

Entering the Stream of Ariya

Sotapannapuggala

Compiled

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To a Buddhist, Sotapanna has a ringing sound and is a very encouraging word, that indicates once one enters the stream of Ariya, he(she) is certain to enter ultimately, Nibbana. This is the goal and this is the target for all Buddhist to strive towards – harder and harder and again and again. Through all planes of existence..

Sotapanna – stream winner – is the most fundamental stage in the stream of Ariya path. One has to strive to progress in step, one at a time: from *Sotapanna* to *Sagadagami*; then to *Anagami*; and then to *Arahat*. At the end of one's life span as *Arahat* he(she) enters Nibbana. Based on the Buddha teaching in *Dhammapada*, when the time is ripe for fruition to progress in the Ariya stream, one needs to meet a virtuous person to facilitate to attain the next step. This statement is true with all of the Arahats who had attained arahatship during the life time of Buddha.

The most obvious example in support of this statement is – Rev. Kondanna, whom the Buddha sought out to preach to him his First Sermon. Buddha sought him out to preach to the Pyinsa Waggi – (The famous Five Disciples) his first Sermon - *Dahmmasekkya Sutta*. *At the end of the discourse, Rev. Kondanna enters Sotapatti fruition; Buddha then continued his second sermon - Anatta Lakkhana Sutta*. At the end of the discourse Rev. Kondanna along with millions of Brahmans enter **Arahatship**.

Qualification of Sotapannapuggala

A stream winner (Sotapanpuggala) is one endowed with five attributes:

- 1. An unshakable faith in the Buddha,**
- 2. An unshakable faith in three gems,**
- 3. Observing five precepts even at the risk of his life,**
- 4. Free from the fetters (Sanyojana) of the illusion of self, doubts, wrong belief in rite and rituals outside the Ariya path, jealousy and stinginess,**
- 5. Extinguishes five modes of evil conduct that lead to the four miserable state of *Apaya*, namely, killing, stealing, sexual misconduct (i.e., adultery) lying and wrong views.**

If a stream winner maintain in the status quo, without further strive to progress to the next level, then, he(she) would have to take seven more rebirths in the Samsara – (birth and rebirth cycle). However, he(she) for certain would not be reborn in the four lower realms of Apaya.

The Key to attaining Sotapanna Fruition

The critical ingredient in attaining the Sotapanna fruition is to have good virtuous friends. When a person has accrued enough Parami (perfection) qualified to be a Sotapannapuggala, he(she) must strive to find a virtuous friend; or the virtuous friend would find you. The task requires faith (Sadha) to carry out to completion. When you find yourself a good friend, then, you will enjoy the fruit of your labor:

- 1. Being look after by virtuous person,**
- 2. Being assisted by assistance of virtuous person**
- 3. Being preached by virtuous person,**
- 4. Being assured of a rebirth in celestial world**
- 5. Being assured, never to take rebirth in Apaya.**

To ascertain the quality of a Sotapannapuggala

One who has faith (Sadha) in his strive to gain progress in the Ariya stream can be tested by three attributes:

- 1. Wishing to see and pay homage to a good moral person,**

2. Wishing to listen to the teaching of virtuous person,
3. No stinginess.

His(her) mind is purified, driven by his(her) faith, and knows and understands the benefits of virtues (kusala) against evil (akusala).

How to find a Virtuous Person

In the lifetime of Buddha, many who are ripe for Sotappanna fruition were sought out by Buddha and some by his disciples. In the current setting, in the post Sasana year 2500 error of his dispensation, we may have to look for a true virtuous person. A man of wisdom and virtues should have the following attributes:

1. Faith (saddha)
2. Morality (sila),
3. Diligence (viriya),
4. Wisdom (pañña).

One who has the above four attributes is considered to be a wise and virtuous person as stated in Anguttara.

Supporting Dhammapada Stories, based on Khuddaka Nikaya II - The Dhammapada - Verses and Stories

Verse 30 - The Story of Magha

This is the story of Sakka (Tha Gyar Min) how he perfected his parami (perfection) through the many existences.

While residing at the Kutagara monastery near Vesali, the Buddha uttered Verse (30) of this book, with reference to Sakka, king of the devas.

On one occasion, a Licchavi prince, named Mahali, came to listen to a religious discourse given by the Buddha. The discourse given was *Sakkapanha Suttanta*. The Buddha spoke of Sakka vividly in glowing terms; so, Mahali thought that the Buddha must have personally met Sakka. To make sure, he asked the Buddha, and the Buddha replied,

"Mahali, I do know Sakka; I also know what has made him a Sakka." He then told Mahali that Sakka, king of the devas, was in a previous existence a young man by the name of Magha, in the village of Macala. The youth Magha and his thirty-two companions went about building roads and rest houses. Magha took upon himself also to observe seven obligations. These seven obligations observed throughout his life,

- (1) he would support his parents;
- (2) he would respect the elders ;
- (3) he would be gentle of speech;
- (4) he would avoid back-biting;
- (5) he would not be avaricious, but would be generous;
- (6) he would speak the truth; and
- (7) he would restrain himself from losing his temper.

