline (Kurnia, 2018). This heightened self-awareness and restraint contribute to a strengthened faith in Buddhism, providing a firm foundation for their spiritual journey (Nikaya, 1977).

The positive influence of *aṭṭhāsila* extends beyond individual well-being to impact household economics. By embracing a simpler lifestyle and reducing expenses related to prohibited items, such as meat and non-vegetarian products, practitioners can experience tangible financial benefits (Kurnia, 2018). This indirect control over desires and spending aligns with the teachings of Bhikkhu Abhipunno, which emphasize the economic benefits of *aṭṭhāsila* practice (Kurnia, 2018).

The desire expressed by the study participants to partake in the *aṭṭhāsila* program again in the future highlights the transformative impact of this practice on their lives (Nikaya, 1977). The findings underscore the significance of *aṭṭhāsila* in fostering personal growth, emotional well-being, and financial prudence within the Buddhist community at Genta Dharma Prabhassa Vihara. Further research on a larger scale could provide additional insights and reinforce the significance of

aṭṭhāsila in the lives of Buddhists, both within this particular community and in the broader context of Buddhism worldwide.

Overall, the study's outcomes contribute valuable knowledge to the field of religious studies, emphasizing the significance of *aṭṭhāsila* in nurturing spiritual growth and fostering harmonious living within the Buddhist community (Kurnia, 2018). By incorporating these findings, the community can further promote *aṭṭhāsila* as an essential aspect of their spiritual practice, leading to a more compassionate and responsible way of life (Nikaya, 1977).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the implementation of the *aṭṭhāsila* program at Gentha Dharma Prabhassa monastery has a profoundly positive influence on the lives of individuals within the Buddhist community. *Aṭṭhāsila* practice bestows numerous benefits, not only on a personal level but also on the household life of the practitioners. It enables them to gain better control over their emotions, reducing attachments and cultivating a life guided by the Dharma. Moreover, the practice of *aṭṭhāsila* empowers individuals to diminish greed and exercise self-discipline, leading to greater mastery over their thoughts, speech, and actions.

The results of this study shed light on the significance of *aṭṭhāsila* in nurturing spiritual growth and fostering harmonious living within the Buddhist community at Gentha Dharma Prabhassa monastery. The insights gained from the qualitative descriptive method with an ethnographic approach contribute valuable knowledge to the field of religious studies, emphasizing the role of faith and religious activities in strengthening the believers' connection to the Triple Gem.

As further research and exploration continue, it is expected that a deeper understanding of *aṭṭhāsila*'s impact on individuals and society will be gained, promoting its integration into daily life and fostering a thriving Buddhist community centered around virtuous principles.

REFERENCES

- Albastomi, M. H. (2018). *Tradisi uposatha atthasila dalam agama Budha: studi kasus di Vihara Buddhayana Dharmawira Center Surabaya*. Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya.
- Ariyanto, D. (2020). Analisis Minat Umat Buddha Dalam Melaksanakan Atthasila Pada Sebulan Penghayatan Dhamma Di Vihara Viriya Jayaloka, Desa Gembongan, Kecamatan Ponggok, Kabupaten Blitar. *Jurnal Patisambhida*, 1(1).
- Koeswinarno. (2015). Memahami etnografi ala spradley. *Jurnal Smart*, 01(02).
- Kurnia, L. (2018). *Nilai-nilai social puasa dalam agama Buddha (studi kasus di vihara sakyamuni Buddha)*. Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara.
- Lisniasari, L., Ismoyo, T., Putri, A. S., Saputra, D. N., & Nyana, D. (2022). Fasting in the Perspective of Buddhism. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal)*, 5(3).
- Malik, A. (2016). *Nilai-nilai social puasa dalam agama Buddha*. Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif hidayatullah Jakarta.

- Moleong, L. J. (2021). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Ng, E. C. H. (2020). *Introduction to Buddhist Economics*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-35114-4>
- Nikaya, D. (1977). *Dialogues of the Buddha*. London: pali text society.
- Ratanadhiro, B. (2017). *Atthasila*. Yogyakarta: Vidyasena Production.
- Samyutta-nikaya. (1975). *the book of the kindred sayings*. London: pali text society.
- Sugiyono. (2018). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan R&D* (Cetakan ke). Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Syukur, E. (2007). *Pelaksanaan dan makna puasa (uposatha) dalam agama Buddha*. Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta.
- Young, J. (2020). Practical Canons from Buddhist Past: What Pāli Anthologies Can Tell Us about Buddhist History. *History of Religions*, 60(1), 37–64. <https://doi.org/10.1086/709167>