

# Right Livelihood: A Vital Factor of Moral Purity for Lay Buddhist Disciples



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## ABSTRACT

Right livelihood is one of the three factors of moral practice in the moral group of the Noble Eightfold Path, the foundation for other higher practices, namely the practice for concentration and insight wisdom. However, the concept and practice of right livelihood for moral purity seems to be one of the least discussed topics in Buddhist literature. This article attempts to study right of lay disciples with special reference to *Vaṇijjāsutta*, *Ādiyasutta*, *Dīghajāṇusutta* of *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, and *Sīṅgālovādasutta* of *Dīgha Nikāya*. This paper also applies qualitative research approach based mainly on documentary analysis. The results show that right livelihood in Buddhist teaching involves both abstinence from wrong livelihood and taking right livelihood with right view and right effort. Buddhist instructions on right livelihood can enhance a lay disciple both materially and spiritually.

**Keywords:** Right Livelihood, Eightfold Path, Lay Buddhist Disciples

## Right Livelihood

Right livelihood or *Sammā-ājīva* in Pāli is one of the moral elements of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, which has been received few considerations in Buddhist literature though the practice of right livelihood is inseparably related to the practice of right action and speech which is the very foundation of Buddhist morality. In Tipiṭaka and Commentaries, instructions on right livelihood for a lay disciple seem to be less frequent compared to the similar instructions for monks.

It may be because the Buddha preached most of the discourses directly addressing to monks. Even when the Buddha was living, a lay disciple asked the Buddha why he taught monks and laypeople differently. Then, the Buddha explained that among his disciples, monks were able to receive his teachings to full extent just like pots without cracks or holes can hold water to full extent but laypeople were not able to pay their full life to noble practices because they have to work for their families so that they are just like pots with cracks that cannot hold water to full extent so that, the Buddha said, he taught differently to monks and laypeople.<sup>1</sup>

Although it is true that in Tipiṭaka most of the discourse are directly addressed to monks, there are still many other discourses that are particularly intended for laypeople, such as Maṅgalasutta<sup>2</sup>, Siṅgālovādasutta<sup>3</sup>, and Dīghajāṇusutta<sup>4</sup>. According to several suttas<sup>5</sup>, general meaning of right livelihood both for monks and laypeople is the same, that is refraining from all kinds of wrong livelihood and not to commit any kinds of wrong bodily and verbal actions on account of livelihood. Just as right livelihood is an important factor of morality in the life of a monk, it is also an indispensable factor in the moral practices of a layperson. In fact, right livelihood is also one of the three beautiful mental factors of abstinences or *viraticetacika*, which means skillful mental factor of abstention either

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<sup>1</sup>F.L. Woodward (trans.), *The Book of Kindred Sayings (Saṃyutta Nikāya) or Grouped Suttas*, part 4, (London: PTS, 1956), p. 221-222.

<sup>2</sup>Kh 88.

<sup>3</sup>D III 180.

<sup>4</sup>A IV 281.

<sup>5</sup>D II 313; D III 177; M III 76.

from various kinds of wrong livelihood or from doing wrong bodily and verbal actions on account livelihood.<sup>6</sup>

## Defining Lay Disciples

The word “laypeople” means Buddhist lay disciples who take refuge in the Triple Gem (*Tiratana*): the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. This definition of a layperson can be found in Mahānāmasutta where Mahānāma Upāsaka asked the Buddha what kind of person can be called a lay disciple of the Buddha. The Buddha replied:

When, Mahānāma, he has found refuge in the Buddha, found refuge in Dhamma, found refuge in the Order, then he is a lay-disciple.<sup>7</sup>

