



# The Life of Reclusheship and Right Livelihood

Ven. Sandarwara,

Phramaha Natakorn Piyabhani, Dr.

International Buddhist Studies College (IBSC)

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University,

Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, Thailand

Corresponding Author Email: yawgyee@gmail.com



## Abstract

The aim of this research paper is to explore the life of reclusheship and delineate the notion of right livelihood from Buddhist perspectives. According to the Theravāda Buddhism, Magadha was considered as the center of religious life and speculation. Needless to say, Magadha was less favored by Orthodox Brahmins rather than North West of India. Those who directly opposed to the Brahmins and their way of life came to be referred by the general term *Paribbājaka*, which means wandering recluses. However, the recluses have to be faced with the task of sustaining of bodies in order to last long precious human lives and to practice the *Dhamma*. In this regard, a question might be occurred on the notion of right livelihood for the life of reclusheship. The Buddha provides a clear instruction on the right livelihood for the Saṅgha Order in the context of ancient Indian society. Henceforth, the researcher would like to explore the meaning of reclusheship, right-livelihood, and how to practice moral discipline regarding to livelihood as a recluse or a monk.

**Keywords:** Reclusheship, Wrong-Livelihood, Right-Livelihood, Morality, and Discipline.

## 1. Introduction

In ancient India, the ideal of recluseship life was common to all recluses which aimed up the attainment of purity or final release from the recurrent cycle of existence. There are two types of renunciation in terms of ‘going forth’, as ‘*Samaṇa*’ and ‘*Brahmaṇa*’. These two words can be found many time in the Tipitaka. The Brahmaṇas believed that this release could be achieved by sacrifice. It is further believed that purity, *Suddhi* and emancipation, *Vimutti*, depended on both sacrifice and self-mortification. The purpose of human life is to find happiness. However, in this case, we can divide into two types of happiness: worldly happiness in the household life and supra-mundane happiness in the recluseship life. The one and only goal of Buddhism is completely extinct or cessation of *dukkha* or all forms of conflict, both inner conflict and outer conflict. This goal of Buddhism is Nibbāna, which is variously defined as extinction of craving (*rāgakkhaya*), extinction of hatred (*dosakkhaya*), and extinction of ignorance (*mohakkhaya*). In this modern era, it can be referred to the term of the *summum bonum* or the supreme bliss and it can be synonymous of the Pāli term ‘*parama-sukha*’, because it is devoid all *dukkha* or suffering by means of tranquility or peace. Taking the term *dukkha* strictly in this sense of inner conflict, the Buddha has explained in the *Ānguttara Nikāya* that it is in this fathom long body which is endowed with perception and mind that *dukkha* as well as its cessation lie. The final solution presented by Buddhism to this problem of *dukkha* is the ethical perfection of the individual, which in other words means realization of *Nibbāna*.

At the beginning of Buddhism, the only goal of religious life was cessation of this *dukkha*. The Buddha intended to build a community of followers totally free from conflict and who could live at peace with themselves and others, which is so called the Saṃgha Order. Going forth or recluse life is a kind of tradition in ancient India before the Buddha appear, however, it is different purpose and practice from Buddhism. In Buddhism Right Livelihood is one of important matter for one who set going forth for spiritual attainment. Therefore, the researcher would like to express in this small article about the recluseship life and right livelihood in accordance with Theravāda Buddhism.

## 2. The Meaning and the Life of Recluseship

The term ‘recluse’ is general interpretation of the Pāli word ‘*samaṇa*, *sāmañña*, *brahmana*’, etc. the root meaning is ‘to strive’. The word was originally applied to those who had left home and the society in search of truth and practiced many forms of austerities and asceticism in ancient India.

During the Buddha's time the term was used for all those homeless seekers who did not follow the Brahmanism but left the home on spiritual ground. There were all kinds of these spiritual seekers; some of them practiced gruesome forms of austerities and lived a celibate life while others freely interacted with females. It also included those who believed in some form of god as well as skeptics and atheists, mystics and rationalists, etc. They wandered often from city to city and from village to village, some of them lived in the thick jungles and others near the villages or towns.

They often interacted with each other and engaged in the debates. There were specially constructed halls for this class of people to come and rest and debate with each other in many cities and towns of northern India. They also interacted with people and gave teachings to them who in turn supported them by giving them food, shelter and medicine or other basic necessities of life. *Samaṇa* formed a distinct class of people which did not fall under the tightly organized class and caste-bound ancient Indian society (Warder, 1999: 23). Their existence provided many people with an alternative lifestyle for those who were frustrated with the ways of the world and were looking for a way out of it.

