

# An Analytical Study of the Way of Life Depicted in the Mahagovinda Sutta

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## Abstract

The objectives of this article were: 1) to study the Mahagovinda Sutta 2) to study the lifestyle portrayed in the Mahagovinda Sutta, and 3) to analyse the problems of life in the Sunshine the Mahagovinda Sutta. This thesis was a qualitative study on collected data from primary and secondary documents. The results of research found that Pancasikha, the son of heavenly musician, informed the Buddha about Jotipala, who was appointed advisor to the king after his father to investigate the direction of the earth and air. After being ordained as a monk, he intended to study and practice insight meditation so that he could attain the highest knowledge and it was predicted by Kassapa Buddha that he will be reborn as Lord Gautama Buddha. This sutta shows the geography of India in the prehistoric period, divided into seven states and Mahagovinda Brahman practiced the four ecstasies of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity and then he was born in the Brahma world after death. Living a life based on Brahmavihara Dhamma and the Eightfold Path is the practice leading to dispassion, detachment, extinction, peace and salvation. Problem solutions in living a life according to the Mahagovinda Sutta is based on Brahmavihara Dhamma; care for yourself and others, having empathy to everyone, to be happy when seeing other happy, and a balanced state of mind, and based on the principle of the Eightfold Path by using the cause and result expounded in the Four Noble Truths.

**Keywords:** Mahagovinda Sutta, Tipitaka, Way of Living

## Background and the Significance of the Problem

Buddhism is the base and it has great significance towards the lifestyle of Thai people which is regarded as an important issue in living one's life. Buddhism can be compared to a lightened torch which has illuminated the way of living of Thai people. Nowadays, in the current society, there has been a sudden change. It is a society focusing on the advancement of external objects and their value, while the significance of mind values are avoided which results in feeble societies lacking love, kindness, harmony towards each other and also causes the change of human behaviors in that personal benefits are always sought to serve their own greed and companions, which adversely affects the whole society due to the manner in which they are rooted in careless thoughts and without careful consideration of an individual's character. Despite of the fact that humans are beings with advanced body growth, humans are still earthly attached and are not separated. Humans are always connected. Hence, a recognition process in order to serve their needs occurs due to the absence of mental development in their individual way of living which results in different and varied manners depending on their desires. Whether they perform immoral or moral deeds, or live with suffering or happiness, it depends on their mental state because a good mental state drives good behavior and results in 'sustainable development of human society'. Hence, mental development is needed to build peace for both

the individual and society to mentally develop each human to perform moral actions according to Buddhist teaching regardless of their educational level. The following behaviors are expanding in society, namely, uncontrollable manner and speech, aggressiveness, dishonesty, selfishness, and the lack of gratitude. Hence, mental development is necessary in developing their mentality to be moral, wise, happy humans which will lead them to the perfect way of living.

Therefore, good development for humans and morality cultivating builds the harmony of human society with peace, not isolation. Different thoughts foster different ways of living in society with either suffering or happiness and with different opinions. Individuals follow their own individual ways of living. Humans belong either to suffering or happiness in their ways of living. Tipitaka is the combination of Buddha's teachings in which can be adapted to be humans' guideline of their ways of living which is called 'Mahagovinda Sutta' (Mahamakut Buddhist Foundation, 2013a: 1)

Mahagovindasutta is a Sutta or Buddhist scripture in which the Lord Buddha preached to Pancasikha, the son of a heavenly musician while the Lord Buddha was staying at Gijjhakut Mountain in Rajagrha City. The Lord Buddha mentioned the word of Pancasikha. The mentioned Sutta was divided into two parts, namely; the first part contains the word of Pancasikha which was told by Sanamkumara Brahman and the last part is the word of the Lord Buddha which he told to Pancasikha. The story is about the passage from Sanamkumara Brahman in which he talked about the Lord Buddha's previous incarnation when he was Brahmavihara Brahman, including the suggestion of the practice to approach the Brahman World. A noticeable point in this Sutta is the practice to approach the Brahman World which Sanamkumara had suggested was 'the four ecstasies of loving-kindness and compassion or 'Appamañña 4' (Mahamakut Buddhist Foundation, 1995: 62-63, 2013d: 212). Pancasikha had ended the conversation with the Lord Buddha by inquiring of him if he could still recall the memory in the past, he accepted and explained that he was Mahagovinda Brahman in his previous life. 'His celibacy' was not for the purpose of boredom relief, but it was for the dispassion, for the peacefulness, for the enlightenment, and for the Nirvana, not merely for boredom relief. His explanation was continued in that the Eightfold Path is a Sutta which equips humans with useful knowledge and life guidelines, especially in the areas of geography and history, including the roots and annals of ancient Indians when it was once Jambhu-Dvipa especially, the background of 7 states according to the interesting organization rules of Mahagovinda Brahman. Most of the state names are different from the present names of the state due to the term 'Territory' which is attached with the term 'Indus' which shows that the territory is in Indus River area. Hence, this is an evidence that is found in Mahagovinda Sutta in Theravada Buddhist Scriptures.