He further asked the Buddha how a lay disciple could be virtuous, which means how a disciple of Buddha has to practise for moral purity. For his question, the Buddha replied that if a lay disciple abstains from taking life, from taking what is not given, from lustful and evil indulgence, from lying and from spirituous intoxicants, the cause of indolence, then he can be said virtuous.<sup>8</sup> It means that if a lay disciple observes five precepts (*pañcasīla*), he or she can be said virtuous. It should be noticed that taking refuge in the Triple Gem and observing five precepts are different matters. A lay disciple will not be virtuous just by taking refuge in Triple Gem though he or she will acquire wholesome results for doing so. One has to observe five precepts to be virtuous. That is why in one discourse, the Buddha preached that a lay disciple who does not observe five precepts is duly thrown into hell:<sup>9</sup>

Observing five precepts and trying to stay upright in workplace in everyday life, a lay disciple of the Buddha has to move on for other higher practices for his or her spiritual progress. Although it would be difficult to attain higher spiritual progress as a lay disciple without forsaking family life, it is not impossible. Laypeople, while they have family life,

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<sup>6</sup>Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), **A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma**, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Kandy: BPS, 2007), p. 88.

<sup>7</sup>E.M. Hare (trans.), **The Book of Gradual Sayings (Aṅguttara-Nikāya) or More Numbered Suttas**, vol 3, (Oxford: PTS, 2006), p. 149

<sup>8</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>*ibid.*, p. 150.

can do ten kinds of wholesome deeds such as offering alms food to monks, observing eight precepts on special holidays and occasionally practicing meditation. According to some suttas<sup>10</sup>, it is known that in Buddha's time, there were a great number of laypeople who realized *nibbāna* while living together with their families.

In another discourse, the Buddha compared his lay disciples to beggars (*caṇḍāda*) or gems, according to their respective practices. A lay disciple is said to be a disciple like a beggar if he or she does not have faith on the Triple Gem or the law of cause and effect, if he or she is immoral, if superstitious and believes in auspicious signs, not in *kamma*, if he or she seeks outside here [outside the Saṅgha Community] for a person worthy of offerings, if he or she does meritorious deeds first there. In contrast, if a disciple does the opposite of the practices mentioned above, he is said to be a gem-like disciple.<sup>11</sup>

## Wrong Livelihood

In *Vāṇijjā Sutta* of *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha instructs laypeople to refrain from five kinds of business or trade that are not right livelihood because they are wrong and harmful both to themselves and to other people around them:

Monks, these five trades ought not to be plied by a lay disciple. What five? Trade in weapons, trade in living beings (including human beings)<sup>12</sup>, trade in flesh, trade in spirits and trade in poison.<sup>13</sup>

This shows that right livelihood for lay disciples is living in harmony with their community and not to associate with any livelihood that is harmful not only to themselves

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<sup>10</sup>M I 487; D II 72; A 451.

<sup>11</sup>E.M. Hare (trans.), **The Book of Gradual Sayings (Āṅguttara-Nikāya) or More Numbered Suttas**, vol 3, (Oxford: PTS, 2006), p. 155.

<sup>12</sup>It is translated from the Pāli word "*sattavāṇijjā*," in which "*satta*" means living beings and "*vāṇijja*" means "trade" but in its commentary, it is explained that "*sattavāṇijjāti manussavikkāyo*" (AA III 303): it says *sattavāṇijjā* means "trading human beings". E.M. Hare (p. 153) translates it "trading human beings" whereas Bhikkhu Bodhi (p. 790) translates it "trading living beings".

<sup>13</sup>E.M Hare (trans.), **The Book of Gradual Sayings (Āṅguttara-Nikāya) or More-numbered Suttas**, vol 3, (Oxford: PTS, 2006), p. 153.

but also to their community. Although all of these five trades do not directly commit any of the five moral precepts, all of them definitely instigate and support to violate them. The Buddha expounded four characteristics of the violation of each of ten unwholesome actions which include threefold unwholesome bodily action, fourfold unwholesome verbal action and threefold unwholesome thought.

