

Well-Being Contributed by a Sotāpanna Individual to a Society



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ABSTRACT

A human being of our modern world is an egoist and self-interest seeker. This article is an attempt to study well-being contributed by a *sotāpanna*, a benevolent individual to our modern society in Buddhism. The important characteristics of the *sotāpanna* must be of the following qualities: 1) Possesses the noble eightfold path, 2) Have strong belief in the Buddha, 3) Have faith in the Buddha, and 4) Do not act against the Dhammas attaining. The *sotāpanna* is the first stage of the four progressive atages—*sotapanna*, *sakadagamin*, *anagamin* and *arahat* where *arahat* is the stage culminating stage into full enlightenment. The first stage is that of *sotāpanna* literally meaning “one who enters the stream” and also said to have “opened the eye of the dhamma”. She/he will be free from doubt. The four kinds of well-being an individual who prefers to be a *sotāpanna* has to cultivate in one’s self are, namely: 1) Physical cultivation, 2) Moral cultivation, 3) Mental cultivation, and 4) Wisdom cultivation. Everyone is trying to improve their status. However, people who have attained *sotāpanna* by practicing the Threefold Trainings have no longer need to strive for a better life like common ordinary persons because Dhamma uplifts their lives automatically.

Keywords: Contribution, Well-Being, *Sotāpanna*, Stream-Enterers

1. Introduction

A world society today has witnessed a fall in moral standard in its human resources due to the adoption of the philosophy of individualism and materialism. The more people intend to pursue wealth to satisfy their wants instead of wisdom, the more selfishness and the lower ethical standard of humanity and social problems have tendency to intensify.

Therefore, this article is an attempt to study the characteristics and contributions of the stream-enterers (*sotāpanna*) to human and social development for peaceful cohabitation. Taking these into consideration, a *sotāpanna* (stream-enterer) (Bodhisatta, 77) in the Teaching of Buddha is a person with benevolence and firm faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. Having a lot of this type of individuals will lead to the greatest number of people to the greatest happiness as well as peace. Thus, *sotāpanna* is a kind of ideal human being that the Buddhist and world societies are looking for. This article also aims to find out the factors characteristics that many to attain the stage of stream-entry as well as their characteristics to the society. Actually, the life of a stream-enterer (Bodhisatta, 341) does not appear alien or frightening to contemporary people; rather, it appears admirable (Gutenberg, 2018). Many of stream-enterers at the time of the Buddha were lay disciples and were exemplary people. They were virtuous, led contented family lives, and were engaged in social works by helping their communities and the religion with their insight wisdom and contribute the greatest benefits to the society.

2. Qualities of the Sotāpanna Individual

The attribute of a stream-enterer as mentioned earlier is the abandonment of the first three fetters (*samyojana*)—personality-view, doubt, and attachment to rules and religious practices. These Abandoned Qualities (Payutto, 2018) are shown as the following:¹

1. *Sakkāya-ditthi*: the delusion in ‘self’ the mistaken belief in a ‘self’, which leads to selfishness, conflict, and suffering.
2. *Vicikicchā*: doubts and uncertainties concerning, for example, the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, and the training. These doubts prevent the mind from rousing energy and advancing on the path.

¹ Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto, *Buddhadhamma, The Law of Nature and Their Benefits to Life*, (Thailand: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 2018), p. 588.

3. *Sīlabbata-parāmāsa*: the misapplication of moral precepts, rules, observances, and traditions; these rules are not used as they are intended, as tools for developing such qualities as tranquility and concentration. Instead, they are tainted by craving and fixed views, by seeking personal reward, enhancing self-stature, or blindly following others.

There are other six essential actives that the stream-enterer possesses qualities, namely, faith (*saddhā*), moral conduct (*sīla*), learning (*suta*), generosity (*cāga*), wisdom (*pañña*) and social action (*sārāṇīya-dhamma*). (Ajahn Kukrit, 2011, 4-6)

The Active Qualities of *sotāpanna* in detail are as follow:

1. Faith: stream-enterers possess a firm trust in truth, goodness, and the law of cause and effect. They have confidence in wisdom, that it is possible for human beings to overcome suffering by realizing the conditioned nature of reality. They have faith in the virtuous people who follow this path of wisdom and have a profound respect for the Triple Gem (*ratanattaya*). Their faith is secure and unshakeable because it is rooted in truly understand.

