

A Comparative Study on the Benefits of Being Acquainted with the Virtuous Person (According to Buddhist and Christian Literature)

Phyo Su Kyi ¹

Abstract

In both Buddhist and Christian Literature, it is said that an ethical man is the one who brings the welfare to his acquaintances and to himself by doing the good things and engaging in good conducts. The data for the study were collected from the *Pāli* scripture, commentaries (*Aṭṭhakathā*) and Christian Bible and comparative method is used to present the data. The present study intends to highlight the benefit of becoming prosperous and having escaped from evil dangers on account of getting acquainted with the ethical men. That is why a person who wants to gain prosperity must associate with the one who is wise and upright. This shall bring in the welfare of oneself and the others. In this paper, the main focus of the study is on virtuous principles. It is also hoped that the other aspects of both Literature should be explored. The result of the study proves that when the focus is on the benefits of being acquainted with the virtuous person, it was observed that the same benefits are said to be attainable either according to Buddhist Literature or according to Christian Literature.

Keywords: virtuous persons, acquaintances, benefits

Introduction

There are four widely practised religions in the world. They are Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. As Myanmar is a multi-religious country, people practise different religions. The following shows the religions in Myanmar. Buddhism 88%, Christianity 6.2%, Islam 4.2%, Hinduism 0.5%, Tribal religions 0.8%, Other 0.2%, No religion 0.1%².

The above that Buddhism and Christianity are the most worshiped religions in the country.

In the Buddhist Literature, The Buddha is the one who taught not only supra mundane well-being for all beings in the world but also the instructions for having good social life for mundane well-being. Among the teachings of the Buddha, there are many instructions of do's and don'ts relating to education, social, and economic affairs.

In this Christian Bible, there are all together 66 books of Bible and 40 different writers wrote it in different languages for people from different walks of life. The Bible is a collection of sacred texts or scriptures instructed by the Lord, during 1600 years after his birth. Old Testament contains 39 books and new testament consists of 27 books.

The stories about the people who get benefits for being acquainted with the virtuous person from both Buddhist and Christian Literature would be explored in this study.

¹ Daw, Assistant Lecturer, Department of Oriental Studies, Mandalay University of Foreign Languages

² <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>.

Aim

The present study intends to highlight the benefit of becoming prosperous and having escaped from evil dangers on account of getting acquainted with the ethical men.

Materials and Method

The data for the study were collected from the *Pāli* scripture, commentaries (*Aṭṭhakathā*) and Christian Bible and comparative method is used to present the data.

Research Questions

1. What benefits can a person get for being acquainted with the virtuous person?

Literature Review

Theoretical Background

Meanings of the Word Virtuous Person in Buddhist and Christian

The word 'virtuous person' is defined in Myanmar language as "one who performs only right and good deed".¹

Whereas in *Pāli* language it is defined as "*Sappurisa*" means "noble man"²

A virtuous person is the one who brings peacefulness even when his name is heard. He is always in right thinking, speaks right words, engages in right thoughts and does right actions.³

A virtuous person is favoured by the Lord. He always lets his descendants inherit his property.⁴

Related Researches

Association with Virtuous person is blessing that preached by our Lord Buddha and everyone should follow this blessing *Paṇḍitānañca sevanā* in the *Maṅgala Sutta*, (သုတေသနသရုပ်ပြအဘိဓာန်၊ ၄၂၂). In the *Lokaṇṭi* Verse 41, *Sabbhiva samāsetha, sabbhi kubbhetha santhavaṃ. Sataṃ saddhamma maññā seyyo hothi na pāpiyo.*

Associate with the good, from companionship with the righteous: it is good, not bad, knowing the goodly ways of righteous men (2001) written by Maung Ant.