Four characteristics of violating this moral precept are as follows: (1) taking life by oneself; (2) encouraging others to take life; (3) approving taking life and; (4) praising thereof.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, other four of the five moral precepts have the same four characteristics because they are constituted parts of the ten unwholesome actions.<sup>15</sup> A lay disciple who observes five precepts, therefore, must abstain from these four ways of committing a moral precept. When one observes the first of five moral precepts, one must refrain from not only on taking life by oneself but also on encouraging others to do so, approving to do so and praising thereof. The Buddha taught not to be associated with all these four ways. Among these ten unwholesome actions, the second of threefold unwholesome mental action is thinking harmful thoughts which include wishing other people and living beings to be in a state of troubles and death.

The second forbidden trade, the practice of slavery, selling and buying human beings for forced labour can be added to the first moral precept because it is cruel, unkind treatment in human relationships. In various discourses, whenever the first moral precept is explained, the Buddha expounded on it:

In this case, householders, a certain one, abandoning onslaught on creatures, is restrained from onslaught on creatures; the stick lay aside, the sword lay aside, he lives scrupulous, merciful, kindly and compassionate to all creatures.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>F.L. Woodward (trans.), **The Book of Gradual Sayings (Āṅguttara Nikāya) or More-numbered Suttas**, vol 5, (Oxford: PTS, 2003), p. 198.

<sup>15</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>I.B. Horner (trans.), **The Collection of Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima-Nikāya)**, vol 1, (Lancaster: PTS, 2007), p. 346; cf. E.M. Hare (trans.), **The Book of Gradual Sayings (Āṅguttara-Nikāya)**, vol 4, (Oxford: PTS, 2006), p. 170..

This clearly shows that the essence of moral teaching of the Buddha is both not to be harmful to any living creatures and to be compassionate with them out of empathy and sympathy. The following Pāli verse from Dhammapa shows such teaching of the Buddha:

All tremble at violence; to all life is dear. Comparing (others) with oneself,  
one should not kill or cause to kill.<sup>17</sup>

Commentarial literature usually explains five factors and six ways of violating the first of five moral precepts, killing a living being. The followings are five factors: (1) the victim must be a living being; (2) the offender perceives that he or she is killing a living being; (3) the offender has the intention to kill; (4) the offender makes the effort of killing; (5) the victim is killed. In these five factors, the intention to kill is the most important because if one accidentally kills a creature without intention to do so, one does not commit the result of killing.

In addition, the following is six ways of making effort to kill a living being that are mentioned in commentaries: (1) killing a living being by the offender himself or herself; (2) telling others to kill a living being; (3) killing a living being shooting by bow and arrows [or a gun]; (4) killing a living being by digging a deep hole on the way [or by placing mines in the hidden ground]; (5) killing a living being by witchcraft, magic, mantra and tantra methods; (6) killing a living being by supernatural power.<sup>18</sup> This shows that the act of killing a creature is an immoral action in either ways, directly or indirectly. In *Samyutta Nikāya*, it is mentioned about a fighting-man who will be reborn in Purgatory of Quarrels because of his livelihood as a fighter in battlefields.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, trade in spirits instigates and supports to violate the fourth of five moral precepts, which is to refrain from having spirituous intoxicants. In *Siṅgālovādasutta*, the Buddha teaches that being addicted to intoxicating liquors is one of the six causes for dissipating wealth. In addition to that, six dangers of the habit of intoxicating liquors are

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<sup>17</sup>R.K. Norman (trans.), **The Word of the Doctrine (Dhammapada)**, (Oxford, PTS, 1997), p. 20.

<sup>18</sup>Pe Maung Tin (trans.), **The Expositor (Atthasālinī)**, vol 1, (London: PTS, 1958), p. 129

<sup>19</sup>F.L. Woodward (trans.), **The Book of the Kindred Sayings (Samyutta-Nikāya) or Group Suttas**, (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1956), p. 217.

mentioned there: actual loss of wealth, increase of quarrels, susceptibility to disease, loss of good character, indecent exposure, impaired intelligence.<sup>20</sup> If a person drinks too much liquors and becomes alcoholic, he or she has more chances of committing moral precepts such as taking life, stealing, telling lies, or adultery<sup>21</sup> and he or she will not be able to live as a responsible human being. Thus, the Buddha guides laypeople not to practise trade in spirits.

