

SAPPURISO – QUALITIES OF A VIRTUOUS PERSON

The Buddha without a doubt is the greatest of all virtuous ones there ever lived in this world. Throughout countless births as a Bodhisattva – a being aspiring for full enlightenment – *Samma Sambodhi*, He fulfilled Ten Great Perfections in all its lesser and greater aspects to the point of saturation.

Finally, in the last birth as King Vessantara, prior to being born as Prince Siddhartha of Kapilavastu, in ancient India, destined to achieve this goal, He left all worldly wealth, luxuries of a prosperous kingdom, to practice renunciation. The holy scriptures state that even the great earth trembled as if in wonderment.

The Buddha has therefore no equal in virtue in this world of gods and men. Many a time, the Buddha has extolled the qualities of a virtuous person – a *sappuriso*, who possesses noble qualities of heart and mind that think and act in various uncommon ways.

“One who gives solace and comfort to a person in need, a person in sorrowful circumstances, such a one is a *sappuriso*.”

In Dhammapada V. 252, again a *sappuriso* is defined, thus:

***The fragrance of flowers, sandalwood, jasmine, lavender,
drift with the wind always;
All pervading is the sweetness of the fragrance
of noble deeds done by virtuous ones.***

The first virtue is **Gratitude**. The Buddha's first lesson to the world was a display of gratitude to the stately Bo-tree that gave Him shelter when striving to attain the supreme goal. A person who serves others and a person who is grateful for help obtained are two extremely rare people in this world. Maha Thera *Sariputta* stood foremost as one who constantly showed gratitude to his mentor Thera Assaji who led him to the Buddha.

The second virtue of a *sappuriso* is **Wisdom**. A wise person lives his life by being a friend to himself and a friend to others. He gives solace to the world. Such a one is likened to a precious gem by the Buddha. “Wisdom purifies one” *pannaya parisujjati* – so said the Buddha to the demon Alavaka.

Being a **Virtuous Friend – Kalyana mitta** is the third feature of a *sappuriso*. There are different types of friends one may meet in one's life. A Kalyana mitta is one who guides and advises on how to progress in this world and realize the Truth. Such a friend also helps when another is in need, shares another's joys and sorrows, does not desert one when faced with trouble and worry; and defends against enemies and protects one from danger.

Another feature of a virtuous person is that they feel the misfortunes, sorrow, sadness of another and assists them in whatever way is possible. The world today is truly in dire straits. Poverty is seen everywhere. People have no food, clothing and shelter, no medicine for their ailments, students find it hard to buy supplies of books and stationery for their needs, employment is scarce.

The Buddha words “*anato lokasannivaso*” – people of the world are destitute has a literal meaning in today’s context. They are all helpless faced with illness, decay and death. Therefore, it is the bounden duty of virtuous people who have much, to assist and share some of their wealth and earnings with people who suffer in various ways.

Along with these features, a virtuous friend is **pleasing to others**, is worthy of respect, is worthy of offerings. When one diligently fulfils one’s duties and is of wholesome conduct, then one becomes worthy of respect. No jealousy, ill-will, greed or hatred is found in such a person. His actions are beneficial to the world and promotes deeds of goodwill in others too.

A virtuous friend is **constant in his friendships**. Does not look for faults in others. Good friends are likened to pots of gold that cannot be damaged by hard blows upon them.

As Bodhisatva, our great teacher spent aeons in the journey of birth and death serving humanity in the 4 great acts of charity – i. being charitable, generous - expecting nothing in return, ii. pleasant speech, iii. doing worthy exemplary deeds and iv. displaying equanimity. It is service that cannot be measured nor expressed in words.

The wealthy must be charitable, the virtuous must cultivate generosity and help generate these same virtues in others, thus, should we treat the world.

The nature of a virtuous person – a *sappurisa* – is also summed up in the story of how Magha became Sakka - king of the heavenly realm *Tavatimsa* (abode of the Thirty-Three).

Magha was a young man who with his 32 friends did many noble deeds to help people. These were extraordinary deeds born out of common sense, caring and generosity. Magha and his friends had a code of good conduct they followed conscientiously.

Throughout his life, Magha and his thirty two friends abided by this sevenfold code of good conduct as follows: supported his parents, respected the elders, spoke gently, never to slander, to be generous, to always speak the truth, and never to become angry. He along with his thirty-two friends did numerous acts of selfless

service by clearing away rubbish, making roads, building bridges, parks and gardens, rest places, water fountains and many other socially useful tasks for the common good of the people.

(Compiled by Srīma Warusawithana)