Furthermore, according to this *Jātaka*, the characteristics of virtuous person are,

1. Knowing the gratitude of others
2. Pay back the gratitude as he knows
3. Have the nature of clam and still
4. Endowed with the characteristics of good friend
5. Approach to the person who deserve to be approached with mindfulness and firmly
6. To help his good friends who are now poor with special attention
7. To help his good friends carry out their business with respect when they are in trouble. (J, II, 10. J, A, V, 155)

¹မြန်မာ့၊ ၃၇၄။

²ပါဠိ၊ ၉၇၅။

³အရှင်ဝဏ္ဏိတ၊ သုတေသနသရုပ်ပြအဘိဓာန်-၂။

⁴သုတ္တံ၊ ၄၇၈။

In the Christian Literature, “The Book of Virtues” (1993) is anthology edited by William Bennett. It was published on November 1. “The Moral virtues and Theological Ethics” (1991) by written Cessario, Romanus.

To conclude, the aim of this paper is to present that Buddhist and Christian Literature, there are practices to adopt, if one wants to be a virtuous person.

Discussion

Based on the moral characteristics such as being wise and morally upright, being charitable of virtuous men, stories from Buddhist and Christian Literature would be set for comparison.

1. According to *Pāli* Literature Benefits of association with Virtuous Persons

In the *Pāli* Literature one who pays back gratitude of others, one who does not make the ruin of friendship with others just like one who does not make the wet hand to dry, one who makes misdeed to one's friends, one who does not make unwholesome deed on account of one's wife can be defined as virtuous person.¹

Through association with virtuous person one will get not only mundane benefits but also supra mundane benefits such as to be born in the noble existences namely human world, *deva* and *brahma* world then up to the *Nibbāna*.

Weeds and grass can grow nearby soil easily without planting so also the manner of evil person easily spreads to his neighbouring person and increased and developed.

The good strains of trees are not like this. They can proliferate only when they are nurtured with great care. Likewise, one who associates with virtuous person needs to try hard to have the manners of virtuous person and developed widely.

Thus, one wishing for the benefits of oneself must avoid the association with evil person. If in unavoidable circumstance, one must associate with them according to the sayings of ancient wise men thus, “able to associate with him in accordance with his wish” means must associate with evil person with rational thinking.

Therefore, those who want benefits must associate with virtuous persons only. By associating with virtuous person many benefits will be achieved. with the references taken out from the *Jātakas*.

1:1. The Benefit of Protecting due to the Association with Virtuous Person

According to the *Mañicora Jātaka*,² the story goes thus, “the lady called *Sujātā* was living in *Bāraṇasī*. She was very beautiful and endowed with morality. She served her husband and parents in law and lived together with them. One day she wanted to visit her parents so she travelled with her husband taking with enough food with them. When they arrived at her parents' city, they stopped for a rest for a while and eating the food in a rest house. At that time King of *Bāraṇasī* happened to arrive at that rest house while wandering in the city. The king was attracted by her beauty and liked her so he enquired either she has an owner (husband) or not. Then the king knew that she has a husband and he was the one

¹ J, A, VII, 217.

² J, I, 51. A, II, 112.

with her. Owing to get her the king tried to kill her husband according to the proverb said that, “kill her husband with a lance for wanting his wife”. Consequently, the king planned to get her. The king ordered his ministers to take his ruby crown and put it in the cart of her husband.

Then the king announced that his ruby crown was lost and ordered his ministers to search for it. According to his plan the ruby crown was found in the husband’s cart. The husband (*Buddha-to-be*) was tied up with rope and tortured him and brought to the king and said that he was the one who stole the king’s ruby crown. Then the king ordered him to kill. The king’s service men brought him from the south gate of city to kill him. Having seen that scene, *Sujātā* followed them while crying and felt sorry for that happening to her husband was due to her fault. The service men of the king ordered him to lie down on his back. At that time *Sujātā* reflecting her morality and said that, there was no *deva* who can hinder those who oppressed, be despicable and torture virtuous persons in the world, there was no *deva* who can take care of virtuous person in this place, there was no *deva* who can hinder those were doing evil deeds and those who could not restrain doing misdeeds physically, verbally and mentally. Having heard the crying of *Sujātā* who was endowed with morality, *Sakka* the king of *deva* pondered upon the reason why she was crying and known all about it. In order virtuous *Sujātā* not to be displeased both physically and mentally *Sakka* descended to the human world. *Sakka* saved her husband by substituting the king in his stead and made the king be headed. Finally, *Sakka* gave the throne to the husband and made *Sujātā* as his queen.