## The Proper Ways to Acquire Wealth for Right Livelihood

When a lay disciple refrains from the five kinds of wrong livelihood mentioned above, and observes five precepts in his or her livelihood, he or she has the purity of livelihood. This is, however, just the beginning of getting on the right track for a layperson's life. In everyday life, a layperson has to struggle for living: for food, clothes, and shelter not only for oneself but also for one's family. Living with right-livelihood is a life-long process. An ordinary person in secular life has to meet both good and bad people in his or her working life. One needs to be always mindful to abstain from violating five moral precepts whenever one encounters a situation that persuades to do so. To be able to maintain on the track of right-livelihood for whole life, a lay disciple should have the knowledge of how to make his or her occupation and business prosper by right effort, right action and speech. The Buddha instructed lay disciples not only to refrain from the five kinds of wrong livelihood but also to take right action and right effort that conduces to right livelihood with material prosperity.

In *Dīghajāṇu Sutta*, the Buddha taught that a lay disciple who desires for wealth and happiness in the present life should fulfil four conditions: (1) achievement in alertness; (2) achievement in wariness or accomplishment in protection; (3) good company; (4) the even or balanced life.

The first condition, achievement in alertness, involves hard-working, having skills and competency concerning with one's profession or one's own business. One should be not only proficient and skillful but also tireless and diligent in one's profession and business.

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<sup>20</sup>T.W. Rhys Davids (trans.), *Dialogues of the Buddha*, part 3, (London: Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1956), p. 175.

<sup>21</sup>Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of Aṅguttara Nikāya*, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012), pp. 791-792.

One should have sound judgement with an inquiring turn of mind into ways and means. In addition, one should be able to arrange, manage and carry out business activities so that he or she will have the first condition for acquiring wealth, the achievement in alertness or *uṭṭhānasampadā*.

Having fulfilled the first condition, one has to try to have the second condition, which is being able to protect one's own wealth and possessions from danger of the king or authorities, from the dangers of fire, flooding, thieves and disobedient heirs so that the wealth and possessions will not be decreased or destroyed. It is, thus, called the achievement in wariness or accomplishment in protection or *ārakkhasampadā*.

After that, one should try to have the third condition, which is making friendship with good people who have faith in the Triple Gem and in the law of *kamma*, who are virtuous, observing five precepts, honest, generous and wise. In Buddhist literature, such good friends are called *kalyāṇamitta* and the Buddha gave special emphasis on making friendship with good people both for material and spiritual development. The Buddha taught that having good friendship can lead a disciple even to the achievement of the entire holy life.<sup>22</sup> Making friendship with such good people will make one to be able to fulfil such personalities of good people in oneself by emulating them. It is the advice to seek for favorable environment to make oneself develop in material and spiritual life. Similar instruction of the Buddha can be found in Maṅgala Sutta in which it is instructed not to associate foolish people, to associate wise people and to give honour and respect to honourable people.<sup>23</sup> When one can make friendship with good people, one is said to have the third condition for wealth and happiness, being with good company or *kalyāṇamittatā*.

Finally, the fourth condition a lay disciple should have for wealth and happiness in present life is balanced living: living by neither extravagant nor too frugal way. A lay disciple should always check his incomes and expenditures just like one who uses scales and checks for weight. Incomes should exceed expenditures, and should not be the reverse. One should be careful not to be too frugal to spend on beneficial matters. One whose expenditures exceed income and who leads to excessive luxurious life is spending wealth

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<sup>22</sup>Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya**, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), p. 1524.

<sup>23</sup>Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (trans.), **The Minor Readings (Khuddakapāṭha)**, (London: PTS, 1960), p. 3.



just like eating tīg fruits, which means spending wealth much more than one should do. If one is too frugal to spend sufficiently on beneficial matters, one is said to be leading to death without refuge because one does not invest anything for the benefits of future occasions. The Buddha, thus, advised lay disciples to lead a balanced-living by ensuring that incomes exceed expenditures while spending on beneficial matters.