It was because of his good deeds and right conduct in that existence that Magha was reborn as Sakka, king of the devas.

Then the Buddha spoke in verse as follows:

Verse 30. Through mindfulness (in doing meritorious deeds)
Magha became king of the devas. Mindfulness is always praised,
but negligence is always blamed.

At the end of the discourse Mahali attained Sotapatti Fruition.

Verse 31 - The Story of a Certain Bhikkhu

This is the story of story of certain Bhikkhu's who were much depressed in their meditation and ultimately realized to strive harder: - "for All beings must burn up all fetters of life with Magga Insight.

While residing at the Jetavana monastery, the Buddha uttered Verse (31) with reference to a certain bhikkhu.

A certain bhikkhu, after obtaining a subject of meditation from the Buddha, went to the forest to meditate. Although he tried hard he made very little progress in his meditation practice. As a result, he became very depressed and frustrated. So, with the thought of getting further specific instructions from the Buddha, he set out for the Jetavana monastery. On his way, he came across a big blazing fire. He ran up to

the top of a mountain and observed the fire from there. As the fire spread, it suddenly occurred to him that just as the fire burnt up everything, so also Magga Insight will burn up all fetters of life, big and small.

Meanwhile, from the Gandhakuti hall in the Jetavana monastery, the Buddha was aware of what the bhikkhu was thinking. So, he transmitted his radiance, and appeared to the bhikkhu and spoke to him. "My son," he said, "you are on the right line of thought; keep it up. All beings must burn up all fetters of life with Magga I nsight."

Then the Buddha spoke in verse as follows.

Verse 31. A bhikkhu who takes delight in mindfulness and sees danger in negligence, advances like fire, burning up all fetters, great and small.

At the end of the discourse that bhikkhu attained arahatship then and there.

Verse 32 - The Story of Thera Nigamavasitissa

This is story of Bhikkhu Thera Nigamavasitissa who is well contented with wjatever he could get and how a Virtuous friend Sakka came to help him because of his good moral virtue. This story shows that we need a good virtuous friend to realize our goal.

While residing at the Jetavana monastery, the Buddha uttered Verse (32) with reference to Thera Nigamavasitissa.

Nigamavasitissa was born and brought up in a small market town near Savatthi. After becoming a bhikkhu he lived a very simple life, with very few wants. For alms-food, he used to go to the village where his relatives were staying and took whatever was offered to him. He kept away from big occasions. Even when Anathapindika and King Pasenadi of Kosala made offerings on a grand scale, the thera did not go.

Some bhikkhus then started talking about the thera that he kept close to his relatives and that he did not care to go even when people like Anathapindika and King Pasenadi were making offerings on a grand scale, etc. When the Buddha was told about this, he sent for the thera and asked him. The thera respectfully explained the Buddha that it was

true he frequently went to his village, but it was only to get alms-food, that when he had received enough food, he did not go any further, and that he never cared whether the food was delicious or not. Then and there, the Buddha praised him for his conduct in the presence of other bhikkhus. He also told them that to live contentedly with only a few wants is in conformity with the practice of the Buddha and the Noble Ones (Ariyas), and that all bhikkhus should, indeed, be like Thera Tissa from the small market town. In this connection, he further related the story of the king of the parrots.

.. I will not fall away: It means, will not fall away from Tranquility and Insight Development Practice and is assured of attaining Magga and Phala. (The Commentary)

Once upon a time, the king of the parrots lived in a grove of fig trees on the banks of the Ganges river, with a large number of his followers. When the fruits were eaten, all the parrots left the grove, except the parrot king, who was well contented with whatever was left in the tree where he dwelt, be it shoot or leaf or bark. Sakka, knowing this and wanting to test the virtue of the parrot king, withered up the tree by his supernormal power. Then, assuming the form of geese, Sakka and his queen, Sujata, came to where the parrot king was and asked him why he did not leave the old withered tree as the others had done and why he did not go to other trees, which were still bearing fruits. The parrot king replied, "Because of a feeling of gratitude towards the tree I did not leave and as long as I could get just enough food to sustain myself I shall not forsake it. It would be ungrateful for me to desert this tree even though it be inanimate."

Much impressed by this reply, Sakka revealed himself. He took water from the Ganges and poured it over the withered fig tree and instantly, it was rejuvenated; it stood with branches lush and green, and fully decked with fruits. Thus, the wise even as animals are not greedy; they are contented with whatever is available.

The parrot king in the story was the Buddha himself; Sakka was Anuruddha.

Then the Buddha spoke in verse as follows:

Verse 32. A bhikkhu who takes delight in mindfulness and sees danger in negligence will not fall away*; he is, indeed, very close to Nibbana.