According to this *Jātaka*, it is found that being endowed with morality, one will be free from impending dangers, would be protected by good and noble *devas*, would be free from life threatening danger by associating with virtuous person.

1:2. Benefit of Security and Calmness of Multitude by Association with Virtuous Person

Where there is a virtuous person people around him would be secure and calm depending on his shade of virtuousness as the sayings goes, “If a single tree is large enough, ten thousand birds can rest on it.” This issue will be delved according to the *Sattigumba Jātaka*.¹ The Buddha delivered this *Jātaka* while He was residing in the *Maddakucchi* cave with reference to *Devadatta*.

The story goes thus, “King *Pañcāla* was ruling in *Uttara Pañcāla* city. Latpan grove of that city, there was a parrot king had twin parrot sons. One day, one young parrot reached at the hand of robbers due to the outbreak of heavy storm. The robbers brought it up and named as *Sattigumba*. The other young parrot arrived at the midst of flowers in forest hermitage. It was named as *Pupphaka* and brought up with hermits.

One day the king accompanied with many companions went for deer hunting in the forest. And the deer known as *Eṇī* escaped from the king’s site. Ministers of king laughed at him because of it. The king was embarrassed and rash to follow the deer out of king’s pride. He found pleasant place of robbers instead of deer at noon. Then he rested in the robber’s place drinking water and

¹ J, I, 330. A, IV, 437-8.

bathing. As soon as *Sattigumba* found the king, it aimed to take the king's ornaments and dress by killing him. So it went and said its intention to the cook named *Patikolamba*. The cook *Patikolamba* on account of knowing he is a king. He said to *Sattigumba* that it is not proper to kill the king. Their conversation was heard by the king. Then the king decided not to stay any longer since it was a dangerous place. He left quickly and arrived at hermitage. There he met with *Pupphaka* parrot. *Pupphaka* greeted the king friendly and to invite the king to enjoy the water from the water pot on the pot stand and fruits with the king's heart content. Seeing this matter, the king asked the reason why these two parrots differ in manner though they are the same species as parrot.

Then *Pupphaka* parrot said to the king that parrot was his brother *Sattigumba* and explained with similies. Just like the arrows smeared with poison caused the quiver being smeared with poison, *kusu* grass wrapping the decayed fish become foul smelling, that parrot was contagious with the bad temperaments of robbers it became ferocious since it associated with wicked robbers. For him, it is just like the leaf wrapping rhododendron flowers had fragrant smell, he had to associate with virtuous persons and contagious with their good habits and became polite parrot. Next, *Pupphaka* parrot taught the king that evil person must not be associated and if associated with him one will be born in hell and virtuous person must be associated and if associated with him one will arrive good destinations. The king gave all parrots sanctuary to honor *Pupphaka* parrot and all the hermits were invited to stay in *Pañcala* city and serve them for the whole life. When the king's son succeeded the throne, he served all the hermits too. Up to the seven generations of the king gave great offering to all hermits.”

According to that *Jātaka*, if associated with evil persons one will become evil person and if associated with noble virtuous persons one will become noble virtuous person just like the saying goes, “son of wise man is polite, son of evil person is most unruly”. It is found that the environment in which one was brought up is very important for one's life and to avoid evil person and to always associate with virtuous person. It also found that, security and calmness will be accrued from associating with virtuous person.

From this *Jātaka*, it should be noted that, benefits will be achieved through association with virtuous person. According to the above mentioned story, *Pupphaka* parrot led its life be smooth and clam because of getting the chance to take refuge in virtuous persons and all other parrots got sanctuary depending on the virtues of virtuous parrot *Pupphaka*. Moreover, for the king also got the calmness in his life and reborn in celestial world by associating with virtuous hermits and in return they benefitted to practice peacefully by king's support.