The Buddha was also known as the *Samaṇa* or the *Samaṇa Gautama* or the Recluse Gautama. The followers of the Buddha formed a distinct class and were recognized as the followers of the recluse Gautama. The whole sutta looks at the question of why so many "sons of good family" left home, wealth and status in society and followed the Recluse Gautama (Ambedkar, 2012: 149).

For many people it was hard to understand why these people left the comfort of home, the people they loved and the status and pleasures of the world. What was in it for them, such a question would be daunting for many till the Buddha explains clearly the benefits of living the life of recluse.

### 3. Aspiration of Recluseship Life

According to Buddhism, someone should not enter into Saṃgha Order to get freedom from worldly responsibilities. Buddhist recluseship life has only one spiritual aspiration or purpose. It is that the termination of suffering, *dukkha nirodha* (M. I. 339), which the Buddha praised as the noblest ambition. On the other hand, the following synonymous also can be found in the Tipiṭaka. They are:

- 1) Elimination of lust (*Rāgavirāgattam*),
- 2) Removal of fetters of existence (*Samyajanamugghātattam*),
- 3) Destruction of predispositions (*Anusayasamugghātattam*),

- 4) Extinction of defilements (*Āsavānaṃ Khayattaṃ*),
- 5) Realization of the fruits of release through wisdom (*Vijjāvimutti-phalasacchikiriyattaṃ*),
- 6) Realization of knowledge and insight (*Ñāṇadassanattaṃ*), and
- 7) Complete liberation from the whirl of existence (*Anupādāparinibbā-nattaṃ*).

Henceforth, the Mahāassapua Sutta of Majjhima Nikāya said that the one concern of ‘*Brahmacariya*’, which means a life of recluseship, is the attainment of that poise and freedom of mind, which is *Nibbāna* (M. I. 197). The three stages of *Sīla*, *Samādhi* and *Paññā* together mark the complete development of Buddhist monastic life which leads to the acquisition of true knowledge, *Aññā* (M. I. 71).

On the contrary, it is said that self-training in terms of these three results in the elimination of greed, hatred and delusion. Thus the true endeavor to develop all these aspects is made the basis of all recluseship aspirations. The Ākaṅkheyya Sutta of Majjhima Nikāya gives it as a prescription for the perfection of recluseship life. It is held out as the best code for the attainment of the highest goal in recluseship life, including Arahatsip (M.I 35). Of three aspects, it is clear from the evidence of the discourses that out of the threefold Sikkhā special emphasis was laid on *Sīla* as the foundation of all spiritual attainments. The Buddha himself is seen assuring his disciples of the efficacy of *Sīla* as the basic of spiritual progress (S. V. 187). The recluseship life is well established on the *Sīla* basis all else seems to follow in natural succession. The Ākaṅkheyya Sutta begins with the admonition of the Buddha to the monks to be mindful of their *Sīla* and acquire thereby the necessary discipline (M. I. 33). The perfection in *Sīla* marks the first stage in the spiritual development of the Buddhist disciple and this advice of the Buddha to his disciples are found in many places in the Sutta Piṭaka, sometimes addressed to individual and sometimes to the Saṃgha as a whole. It is clear that *Sīla* was the corner stone of the Buddhist monasticism and first and foremost, the Buddhist disciple had to be a virtuous, *Sīlavā*.

One, therefore, who enters the life of recluseship having the spiritual aspiration should be fulfill the training of morality. The Buddha taught in this Sāmaññaphala Sutta, first of all, about the fulfillment of moralities are the fruit of recluseship. Later on, the Buddha explained as the higher fruits: concentration and wisdom.

#### 4. Right-Livelihood

Right livelihood is the third factor of the Noble Eightfold Path. It belongs to the group of the morality or *Sīla* together with Right speech and Right action. Generally, the Buddha said five kinds of Wrong livelihood in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* thus “Monks, a lay follower should not engage in five types of trade. Which five? Trade in weapon, trade in living beings, trade in meat, trade in intoxicants, and trade in poison (S. 45).” On the other hand, the Buddha gives the definition of Right livelihood in *Samyutta Nikāya*. “And what is right livelihood? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, having abandoned dishonest livelihood, keeps his life going with right livelihood, this is called Right livelihood.”

Right livelihood is an essential factor in the way of Noble Eightfold Path, it is said in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, “How is right view the forerunner? One discerns wrong livelihood as wrong livelihood, and right livelihood. And what is wrong livelihood? Scheming, persuading, hinting, belittling, and pursuing gain with gain. This is wrong livelihood.”