2. Moral Conduct: their behavior through body and speech is appropriate and their mode of livelihood is honest and upright. Their conduct is ‘free’; it is not enslaved by craving. They act in accord with truth to promote virtue, simplicity, dispassion, peace and concentration. Generally speaking, this means following the five precepts, which is considered perfect moral conduct.

3. Learning: ‘those learned in spiritual knowledge’ they have studied the ‘noble teachings’ (*ariya-dhamma*).

4. Generosity: they delight in giving and sharing; they relinquish what they have for others; they are not stingy.

5. Wisdom: they possess the knowledge of a ‘learner’ (*sekha*): they see clearly into the Four Noble Truths, Dependent Origination, and the three characteristics; they abandon all wrong view (*micchā-ditthi*); they have no doubt concerning the Four Noble Truths; they know the world as it truly is.

6. Social Action: stream-enterers abide by the ‘virtues conducive to communal life’ (*sārāṇīyadhamma*), which engender social unity and concord. They do this social action quality perfectly because this quality is known as the summit one that they maintain the last virtue, which connects all the other five qualities.

This *sārāṇīyadhamma*, which means memorable qualities or that are conducive to amiability, that are making for affection, and that are engendering feelings of respect for leading to a sense of fellowship, for lack of contention, for harmony, and for a state of unity, is composed of six actions as follows:²

- 1) Physical acts of lovingkindness (*mettā-kāyakamma*); mutual assistance and respect. It means that herein, a person should maintain on bodily acts of good will or loving kindness with regard to his companions in the holy life, to their faces and behind their backs. This is called *mettā-kāyakamma*.
- 2) Verbal acts of lovingkindness (*mettā-vacikamma*); well-intentioned advice and instruction; well-mannered speech. It means that the person should offer a friendly act of speech or verbal acts of loving-kindness both in public and in private towards his companions in the holy life. This, too, is called *mettā-vacikamma*.
- 3) Thoughts of lovingkindness (*mettā-manokamma*); thinking well of others; wishing to assist others; cheerful demeanour. It means that the person should put forward an act of thought for others or mental acts of good will with regard to his companions in public and in private towards in the holy life. This, too, is called *mettā-manokamma*.
- 4) Distributing lawful gains with others (*sādhāraṇa-bhogitā*). It means that whatever righteous gains the person should obtain them in a righteous way. For example, when the monk goes around into the village for food, he shouldn't enjoy even if only the alms in his bowl- he does not consume and share them alone without making reservations. He should consume them after sharing them in common with his virtuous companions in the holy life. This is called *sādhāraṇa-bhogitā*.
- 5) Possessing a similar virtuous conduct as one's companions (*sīla-sāmaññatā*); acting in an agreeable manner. It means that with reference to the virtues that are un torn, unbroken, unspotted, unsplattered, liberating, praised by the wise men, ungrasped at, leading to concentration—the person should dwell with his virtue in tune with that of his companions in the holy life, to their faces and behind their backs. This is called *sīla-sāmaññatā*.
- 6) Sharing right, noble views with one's companions (*ditthi-sāmaññatā*) which lead to the end of suffering. It means that the person should maintain possessing in common with his companions in the holy life that view that is noble and emancipating, and leads

² M.I. 321.

one who practises in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering both in public and in private. This is called *ditṭhi-sāmaññatā*.³

Therefore, this *sārāṇīya-dhamma*, which means memorable qualities that are making for affection, and that are engendering feelings of respect for each other, is very useful and applicable for society and they can connect with not only the harmonious unity but also the end of suffering or the highest goal of happiness because of practicing and application the Dhamma which is *sārāṇīya-dhamma*.