Therefore, in order to live in life peacefully and in secure it is the must to associate with virtuous persons.

1:3. Benefit of Achieving Noble *Dhamma* by Association with Virtuous Person

Those who associate with virtuous person can obtain the noble *dhamma* which the virtuous person had achieved like them just like the saying goes, “Because the soap is good, the turban piece becomes white.”The story of a certain

person achieved the noble *dhamma* is extracted and studied from the *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā, Aṅgulimāla vatthu*.¹

That story was delivered by the *Buddha* while He was staying at the *Jetavana* monastery in *Sāvatti* with reference to *Thera Aṅgulimāla*.

That *Thera*-to-be took conception in the womb of the wife of Brahmin chaplain in *Sāvatti*. At the time of his delivery, all the weapons in *Sāvatti* illuminate like a flame of fire. On account of this event, he was named as *Ahimsaka*. When he came of age, he was sent to *Takkasīla* for studying arts and crafts. The professor of *Takkasīla* loved him because of his obedience. He was jealous by other students. So they gave misinformation to the professor of *Takkasīla* that he indulged in affairs with the professor's wife. Having heard about this the professor planned to kill *Ahimsaka* just like the saying said, "If the wife is molested by the other person, the husband will lay hands on the sword." He planned to kill *Ahimsaka* not by himself. He planned *Ahimsaka* to die being murdered by other. So he said to *Ahimsaka* that to in order to get further study it is needed to collect one hundred index fingers and give him.

From that time onwards, *Ahimsaka* killed the travelers whoever he met and cut their index fingers and made a garland with them and wearing it around his neck. Thus he got the name *Aṅgulimāla*. Having heard about *Aṅgulimāla*, the king together with his army took the journey for catching him. On the journey the king approached to the *Buddha* to pay homage to Him. The mother of *Ahimsaka* went to the forest in order to bring back his son when she heard about that news. At that time the *Buddha* foreseeing that *Aṅgulimāla* will kill his mother. So the *Buddha* went to the place where *Aṅgulimāla* was staying and arrived before his mother arrived and delivered the sermon to him. At the end of the *Buddha*'s sermon *Ahimsaka* abandoned his evil action and entered the community of Order as *ehibhikkhu*. And he followed the *Buddha* and sat in the monastery. Having known all about the king praised the *Buddha* for the ability to tame the untamed being to be tame and left for the palace.

Thera Aṅgulimāla could not get alms food because people were afraid of him for his misdeed done before in lay life. One day on his alms round he felt compassion when he saw a pregnant woman who was suffering from labour pain during difficult delivery in a house. He said about this event to the *Buddha*. The *Buddha* taught him to make a vow of truth and recite holy protective verse (*paritta*). By the power of *paritta* and his utterance of truth, the pregnant woman gave birth easily and escape from life threatening danger. From that time onward *Thera Aṅgulimāla* received alms food. *Pritta* has the long lasting effect up to the end of the world. He felt sorry for such an evil deeds he had done before when practising calm meditation (*kamaṭṭhāna*). The *Buddha* taught him to practice insight meditation (*vipassanā*) and soon he became an *Arahat*. One day *Thera Aṅgulimāla* came back from his alms round with broken head with bleeding and alms bowl as he was thrown with a stone when he was going alms round. He approached the *Buddha*. The *Buddha* said that you suffer the bad consequences of evil deed done before at present body instead of suffering in hell for many years. Next *Thera Aṅgulimāla* approached the secluded place and lived alone for enjoying the bliss of emancipation (*vimuttisukha*) and attained *Parinibbāna*"

¹ Dhṛp, A, II, 110.

According to the aforementioned, one will be aggrieved if one wrongly acknowledge someone as a teacher and even the foolish man could attain noble *dhamma* due to meet with virtuous person when the proper time for getting this opportunity.