“One tries to abandon wrong livelihood and to enter into right livelihood: This is one’s right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong livelihood, to enter and remain in right livelihood: This is one’s right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities; right view, right effort and right mindfulness – run and circle around right livelihood” (M. III. 117).

Have been looked at these teachings, we can understand that Right livelihood is related to other Noble factors and it is played an essential role in the life of monkhood as well. However, Right livelihood for laities is slighter than recluseship or going forth life. Recluseship life’s right livelihood is very simple, but it would be difficult for householder to follow it.

Wrong livelihood and Right livelihood for ascetic life is explained in detail in this *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* as Mahā Sīla. “Great king, the *bhikkhu* who is thus possessed of moral discipline sees no danger anywhere in regard to his restraint by moral discipline. Just as a head-anointed noble warrior who has defeated his enemies sees no danger anywhere from his enemies, so the *bhikkhu* who is thus possessed of moral discipline sees no danger anywhere in regard to his restraint by moral discipline. Endowed with this noble aggregate of moral discipline, he experiences within himself a blameless happiness. In this way, great king, the *bhikkhu* is possessed of moral discipline (D. I. 2).”

There are four kinds of Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*):

- i. *Duccarita micchā-ājīva virati*: In the case of laities, refraining from wrong livelihood by means of immoral physical and verbal actions.
- ii. *Anesana micchā-ājīvavirati*: In the case of monks and recluses, refraining from wrong livelihood, e.g. by means of giving pursuits and flowers to laymen to win their affection.
- iii. *Kuhanādi micchā-ājīva virati*: In the case of monks and recluses, refraining from trickery and deception by means of working wonders.
- iv. *Tiracchāna vijjā micchā-ājīva virati*: In the case of monks and recluses, refraining from wrong livelihood, e.g. by means of performing base arts, such as reading signs and omens, which are against the rules and practices of the Order.

The Buddha taught on right livelihood or transcendental livelihood for the Saṃgha in the context of ancient Indian society where the populace respected spiritual practitioners and it was the norm for householders to support wandering contemplatives.

Being a monk or having entered recluseship, there is no way to be support for oneself. In Theravāda Buddhism, a monk has to follow the Vinaya as laid down by the Buddha. A monk should not seek for wrong livelihood. The Buddha allows only four great requisites for a monk. They are: shelter, clothing, alms-food, and medicine.

A monk is allowed to collect, receive and consume food between dawn and midday. He is not allowed to consume food outside of this time and he is not allowed to store food overnight. Plain water can be taken at any time without having to be offered. Although a monk lives on whatever is offered, vegetarianism is encouraged. There are some of special rules and regulation in Vinaya Piṭaka. Let's see how the duties for going alms-around is. They are as follows:

“Monks, if a monk when he is walking for alms-food thinks: ‘I will enter this village,’ having dressed himself with his inner robe all round him so as to cover the three circles, having fastened his waistband, having made one bundle, having clothed himself in his upper robes, having fastened the block, having washed, having taken a bowl, he may enter the village carefully and unhurriedly. He should go amid the houses properly clad ... he should not go amid the houses crouching down on his heels. When he is going amid the houses he should consider: ‘I will enter in this (fashion), I will leave in this.’ He should not enter too hastily, he should not leave

too hastily, he should not stand too far away, he should not stand too close, he should not stand too long, he should not turn away too soon. While he is standing, he should consider: ‘Are they willing to give alms or are they not willing?’ If she puts aside her work or rises from her seat or wipes a spoon or wipes a dish or sets it out, he should stand still, thinking: ‘It is as though she is willing to give.’ When alms are being given, having raised the outer cloak with the left hand, having uncovered the bowl with the right hand, having grasped the bowl with both hands, the alms should be received, but one should not look at the face of the donor of the alms. He should consider: ‘Are they willing to give curry or are they not willing?’ If she wipes a spoon or wipes a dish or sets it out, he should stand still, thinking: ‘It is as though she is willing to give’. When the alms have been given, having covered the bowl with the outer cloak, one should turn away carefully and unhurriedly. One should go amid the houses properly clad ... one should not go amid the houses crouching down on one’s heels (Vin. II. p. 207).