As a result of researching some knowledge regarding the background and the significance of the problem, the researcher desires to study some Buddhist teachings in Mahagovinda Sutta due to its importance in Buddhist teachings for the ways of living such as the Eightfold Path and the four ecstasies of loving-kindness and compassion or 'Appamañña 4' (Mahamakut Buddhist Foundation, 2013a: 1) in which Pancasikha, the son of heavenly musician, had asked the Lord Buddha about the ways to adapt it into life and its practice of living harmoniously in society and for the happiness and advancement of a society. Due to the lack of adaptation of Buddhist teaching, troubles persist in a society.

## Objectives

1. To study about Mahagovinda Sutta
2. To study the way of living with Mahagovinda Sutta practice

3. To analyze the principles of living ways as appeared in Mahagovinda Sutta

### Specific Research Terms

‘**Analyzation**’ refers to the distinguishability in Mahagovinda Sutta to consider the practice in the way of living.

‘**Living**’ refers to the characteristics of each behavior which identifies each character of each different way of living, including the way of living in Govindasutta.

‘**Mahagovinda Sutta**’ refers to a Sutta or Buddhist teaching appeared in ‘Suttantapitaka Digha Nikaya’ in 14<sup>th</sup> book in which Mahagovinda Brahman was mentioned and that was named after a person in Buddhist teaching contents.

### Research Procedures

This study is a documentary research. The research procedures are to analyze and diagnose the sources namely, researching and gathering all of the information from primary sources which is Tipitaka and Atthakatha in the issue of Mahamakut Rajavidyalaya Edition in the 91<sup>st</sup> set in year 2013 in 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, as well as gathering information from secondary sources and some related research. After all of the obtained information were studied, the information was hereafter analyzed, described in descriptive form.

### Research Results

1. **According to the study of Mahagovinda Sutta**, it was found out that Govindasutta is the information of a Brahman priest or ‘Purohit’ who was in a position of ‘Govinda Brahman’ in coronation ceremony after taking over from his father after his death. The story was told to the Lord Buddha by Pancasikha, the son of heavenly musician and he also inquired if the Lord Buddha could recall the memory and accepted it. The Lord Buddha also informed him about his previous life as Mahagovinda Brahman who preached to other Brahman about the ways to live with other Brahmans when he was in the Brahman World whereas its purpose was not due to boredom, and was merely for dispassion, detachment, extinction, peace, salvation, enlightenment, and for Nirvana and merely for emergence in the Brahman World.

For celibacy of the Lord Buddha was merely for dispassion, detachment, extinction, peace, salvation, enlightenment, and for Nirvana. Pancasikha, the son of heavenly musician appraised and was pleased about it. He showed respect to the Lord Buddha afterwards, before he left.

‘Govinda Brahman’ is not his name but his position or his dignity of the Brahman priest or ‘Pulohit’ in this ‘Mahagovindasutta’. He was ‘Chotipalamanop’ who was positioned by King Thisambodee. Chotipalamanop was born in a Brahman family, who was expert in identifying directions on air and on land. He obtained ‘Anāgāmi’ after listening to Dhamma preached by the Lord ‘Kassapa Buddha’. After his ordination to become a monk, he attempted to study and practice Vipassana meditation until he obtained the highest level of perception. It was predicted by the Lord ‘Kassapa Buddha’ that he or Chotipala Bhikkhu would be the fourth Buddha, which would be named ‘the Gautama Buddha’ in the future.