1:4. Benefit of Free from Life Threatening Danger by Association with Virtuous Person Endowed with Faith (*Saddhā*)

By association with virtuous person who is endowed with faith (*saddhā*), one will be free from life threatening danger. In order this issue to be distinct the *Sīlānisamsa Jātaka*¹ explored as follows.

The story goes thus, “During the time of *Kassapa Buddha*, a lay disciple of the *Buddha* who was a stream-winner (*sotāpanna*) took the journey with ship and accompanied by a barber on boat. On the seventh day the ship was wrecked in the middle of the ocean. They ride on the wooden flat and went to the island. When they arrived at the island the barber killed the birds to eat but the stream-winner was reflecting the attributes of triple gems instead of eating it. On account of this wholesome deed, the dragon king created a beautiful ship and made him to ascend on it. That lay disciple called the barber. At that time the guardian *deva* of ocean said that you alone were called but not the one who has no morality. Then the stream-enterer taught the barber that not to do unwholesome deed and being endowed with morality has the nature of rescuing other. Moreover, he shared his merits of giving, observing of *sīla* and reflecting of meditation (*bāvanā*) to the barber. The barber also rejoiced it by saying well done (*sādhu*). Owing to this rejoicing of other’s merits (*pattānumodanā*) the barber got permission to ride on the ship and free from the life threatening danger in the ocean.”

According to this *Jātaka*, it is found that the benefit of free from life threatening danger is achieved by associating with virtuous person endowed with faith (*saddhā*).

Thus, it is found that, free from life threatening danger is one of the benefits obtained by associating with virtuous person.

2. According to Christian Literature, Benefits of getting acquainted with virtuous person

In the Bible, a person who wants to be a man of virtue there are eight ways to follow. They are-

1. Faith
2. Moral excellence
3. Knowledge
4. Temperance
5. Patience
6. Godliness
7. Brotherly Kindness
8. Love²

¹J, I, 49. A, II, 101.

²www.simplybible.com. 2Peter1:5-7.

A person who befriends with the ones who follow the above ways can gain benefits from his friends. This fact can be claimed with reference to the stories in Buddhist and Christian Literature.

2:1. The benefit of receiving help for being acquainted with virtuous Person

There lived a rich man named “Nabal” and his wife “Abigail” in the city of “Kayamayla”¹. The wife was beautiful and wise. The husband was harsh and fails to do good deeds. During those day, David and his troops took a shelter in a cave on the run from the hands of King Saul. David sent his men go to the rich man Nabal to request some food for the company. In returns, they promised to keep the rich man’s property safe from danger. But the unwise and aggressive Nabal turned down the deal. David in his anger marched to kill Nabal. When the wise woman Abigail heard the news of David coming to Slain them, she prepared a hundred loaves of bread, two skins of grape wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisin, two hundreds cakes of pressed figs on donkey backs quickly and welcomed David and his company on their way. As soon as she saw David, Abigail climbed off her donkey quickly vowed on the ground before David. She made an excuse for her husband Nabal. She explained that her husband was a harsh and mean man. As the Lord tells his people not to kill one another, she asked a pardon for her husband. Abigail gave the provisions to David’s men.

Having listened to what Abigail said, David replied that it was a blessing that such a wise person was sent. He was not going to kill anyone since he should not be the cause of suffering to others by killing. Abigail was also praised for the good blessing she had caused. Her prudent action cause David and his men to bless her and return to their camp.

Nabal, his family and servants were saved through Abigail’s actions. Therefore it could be observed that the others were saved because of virtuous person.

2:2. The benefit of being saved from danger for being acquainted with virtuous Person

The Lord was sorry that he had made on the earth, and it grieved him in his heart. So the Lord “ I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground for I regret that I have made them”².

Noah was a righteous man and walked with God. Seeing that the earth was corrupt and filled with violence, God instructed Noah to build an ark in which he, his sons, and their wives, together with male and female of all living creatures, would be saved from the water. God also suggested storing food for the people and for the animals. When the time came, there was a heavy rain and a world-engulfing flood. Only Noah, his family, and examples of all the world’s animals were left safe. Every living thing on the surface of the earth was wiped out.