3. Well-Being Attained as a sotāpanna in View of P.A. Payutto

In his Buddhadhamma, Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto has clarified “wellbeing” as a *sotāpanna* (Payutto 2018, 519) in a sense of *bhāvanā* (cultivation). Here is a brief description of the four kinds of cultivation of well-being:

1. Physical cultivation (*kāya-bhāvanā*): physical development; to develop one’s relationship to surrounding material things (including technology) or to the body itself, in particular, to cognize things by way of the five faculties (eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body) skillfully, by relating to them in a way that is beneficial, does not cause harm, increases wholesome qualities, and dispels unwholesome qualities.
2. Moral cultivation (*sīla-bhāvanā*): development virtuous conduct; to develop one’s behavior and one’s social relationships, by keeping to a moral code, by not abusing or injuring others or causing conflict, and by living in harmony with others and supporting one another.
3. Mental cultivation (*citta-bhāvanā*): to develop the mind; to strengthen and stabilize the mind; to cultivate wholesome qualities, like lovingkindness, compassion, enthusiasm, diligence, and patience; to make the mind concentrated, bright, joyous, and clear.
4. Wisdom cultivation (*paññā-bhāvanā*): to develop and increase wisdom until there arises a comprehensive understanding of truth, by knowing things as they are and by gaining a clear insight into the world and into phenomena. At this stage, one is able to free the mind, purify oneself from mental defilement, and be liberated from suffering. One lives, acts, and solves problems with penetrative awareness.

³Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu and Bodhi Bhikkhu. *The Middle-Length Discourse of the Buddha, A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. (Kandy, Srilanka: BPS, 1995), p. 419.

When one understands the meaning of *bhāvanā* (cultivation), which lies at the heart of the aforementioned ways of practice, one also understands the term *bhāvita* (adept), which is an attribute of those who have completed their spiritual practice and fulfilled the four kinds of cultivation: *bhāvita-kāya*, *bhāvita-sīla*, *bhāvita-citta*, *bhāvita-paññā*.

In addition, the subject of wholistic view of well-being is derived from the three elements of the Threefold Training. This training is simply essential to human being's lives which consist of three facets or three spheres of activities. These three factors combine together to make up a person's life as well as proceed and develop in unison in each individual. Those who have not yet reached the stage of *sotāpanna* (stream-enterers) also try to make their lives better. However, people who have achieved *sotāpanna* by practicing the Threefold Trainings (*Ti-Sikkhā*) no longer need to strive for a better life like common ordinary persons because Dhamma uplifts their lives automatically.⁴

4. Example of Well-Being Contributed to a Society by Sotāpanna Individuals in the Buddha's Time the Case Study

4.1 Anāthapiṇḍika

The reason why he can get well-being is that he is known among Buddhist as a *sotāpanna*, which makes him almost perfect in the spiritual progress of Buddhism, has practice threefold trainings everyday life, that he is also a model gentlemanly leader both his physical and mental well-being. He is one of the persons who are the model Buddhists in leadership of the Buddhists which many people nowadays are interested in leadership. Therefore, Anāthapiṇḍika is considered to be the chief layman devotee of Buddha and became famous not only for his kindness and generosity, but also for his leadership, indicating that he is one of the most important figures in Buddhism, and worth thorough study. Anāthapiṇḍika includes intelligence, ability to motivate others, loving kindness, (Siridhamma 2009, 21) setting a good example, creativity, and fairness. His success in life can be divided into two parts: 1) his success in personal development, during which he

⁴That is evidenced by the saying of the Buddha to Venerable Ānanda, “What is that good practice? It is the Noble Eightfold Path ... which leads to complete disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna”, Nāñamoli, Bhikkhu and Bodhi Bhikkhu. *The Middle-Length Discourse of the Buddha*, 1995, p. 692, (Makhādevasutta, M.83.21).