While Pancasikha, the son of heavenly musician performed his duty to make Ginseng drinks for angels and for those who were in the heaven of Indra. His duty was also to play music to gratify all of the angels. In Buddhist belief, ‘heavenly musicians’ are regarded as angels at the Jatu Maharajah Goddess level. A sample of high-ranking angels in heaven who live in Jatu Maharajah level was Pancasikha Devaputta, while low-ranking angels that live on earth are such as tree nymphs, Tanee mythical ghosts, the spirit guarding of a ship or a boat, etc. All of the

heavenly musicians are the servants of 'King Dhatarattha' who is a protector of Eastern region of the world. (Mahamakut Buddhist Foundation, 2013b: 236; Davids, 1995: 259)

While Panjasikha was forming moral power for humans on earth, he was the head of cow herders. After his early death, he was born in Jatumaharachika Heaven and was 9-million years old with 60 carts of jewelry, 9 pots of fragrance. He wore his red straight tip fabric with 5 tufts of hair at the back.

**2. After studying about the way of living in Mahagovindasutta**, it was found out that it concerned the story told to the Lord Buddha by Pancasikha which was related to the moral power practiced by Mahagovinda Brahman, a famous scholar who was assumed to have met and had a conversation with Brahma, but in fact he was not able to perform magic. Pancasikha had been told about the practice to have the ability to meet and have a conversation with the Brahma by his old Brahman teacher in which he needed to practice a 4-month deep meditation focusing on mercy for him to receive the talented gift. Hence, he informed all of the kings and his 40 wives about his mission. Once he was allowed, a residence was built for his 4-month mission. After his practice, he still was not able to perform his talent and to meet nor have a conversation with Brahma.

Mahagovinda Brahman's mission was known by Brahma which led to the existence of Brahma and he was scared to see him for the first time. Sanamkumara Brahman was then asked by Mahagovinda who he was. He then replied that he was well known by all of the angels as the son in the Brahman World. Govinda Brahman hereafter offered some valuable stuffs to Brahma and he then accepted it. Govinda Brahman realized that he was given a chance to ask questions. Hence, Sanamkumara Brahman was asked about what kind of Dhamma is needed to practice in order to reach the immortal Brahman World. Sanamkumara Brahman then replied that humans and animals who could ignore their egoism altogether with their pleasing minds, without stinking odor nor sexual intercourse would reach the immortal Brahman World and those beings which live separately in forest areas, tree bases, mountains, gullies, cemeteries, outdoor areas, and straws with their pleasing minds who share kindness unlimitedly with morality to beings in all areas, would reach the immortal Brahman World.

Mahagovinda Brahman raised a question to Sanamkumara Brahman about the factors affecting beings to have unpleasant smells. Sanamkumara Brahman then mentioned the factors of anger, falsifying, cheating, assault, constancy, insulting, covetousness, desire, indecision, persecution, greed, a thought of committing an offense, and infatuation. All beings with those factors are considered to have unpleasant smell whose destinations are a state of loss and woe and the gate to Brahman World would be closed for them. Hence, Mahagovinda Brahman stated that 'After having been informed that it was an unpleasant smell, I then realized that it was not easy for laymen to eradicate it, thus I shall leave my residence for an ordination.'

Thereupon, Mahagovinda Brahman visited King Renu and another 6 kings and informed them about his upcoming ordination to become a monk. The 6 kings required him to wait for 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, and one year and he said it was too long. Then, the kings still asked him for 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, and one month, but he said it was still too long. Then, the kings asked for a month or a half month. He said it was still too long. Hence, the 6 kings still required him for another 7 days and he agreed with it since it was not too long to wait. Then Govinda Brahman met up 7 Brahman Mahasarn and 700 Brahman Mahadok to tell them about his upcoming ordination but they disagreed with the reason of less divinity and fortune while being a monk, but they tried to insist that he could receive a more abundant of divinity and fortune when being a Brahman.

Mahagovinda Brahman insisted that no one would receive more divinity nor fortune than him at that time and also insisted to leave all of his belongings to become a monk. Then, he met his wives and told them to return to their families or to remarry but they also desired to ordain if he would also be ordained. As the time passed by, Mahagovinda then shaved his hair and beard, then he wore a monk's robe to become a monk, altogether with 7 kings, 7 Brahman Mahasarn, 700 Brahmannahadok, and his 40 wives. In the last chapter of Sutta, the Lord Buddha mentioned that he was Mahagovinda Brahman at that period of time and he had shown the way of living with other Brahman in the Brahman World to their followers but this purpose of celibacy was merely for reborn in Brahman World while his celibacy was only for dispassion, detachment, extinction, peace and salvation.