According to the story, it is observed that people and animals who are with a righteous person could lead a safe and peaceful life.

¹2 Samel 17:25.

²Genes 6.

2:3. The benefit of attaining Noble *Dhamma* for being acquainted with virtuous person

Naaman was a commander of the army of Syria¹. He was a good commander and was held in favour because of victory that God brought him. Yet Naaman was a leper. Naaman's wife had a servant girl from Israel who said that a prophet there would be able to heal him. Then Naaman went to Israel and met Elisha. Elisha told him to go bathe in the Jordan river seven times and he would be clean. Naaman did what he was told. He was healed and got a skin of a young man.

Although the advice for seeing the prophet was from a servant girl, Naaman took the advice and his disease was healed after seeing the God's man Elisha. Besides, commander Naaman and his family received a pardon from the God.

2:4. The Benefit of being saved from famine for being acquainted with the virtuous person

In the story, during the famine the Lord came to Elijah and said, "Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there². I have directed a widow there to supply you with the food". So he went to Zarephath when he came to the town gate, he met a widow. He called to her and asked for a little water and a piece of bread. The widow had only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. That time she was gathering few sticks to take home and make a meal for herself, that they may eat it and die. However, the generous widow made a small loaf of bread for Elijah. She and her son ate the rest of the bread. Due to her generosity, the Lord blessed her as: "The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the Land".

This way Elijah, and the woman and her son could stay alive with food every day for 3 years during the famine.

Based on the stories from the Literature in Buddhism and Christianity, it might be concluded that people who become acquainted with the virtuous persons achieve better benefits because of their friends.

Findings

It is impossible to trade the good reputation of being a virtuous person. It cannot be requested from another person nor can it be stolen or robbed. It is only attainable by a person himself through good practices.

For all human beings, it is possible to be in good thoughts, to speak right words and to behave well based on their good mood. Likewise, a person can be in bad thoughts, speak bad words and behave in bad manners based on his bad mood.

For the present study, when the focus is on the benefits of being acquainted with the virtuous person, it was observed that the same benefits are said to be attainable either according to Buddhist Literature or according to Christian Literature.

¹2 King 5:1-27.

²1 King 17.

Although the referred data for the study were collected from different Literature, benefits can be gained whatever practices they follow. Only one's interest in the Literature is the most important matter to explore more in that particular Literature.

Conclusion

In brief, the present study described the stories in which the people who become acquainted with the virtuous person achieved good things and good benefits. The stories supported the statement of being acquainted with the virtuous person can lead to a better life. Therefore, it is advisable that people should look up to the people are spiritually and mentally superior to them.

Since the Literature used for data collection in this study is from Buddhism and Christianity, the characteristics to be practised to become virtuous person, may not be the same. But, the meaning the stories want to convey is nearly the same.

The limitation of the study is that there are some more aspects of the area to be explored next time. Such as comparing the related literature about the fools; basic core values in Buddhism and Christianity, so that the similarities and differences in both literatures can be identified more exactly.

In Conclusion, to be able to lead a peaceful and prosperous life for oneself and for the others around, it is beneficial for people to be acquainted with the virtuous person.

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 မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့။ (၁၉၇၉)။ မြန်မာအဘိဓာန်၊ စာပေဗိမာန်ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ရန်ကုန်။
 ဝဏ္ဏိတ။အရှင်။(၂၀၁၂)။ သူတော်ကောင်းလက္ခဏာတရားတော်။ ရွှေနိုင်ငံပုံနှိပ်တိုက် အမှတ်(၉၀စီ)၊ ကမ္ဘာအေးဘုရားလမ်း၊
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 သုတေသနသရုပ်ပြအဘိဓာန်၊ (၂၀၀၉)၊ သာသနာရေးဦးစီးဌာနပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ရန်ကုန်။
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