On balanced living of a lay disciple, the Buddha gave some more advice in *Siṅgālovādasutta*. The advice is to divide incomes into four parts: the first part to be enjoyed, the second and third to invest in business and the fourth to be saved for future needs. It is the advice on managing incomes not only for balanced living but also for prosperity of one's business because it can be seen that the advice on the amount of business investment is doubled to the amount of spending or saving.<sup>24</sup>

When one has achieved these four conditions for wealth and happiness in the present life, one should also be careful to protect oneself from four causes of dissipating wealth: (1) womanizing; (2) drunkenness; (3) gambling; (4) making friendship with evil doers. If one commits these four causes of the dissipating wealth, one's wealth will gradually decrease and finally one's life will lead to poverty. The Buddha compared these four causes of dissipating wealth to four holes of a large tank from which water in the tank leaks out. Similarly, wealth acquired by right livelihood will leak out if one indulges in these causes.<sup>25</sup>

In *Siṅgālovādasutta*, another six practices of dissipating wealth are mentioned and each practice are explained in detail. These are addicted to intoxicating liquors, frequenting the streets at unseemly hours, haunting fairs, infatuation with gambling, associating with evil companions and the habit of idleness.<sup>26</sup> From these two sources, the teaching of the Buddha on the causes of dissipating wealth are altogether seven: (1) womanizing; (2) drunkenness, (3) gambling, (4) associating with evil companions, (5) frequenting the streets at unseemly hours, (6) haunting fairs, (7) the habit of idleness. All of these causes are very practical and still helpful to modern disciples of the Buddha for ensuring their wealth not to be dissipated.

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<sup>24</sup>T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids (trans.), *Dialogues of the Buddha*, part 3, (London: PTS, 1957), p. 180.

<sup>25</sup>Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012), p.1194.

<sup>26</sup>T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids (trans.), *Dialogues of the Buddha*, part 3, (London: PTS, 1957), p.175.

Among the four conditions for wealth and happiness, the first and second are to have right effort with sufficient knowledge and skills on one's profession or business and to protect one's wealth from dangers. The third and fourth conditions are to make friendship with good people and to spend wealth wisely. With these four conditions, lay disciples will be able to make their profession or business successful by right livelihood. After they have acquired wealth and happiness, the Buddha advised that they should not neglect seven causes of dissipating wealth from which they must refrain. By following all of these instructions, a lay disciple will surely be able to acquire wealth and make it to accumulate while maintain oneself in right livelihood.

In *Siṅgālovādasutta*, the Buddha also instructed how laypeople should build a successful and prosperous family life by performing respective duties not only between husband and wife, but also between parents and children. It is instructed that a husband should be dutiful to his wife in five ways: by honouring her, by not disparaging her, by not being unfaithful to her, by giving full authority to her [concerning with all kinds of housework and kitchen management]; by providing her with adornment. Similarly, the wife should be dutiful to her husband in five ways: by properly organizing her work, by being kind to servants, by not being unfaithful to her husband, by protecting stores, and by being skillful and diligent in all she has to do. Husband and wife, if they are dutiful each other according to these instructions, they will surely obtain the accumulation of wealth and happiness.<sup>27</sup>

Family is, however, not built only with husband and wife. Sons and daughters are also important parts of a family. The Buddha, therefore, instructed how parents and children should behave each other to have a happy, prosperous family. Sons and daughters have to fulfil five duties to their parents: by supporting their parents when they are getting old; by helping their parents' family responsibilities; by observing family tradition; by being good inheritors; by doing wholesome deeds and sharing merit after parents have passed away. In return, parents should do the following five duties to their sons and daughters: by preventing them from doing unbeneficial things; by guiding them to do beneficial things; by providing them with suitable education; by getting them married with a suitable partner; by giving them inheritance in due time.<sup>28</sup> In a family, when parents and off-springs have

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<sup>27</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 181-182.