**3. Analytical results concerning ways of living appearing in the Mahagovinda Sutta**, it is found that the way of living principles in Appamañña 4 which consists of the four ecstasies of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity that is infinite and is spread to all beings in all areas as follows.

The merciful way of living principles is to give good wishes without expecting anything in return from others, to give alms, to avoid inconvenience to all beings, to love others as one loves oneself namely, 1) Having a moral mind with mercy and the aims of happiness, without any sufferings in humans or animals, 2) Having a moral mind with mercy to beings who suffer and to wish them to find relief from it, 3) Having a moral mind with sympathetic joy and congratulate with others' prosperity and to wish the beings stay in their state of prosperity, 4) Having a moral mind with detached mind, staying in the middle way. The said practice is called 'Appamañña Dhamma' which is an infinite spread action of morality without any vengeance nor passionate. It is so called a pure beauty. (Mahamakut Buddhist Foundation, 1995: 75; Davids, 1997: 62)

A kind way of living this principle is a desire to help others from suffering without any wishes of anything in return as well as a desire to help beings with sufferings to find relief from it.

A sympathetic joy way of living this principle is having a mind without jealousy toward all beings in all areas without any wishes of anything in return.

A detached way of living this principle is an ignorance to anything that interrupt one's temper of ignorance.

In Appamañña, 'ignorance' refers to fairness to everyone which means ignorance in Dhamma. The way of living principles in the Eightfold Path which is the way that we follow the Four Noble Truths that consist of suffering, origin of suffering, cessation of suffering, and the path cessation of suffering in which also appears in Mahagovinda Sutta as the following explanations. (Mahamakut Buddhist Foundation, 2013b: 232)

1. Having a right idea depending on the truth and all of wisdomful morality that consists of Yonisomanakikara
2. Having a right consideration by avoiding three faults namely, sensual thoughts, vindictiveness, and thoughts of devastation
3. Having a right speech by avoiding falsehood, instigation, swear words, and drivel. All of these avoidances are called 'having right speech'
4. Performing right behaviors to follow the middle way of morality.
5. Having a right occupation and not to have immoral occupation such as weapon commerce, human trafficking, selling animals to be slaughtered for consumption, selling alcohol as well as drugs and poisons and consuming sufficiently the 4 necessities for living
6. Having a good attempt refers to the principle of living in attempting to attain morality to prevent any obscene issues in the future and to avoid some obscene issues from appearing moral.

7. Having a right recall refers to the principle of living in always recalling every current moment of performance in 4 areas, namely body, sensations, mind, mind-objects which are called ‘the Four Foundations of Mindfulness’ (Mahamakut Buddhist Foundation, 2013b: 265; Woodward, 1995: 322)

8. Having right attention refers to the certain moral attention.

The Eightfold path can be concluded into 1) Training in Higher Morality, 2) Training in Higher Mentality, and 3) Training in Higher Wisdom. (Mahamakut Buddhist Foundation, 2013c: 237; Woodward, 1995: 208) The living principle of the Eightfold Path is to understand problems or realize the state of suffering being faced, to be facing the problems, to eradicate the sources of the problems and to reach the paths leading to the cessation of suffering until the suffering fades.

## Suggestions

### Policy Suggestions

The result of the research entitled ‘Analytical Study of the Way of Life Depicted in the Mahagovinda Sutta’ reveals that the way of living principle consists of 2 main Buddhist teaching lessons namely Appamañña 4 and the Eightfold Path that was presented by the researchers to be a living guideline which is adaptable according to Buddhist teaching. The policy recommendations are as follows,

1. For all religious leaders or any executives of any institutes to realize the way of the living principle of Mahagovinda Brahma which according to Appamañña 4 consists of compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity which are regarded as the core of any administration organization and are important to hold the togetherness of working collaboratively in a particular institute.
2. Any meditation organization or any educational institute should be able to adapt the Eightfold Path for the highest benefit for their centers or institutes.

### Suggestions for further research

In this study, some parts of the Four Ecstasies of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity or Appamañña 4 and the Eightfold Path and some related sessions were selected to study. Furthermore, the following topics are set for further study for the utmost benefit in Buddhist teaching study.

1. ‘Studying and Analyzing the Way of Living Principle as appeared in Aggañña Sutta in Buddhist Principles’
2. ‘An Analytical Study about ‘The Dependent Origination’ or ‘Paticcasamutpada’ in Theravada Buddhism’
3. ‘A Comparative Study in Mahagovinda Sutta between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism’

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