keeps on developing himself and training himself to be a better person, continuously, until he reached the spiritual status as sotāpanna, 2) his success in contributing to a society, in which he had helped to build the Jeta's Grove Monastery, developed his home town, and brought in Buddha and Buddhism to Sāvatthī, one of the most important cities in Buddhism. Before his death Anāthapiṇḍika became aware that he wanted other lay people to have an opportunity to listen to the deep Dhamma or the teachings of Buddha. Anāthapiṇḍika's life and works reflect strong leadership skills. Present day Buddhist leaders should reflect upon the details of Anāthapiṇḍika's life, especially how he managed to achieve success on both personal and social life planes—both successes depending deeply on Buddhism's moral grounds. And then, there are many sets of Dhamma related to happiness and leadership that Buddha taught country and communities during his life time. When looking at the life of Anāthapiṇḍika, it is found that there are several sets of Dhamma. These sets of Dhamma help him shine and succeed in setting a good example for other Buddhists even up to the present. He practiced the following every day: 1) *Dāna* or charity: Anāthapiṇḍika sacrificed his own pleasure for the well-being of the public by giving away his belongings and food to support others, including giving knowledge and serving the public, 2) *Sīla* or high moral character; he set a good example for controlling his body, speech, and heart in righteousness, 3) *Pariccāga* or self-sacrifice; he was generous, avoided selfishness, and practiced, 4) *Ājjava* or honesty; Anāthapiṇḍika was honest and sincere towards other people, performing his duties with loyalty and sincerity toward others and the religion, 5) *Maddava* or gentleness: he had a gentle temperament, avoiding arrogance, and never defaming others, 6) *Tapa* or self-controlling; Anāthapiṇḍika was calm in many difficult situations, performing his duties without indolence, 7) *Akkodha* or non-anger; he was free from hatred and remained calm in the midst of confusion. This is the reason why Anāthapiṇḍika was always invited to be a judge for his city, 8) *Avihimsā* or non-violence; he exercised non-violence, and he was not vengeful, 9) *Khanti* or forbearance; Anāthapiṇḍika practiced patience and trembling to serve public interests, 10) *Avirodhana* or uprightness; he respected the opinions of others without prejudice. Notwithstanding the above, Anāthapiṇḍika also tried to promote public peace and order to take well-being or to attain the highest goal not only for himself but also for others as a model Buddhist model.⁵

⁵ Nyanaponika Thera and Hecker. Hellmuth, *Great Disciples of the Buddha*, (ed). Bodhi Bhikkhu, Sri Lanka: BPS, 2003. pp. 381-409.

4.2 Visākhā

The reason why she can get well-being is that she is the most delightful and great charm one among all the stories of the early Buddhist women and first female disciples of the Buddha, that she was known as an able manager and an effective communicator, that she was also well respected in the Saṅgha for her wisdom, and generosity. Especially, she has to get wellbeing confidence (*saddhā*) in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha; virtue (*sīla*); charity (*cāga*); and wisdom (*paññā*) in order to get wellbeing for her the whole life. To Visākhā, a deeply emotional and affectionate grandmother who lost her grand-daughter, the Buddha consoled her as following: “From affection spring grief, from affection spring fear, for one who is wholly free from affection, there is no grief, much less fear.” Therefore, she tried to practice to reduce bad things and to take well-being. Also, for promoting the cause of women, the Buddha can be considered as the first emancipator of women and promoter of women and promoter of a democratic way of life. It is to the eternal credit of the Buddha-Dhamma that women were not despised and looked down, but were given equal status with men in their spiritual endeavor on the way to gain wisdom and the complete deliverance or the Supreme Happiness. Similar to other Buddhists or even Buddha himself, Visākhā had first struggled to instill good qualities in her before she looked outside and helped the public. She succeeded in actualizing herself and also succeeded (Siridhamma 2009, 10-13) in developing society.