“Whoever returns first from the village for alms-food should make ready a seat, he should bring forward water for (washing) the feet, a footstool, a foot-stand, he should set out a refuse bowl, having washed it, he should set out drinking water and water for washing. Whoever should return last from the village for alms-food, if there should be the remains of a meal and if he should so desire, he may eat them; but if he should not so desire, he may throw them away where there is but little green grass or he may drop them into water where there are no living creatures. He should put up the seat, he should put away the water for (washing) the feet, the footstool, the foot-stand, he should put away the refuse-bowl, having washed it, he should put away the drinking water and the water for washing, he should sweep the refectory. Whoever should see a vessel for drinking water or a vessel for washing water or a vessel (for water) for rinsing after evacuation, void and empty, should set out (water). If it is impossible for him (to do this) he should set out (water) by signaling with his hand, having invited a companion (to help him) by a movement of his hand; but he should not for such a reason break into speech. This, monks, is the observance for monks when they are walking for alms-food and which should be observed by monks when they are walking for alms-food.”

Offering should be done in a respectful manner, making the act of offering a mindful and reflective one, irrespective of what one is giving. It can approve that recluship has right livelihood for food. Not only for food, but also others clothing, resident, and medicine are also very simple and pure livelihood.

Henceforth, the Buddha said in the Tuvattaka Sutta of Sutta Nipāta thus:

“*Kayavikkaye na tiṭṭheyya, Upavādaṃ bhikkhu na kareyya kuhiñci;  
Gāme ca nābhisajjeyya, Lābhakamyā janaṃ na lapayeyya* (Snp. 4. 14).”

They would not continue at a trade, a bhikkhu would not incur blame at all;

They would not linger in a village, nor cajole people hoping to get stuff.

Therefore, the life of ascetic or recluseship could not do any worldly livelihood means. They have to avoid and follow the rules and regulation laid down by the Buddha, which is generally so called Vinaya.

Being an ascetic should not engage to pursuit worldly livelihood. Theravāda Buddhist monks are strictly limited by the Vinaya with regard to their way of acquiring, owning, and consuming food. The most important principle for them is to live as going around for alms-food, and to depend on donation (*dāna*) given by lay people. In Theravāda Buddhism, this way of life is thought to be the optimum approach, though not the only one, to achieve liberation (*nibbāna*). Monks, however, cannot live without any food.

The characteristic of a monk is differing from the worldly person. Even to get a food could not trade or make any other types of worldly livelihood, such as plaguing or trading, and so on. There are four types of morality to be observed by a monk. They are:

1. *Pātimokkha Sīla* -- The Fundamental Moral Code (major offenses related to immoral, cruel, harmful and selfish activities.)
2. *Indriyaśamvara Sīla* -- Morality pertaining to sense-restraint.
3. *Ājīvaparissuddhi Sīla* -- Morality pertaining to purity of livelihood.
4. *Paccayasannissita Sīla* -- Morality pertaining to the use of requisites pertaining to life (Ñānamoli, 2010: 14).

These four kinds of morality are collectively called *Sīla-Visuddhi* (Purity of Virtue). When a person enters the Order and receives his ordination he is called a *Sāmaṇera* \_Novice. He is bound to observe Ten Sāmaṇera Precepts with certain disciplinary codes for leading a monastic life until he receives his higher ordination? *Upasampada* \_ to become a Bhikkhu or fully ordained monk (Dhammananda, 2002: 208). A bhikkhu or a monk is bound to observe the above-mentioned four kinds of higher morality which comprise 227 rules in brief and apart from it, there are several other minor ones. The four major ones which deal with celibacy and abstinence from stealing, murder, and false claims to higher spirituality must strictly be observed. If he violates any one of these, a monk is regarded



as a defeated person in the Saṃgha community. He will be deprived of certain religious rights by the Saṃgha community. In the case of other rules which he violates, he has to face many other consequences and make amends according to the gravity of the offence.

Therefore, the ancient Elder monks gave a remark on the Vinaya thus: “*vinayo nāma sāsanaṃ āyu, vinaye ṭhite sāsanaṃ ṭhitaṃ nāma hoti*”, vinaya is the life blood of the teaching of the Buddha, as long as it is alive, there will be last long the Buddha’s teaching.

All the teachings of the Buddha can assume up into three words: *Sīla*, *Samādhi*, and *Paññā*. These three are interrelated and interconnected each other. In the Vinaya Piṭaka of Cūlavagga, it says that the *Sīla* is a condition to attain *Samādhi* and *Paññā*. Without observing of *Pīla*, no one can attain the *Samādhi* and *Paññā*. One, who does not have *Samādhi* and *Paññā* cannot achieve *Nibbāna*. Thus, *Sīla* is one of the essences of Buddhism (Vin, VI, p. 416).