<sup>28</sup>*ibid.*, p. 181.

fulfilled their respective duties according to the Buddha's instructions mentioned above, wealth and happiness will surely be accumulated.

The Buddha guided not only on the relationship between family members, but also on the important relationship between employer and employees. In a business or a trade, without having proper treatment to employees, it will not be prosperous. That is why the Buddha guided to treat employees in five ways: (1) by assigning them work according to their strength; (2) by supplying them with food and wages; (3) by tending them in sickness; (3) by tending them in sickness; (4) by sharing with them usual delicacies; (5) by granting leave at times. These five suggestions of the Buddha are still applicable to modern workplaces even it was instructed over 2500 years ago. The advice on providing employees with healthcare and holidays is the advice far ahead of the time.

### **Proper Ways Utilizing Wealth Acquired by Right Livelihood**

As a constituent of right-livelihood, the Buddha has taught not only on proper ways of acquiring wealth, but also on proper ways of the management and distribution of wealth. Once the Buddha preached to Anāthapiṇḍika-gahapati about five ways of properly utilizing wealth that are acquired by right livelihood.

The followings are five ways of utilizing wealth properly: (1) utilizing wealth for the happiness of oneself, parents, wife, sons, daughters, servants and other family members; (2) utilizing wealth for the happiness of one's friends; (3) utilizing wealth for protection oneself from dangers; (4) utilizing wealth for making five kinds of oblations; (5) utilizing wealth for doing wholesome deeds.

According to the first way of utilizing wealth, it can be seen that in Buddhist teaching, the purpose of wealth is not only for the happiness of oneself selfishly but also for the happiness of all family members including one's own servants who would be staff of one own's business in modern context. It can be said that sharing wealth and happiness among family members and servants is one of the purposes of making business for a Buddhist lay disciple.

The second way of utilizing wealth is sharing the fruits of work among his or her friends. According to the Buddha's teaching, good friends are highly regarded as important people in one's life. They can make one's life happy and successful both materially and spiritually. In *Sīṅgālovāda Sutta*, the Buddha instructed to provide one's friends with four kinds of support: with gifts, with kindly words, with care by looking after their welfare,

with treatment just like oneself and with truthfulness by keeping one's words. If one supports one's friends with these four ways, they will, in return, support him by looking after him when he is inattentive, by looking after his property when he is inattentive, by being a refuge when he is afraid, by not deserting him when he is in trouble and by showing concern for his children.<sup>29</sup>

The first and second ways of utilizing wealth may be assumed as the positive side of right livelihood. Right livelihood without such utilization of wealth would not be meaningful and beneficial. The third way of utilizing wealth properly is using it for protection from such dangers as flooding, fire, king, thieves and disobedient inheritors which are often known as five enemies in Buddhist literature. Such dangers, if they are not protected in advance, can destroy all of one's possessions and some of them can destroy even one's life. By taking preventive measures from these dangers, one will be able to work without danger and will be able to enjoy wealth and happiness together with his or her family members, servants and friends

The fourth way of properly utilizing wealth is to make five oblations: oblation to relatives, guests, ancestors, the king and the deities. It is taking the duties of a householder with wealth acquired by right livelihood. It includes helping relatives, giving taxes to the king, treating properly to guests, and making religious activities for ancestors that have passed away and for deities such as by doing good deeds and sharing merit to them. Helping relatives is also one of thirty-two blessings, the guidelines for the prosperity of both material and spiritual attainment in the life of a householder, which can be found in Maṅgalasutta.<sup>30</sup>

The fifth proper way of utilizing wealth is to make offerings to ascetics and recluses who refrain from intoxication and heedlessness, who are settled in patience and mindness, who tame themselves, calm themselves and train themselves to realize Nibbāna. It is doing good deeds by supporting such people who are dedicated their life to noble practices. According to the Buddha's teaching, it is also doing for the benefits of the hereafter.

The Buddha expounded that if a lay disciple utilizes his or her wealth acquired by right-livelihood through these five ways, he will not feel remorseful on account of wealth

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<sup>29</sup>Maurice Walshe (trans.), **The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya**, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), pp. 467-468.