{*=*will not fall away*: It means, will not fall away from Tranquility and Insight Development Practice and is assured of attaining Magga and Phalla. (The Commentary)}

At the end of the discourse, Thera Tissa attained arahatship

Verses 33 and 34 - The Story of Thera Meghiya

This is the story of Thera Meghiya whom the Buddha helps him to control his mind, since the mind is easily excitable and fickle, one should control one's mind. Buddha greatly helps the Thera to attain Sotapanna fruition. Here also Thera was look after by a Virtuous friend – Buddha.

While residing on the Calika Mountain, the Buddha uttered Verses (33) and (34) with reference to Thera Meghiya.

At that time, Thera Meghiya was attending upon the Buddha. On one occasion, on his return from alms-round, the thera noticed a pleasant and beautiful mango grove, which he thought was an ideal spot for meditation. He asked the Buddha's permission to let him go there, but as the Buddha was alone at that time, he was told to wait for a while until the arrival of some other bhikkhus. The thera was in a hurry to go and so he repeated his request again and again, until finally the Buddha told him to do as he wished.

Thus, Thera Meghiya set out for the mango grove, sat at the foot of a tree and practiced meditation. He stayed there the whole day, but his mind kept wandering and he made no progress. He returned in the evening and reported to the Buddha how all the time he was assailed by thoughts associated with the senses, ill will and cruelty (kama vitakka, byapada vitakka and vihimsa vitakka).

So, the Buddha told him that as the mind is easily excitable and fickle, one should control one's mind.

Then the Buddha spoke in verse as follows:

Verse 33. The mind is excitable and unsteady; it is difficult to control and to restrain. The wise one trains his mind to be upright as a Fletcher straightens an arrow.

Verse 34. As a fish quivers when taken out of its watery home and thrown on to dry ground, so does the mind quiver when it is taken out of the sensual world to escape from the realm of Mara (i.e., kilesa vatta, round of moral defilements).

At the end of the discourse Thera Meghiya attained Sotapatti Fruition.

Verse 37 - The Story of Thera Samgharakkhita

This is the story of a young Thera Samgharakkhita, how his uncle assumed a helping hand and Buddha helps him to realize his fateful goal by uttering verse 37. “that the mind has the ability to think of an object even though it might be far away, and that one should strive hard for liberation from the bondage of passion, ill will and ignorance”. We all need a virtuous friend in our journey through the samsara.

While residing at the Jetavana monastery, the Buddha uttered Verse (37) of this book, with reference to the nephew of Thera Samgharakkhita.

There, once lived in Savatthi, a senior bhikkhu by the name of Samgharakkhita. When his sister gave birth to a son, she named the child after the thera and he came to be known as Samgharakkhita Bhagineyya. The nephew Samgharakkhita, in due course, was admitted into the Order. While the young bhikkhu was staying in a village monastery he was offered two sets of robes, and he intended to offer one to his uncle, the thera.

At the end of the vassa he went to his uncle to pay respect to him and offered the robe to the thera. But, the uncle declined to accept the robe, saying that he had enough. Although he repeated his request, the thera would not accept. The young bhikkhu felt disheartened and thought that since his uncle was so unwilling to share the requisites with him, it would be better for him to leave the Order and live the life of a layman.

From that point, his mind wandered and a train of thoughts followed. He thought that after leaving the Order he would sell the robe and buy a she-goat; that she-goat would breed quickly and soon he would make

enough money to enable him to marry; his wife would give birth to a son. He would take his wife and child in a small cart to visit his uncle at the monastery. On the way, he would say that he would carry the child; she would tell him to drive the cart and not to bother about the child. He would insist and grab the child from her; between them the child would drop on the cart-track and the wheel would pass over the child. He would get so furious with his wife that he would strike her with the goading-stick.

At that time he was fanning the thera with a Palmyra fan and he absentmindedly struck the head of the thera with the fan. The thera, knowing the thoughts of the young bhikkhu, said, "You were unable to beat your wife; why have you beaten an old bhikkhu ?" Young Samgharakkhita was very much surprised and embarrassed at the words of the old bhikkhu; he also became extremely frightened. So he fled. Young bhikkhus and novices of the monastery chased him and finally took him to the presence of the Buddha.

When told about the whole episode, the Buddha said that the mind has the ability to think of an object even though it might be far away, and that one should strive hard for liberation from the bondage of passion, ill will and ignorance.

Then the Buddha spoke in verse as follows:

Verse 37. The mind wanders far and moves about alone: it is non-material; it lies in the cave (chamber) of the heart. Those who control their mind will be free from the bonds of Mara

At the end of the discourse the young bhikkhu attained Sotapatti Fruition.

"We have a saying – when your time is up, a person of virtue would appear before you., all you need to do is strive hard".

With Ananta Metta

Maung Paw