The Sumaṅgalavilāsinī, a commentary on *Sīlakkhandhavagga* of Dīgha-Nikāya says that through observing of *Sīla* one avoids the extreme of indulgence of sense-desire, through *Samādhi*, avoids the extreme of self-mortification and cultivates the Middle Way (Eightfold Noble Path) through *Paññā*. It shows that the way of overcoming the state of loss (*Apāyasamatikkamānuayoga*) is the observation of *Sīla*, that the way of overcoming the elements of sensual desire is the practice of *Samādhi* and that the way of overcoming the all becoming is *Paññā* (Sv. I. pp. 56-158).

Of *Sīla*, *Samādhi* and *Paññā*, the *sīla* is the first stepping-stone. When the Buddhists count the teachings of the Buddha in linear, they say *Sīla* first and then *Samādhi* and *Paññā*. According to the Buddha’s teachings, one has to go to the highest goal of *Nibbāna* step by step. With absence of the observing of *Sīla*, only with *Samādhi* and *Paññā* he cannot attain the highest goal of *Nibbāna*.

## 5. Benefits of the fulfillment of Morality

The virtue of purification of livelihood means the abandonment of unbecoming, wrong search of requisites. A good bhikkhu must avoid such seeking for alms-food etc. That are of impure origin and he should be careful to make use of those which are of pure origin. What are those of pure origin? Food or robes which are obtained from the community of Saṃgha or a group two or three bhikkhus or from a layman who has confidence in his having such special qualities as purity of virtues, concentrated mind, canonical knowledge etc. are those of pure origin. Above all, those obtained on alms-round are of extremely pure origin.

The benefits of perfecting virtue are the acquisition of the several qualities beginning with non-remorse, and getting a large fortune as a consequence of diligence; being a fair name spread abroad; participating any assembly without fear or hesitation; being death unconfused; taking birth in a happy destined place (D. II. p. 72).

The Buddha mentioned the following five benefits gained by one who is virtuous and who is established in morality:

- (1) Based on mindfulness through *Sīla-sikkhā*, he acquires great wealth;
- (2) He gains fame and good reputation;
- (3) He approaches and enters any assembly of nobles. Brahmins, householders or recluses with complete self-assurance, without any indication of inferiority complex;
- (4) He lives the full span of life and dies unconfused.
- (5) He is reborn after that in happy realms of deities and human beings.

## 6. Conclusion

As a conclusion of this small paper, the researcher would like to assume up that *Sīla*, or morality is the essential factor of the higher step for the noble practices. Furthermore, in term of morality, right-livelihood is one of requirement duties which has to be fulfilled by the recluses. Henceforth, the researcher would like to conclude a word of the Buddha in the Cūlavagga Pāli of Vinaya Piṭaka, “*vattaṃ apripūrento, na sīlaṃ paripūrati, asuddha-sīlo duppañño, citt’ekaggaṃ na vindati, vikkhitta-citto n’ekaggo, sammā dhammaṃ na passati, apassamāno saddhammaṃ, dukkhā na parimuccati*”, being imperfect in observance one does not perfect morality, impure in morality, of poor wisdom, one knows not one-pointedness of mind, the mind wavering, not one-pointed, sees not *dhamma* rightly, not seeing true *dhamma*, one is not freed from ill. For a recluseship life, the right-livelihood is very importance to be performed as a requirement for the training of morality.

## References

- Ambedkar, B. R. (2012). *Buddha and his Dhamma*. Critical edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Anderson and Smith, H. (eds.) (1913). *Suttanipata*. London: PTS.
- Dhammananda, K. S. (2002). *What Buddhist Believe*. Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society.
- Horner, I. B. (tr.) (1952). *The Book of the Discipline*. Vol. V. Bristol: The Burleigh Press.
- Morris, R. and E. Hardy (eds.) (1900). *Āṅguttara-Nikāya*. London: PTS.
- Nānamoli, Bhikkhu (tr.) (2010). *The Path of Purification*. Colombo: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Peer, L. (ed.) (1904). *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (1904). London: PTS.
- Rhys Davids, T. W. and Carpenter, J.E. (eds.) (1901). *Dīgha-Nikāya*. London: PTS.
- Trencker, V. and Chalmers, R. (eds.) (1901). *Majjhima Nikāya*, London: PTS.
- Warder, A.K. (1999). *Indian Buddhism*. Delhi: Motilal Banarasadas Publication.