<sup>30</sup>Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (trans.), **The Minor Readings (Khuddakapāṭha)**, (London: PTS, 1960), p. 3.

whether it comes to prosperity or destruction because such a lay disciple has utilized wealth righteously not only for the benefits of present life but also for the hereafter.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, if a lay person will not utilize his or her wealth beneficially both for the himself or herself and for others, the wealth he or she has acquired will be just like a large fresh water lake which is situated in a remote place and the water in which dries up without having access to anyone for drinking or bathing.<sup>32</sup>

### Exemplary Laypeople from Buddhist Literature

As an example of a lay person's right livelihood, there are only a few stories in Pāli Nikāya. One of them is the story of Dhanañjānī brahman. He is a close disciple of Sāriputta Thera and a tax collector brahman of Rajagaha, the capital of Magadha Kingdom. This story can be found in Majjhimaṇṇāsa of Majjhimanikāya. This is the story of how Sāriputta Thera rebuked Dhanañjānī for his wrong livelihood, showing the way to right livelihood that a lay disciple should take.

Once Sāriputta Thera heard that Dhanañjānī plundered brahman householders under the king's patronage and plundered the king under the patronage of brahman householders. Sāriputta Thera, therefore, decided to pay a visit to Dhanañjānī and to rebuke him for his wrong doing because Dhanañjānī was one of his close disciples. When the Thera met Dhanañjānī, he asked brahman whether he could be able to live without being forgetful and with diligence to do wholesome deeds. Then the brahman replied that he could not live a life of full mindfulness and efforts to do wholesome deeds because he has many family duties. And he confessed that he did wrong ways of livelihood because he had to support his own family, parents, relatives, friends and servants.

Then Sāriputta Thera tried to convince him that his way of reasoning is wrong as a disciple of the Buddha and tried to convince him that for whatever purposes, maybe good or bad, for whomever maybe, for parents or for brahmins and ascetics, if one does unwholesome actions, one will have to reap the results of his *kamma* by oneself. For good purposes, one can do by taking right action and speech in seeking for wealth. Therefore,

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<sup>31</sup>E.M Hare (trans.), **The Book of Gradual Sayings (Aṅguttara-Nikāya) or More-numbered Suttas**, vol 3, (Oxford: PTS, 2006), p. 38.

<sup>32</sup>Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya**, vol 1, (Oxford: PTS, 2000), pp. 182-183

Sāriputta Thera exhorted Dhanañjāni to refrain from unwholesome actions even for good purposes and to take good actions for good purposes as the teaching of the Buddha

In the discourse, it is not mentioned directly that Dhanañjāni followed the guidance of Sāriputta Thera, but later part of the discourse, it is recorded that Dhanañjāni reborned into Brahma-world. Therefore, it can be inferred that he followed the guidance and refrained from work that are not in accordance with Dhamma in his livelihood. Without refraining from wrong livelihood, it would be impossible for him to be reborn in Brahma-world.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, according to the Buddha's teaching, the life of a layperson who takes refuge in Triple Gem is worth living if he or she observes five precepts, practises right livelihood, doing occasional meritorious deeds and taking meditation under the guidance of monks. Although the life of a layperson is not an ideal life for utmost practices of dhamma and vinaya, a layperson can attain highest enlightenment as a layperson if he or she dedicates as much time and effort to the practice of threefold trainings. However, the most important part of a layperson is taking livelihood for oneself and for family. Thus, in the beginning, he or she should take great care in choosing livelihood. If the livelihood is wrong, there will be little chance for him or her to observe precepts or to do any meritorious deed. Having taken right livelihood, he or she should be diligent in workplace and should manage profits or wealth properly both for the benefits of oneself and for others. A layperson with right livelihood that is supported by right effort and right utilization of wealth will have both material and spiritual well-being not only in the present life but also in the hereafter until the life in which he or she attains full enlightenment.

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