Through the analysis of Visākhā’s success in developing herself, it was found that: 1) she kept looking for a spiritual master all in life and eventually found the Buddha in the city of Bhaddiya accompanied by a great retinue of monks, 2) she sought out the Dhamma or the teaching of Buddha and realized the truth about life’s purpose and was able to reach the spiritual stage of *sotāpanna* at her age of seven years, 3) Since she was born in a family, she was known to have high skills in keeping the virtue of generosity and to have built up her keeping patience and to do the duties of a wife, 4) her inner strength of, for example, patience, perseverance, compassion, and forgiveness helped her to be a good gentlewoman, 5) she held high moral principles in life, especially always observing the Five Precepts, which the Buddha said to be the foundation to make one a real human being, 6) she set a clear goal and is not detoured by any changes. This was seen from her determination to build her family life, which remains an important spiritual place for Buddhism, 2,500 years later, 7) she keeps developing himself until the last minute of life, by listening to the Buddha’s teaching on a daily basis, 8) Visākhā gave to the needy and priests all the time and she stood foremost among the women lay supporters who served as supporters of the

Order so she lived a model female lay devotee, endowed with unwavering confidence in the Triple Gem, securely settled in the fruit of stream entry, bound for a happy rebirth and in the end, for final deliverance from suffering.⁶

5. Contribution of Sotāpannas to society

Stream-entry is a valid goal for Buddhist practitioners. The reach of this essential stage of awakening and generate a lot of benefit to the society which should be encouraged. The related factors of faith, conduct, learning, generosity, and wisdom, which the Buddha repeatedly taught, and when each individual developed can be considered as equivalent to that of the stream-enterer, should also be encouraged to cultivate in individual. These five factors can be developed gradually, both before the realization of stream-entry and after, and they are relevant to the present time: (Payutto 2018, 568)

1. Today's society is in need of faith that is bases on reason not credulity, and of trust in the human potential for reaching the highest good.
2. Society requires an understanding of the true spirit of moral conduct, as connected to other spiritual qualities; this conduct then guides and protects society.
3. In today's society there is an abundance of learning and a profusion of information, but it often appears to create increased confusion and difficulty for people. Society requires an education in noble principles that reveals the essential meaning of life and points out ways of disentanglement from problem; such learning leads to self-sufficiency and suitable action.
4. Today's society faces increasingly dire economic problems, which require self-sacrifice, generosity and mutual assistance coming from a pure heart. The earth no longer has the resources to sustain people's unbridled greed. People need to discover the happiness that comes from giving and sharing and that leads to social harmony.
5. Contemporary society is full of people who take pride in their intelligence because they have received a formal education. They are able to accomplish extraordinary thing and wield a certain power over nature and the environment. People have become expert at worldly knowledge to the extent that their power is exceptional. But because they lack transcendent wisdom, they have only begun to penetrate the mysteries of the universe. As

⁶Ibid., pp. 281-291.

a result of pride, people risk falling into a pit created by their own intelligence; they meet with obstruction on the physical and frustration in their hearth. To solve these problems, people require noble wisdom.

Looking at the state of the world today and the widespread behavior of people, there are two outstanding qualities of a stream-enterer that should be emphasized as guidelines for living:

First, stream-enterers have a firm understanding of the law of cause and effect. Their trust in wisdom is adequately strong to expect successful results from actions based on mindfulness and balanced effort, and in line with causality. They do not rely on fate or petition a supernatural force from outside to intercede on their behalf.

Second, stream-enterers are firmly established on the path to awakening. Their understanding of the world is sufficient to not be influenced by defilement not to overrate worldly conditions (Loka-dhamma). They have begun to experience transcendent joy and freedom, which brings about an appreciation of the truth. They develop chanda: enthusiasm and love for truth. They desire truth so much that there is no chance of them returning to a fascination with material pleasures.

6. Conclusion

Stream-entry is a valid goal for Buddhist practitioners and reaching this essential stage of awakening should be encouraged. So, we have to apply in Society that the related factors of faith, conduct, learning, generosity, and wisdom, and when developed can be considered equivalent to stream-entry, should also be emphasized. These factors can be developed gradually because they are relevant to the present time. This article is an attempt to study the characteristics of stream-enterers to development the human social world to the peaceful cohabitation and leading the society to the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people as well as a peaceful and happy society. It is a kind of ideal society that the human being is looking for. Therefore, if we follow like sotāpannas, the more people could attain sotāpanna, the world would be more peaceful and it can be the greatest benefits to the society.

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