

# Positive Psychological approach as reflected in Puṇṇovādasutta

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## Abstract

පුද්ගලයකුගේ මානසික දියුණුව සේම කායික දියුණුව සඳහා ද තීරණාත්මක බලවේගයක් වශයෙන් ධනාත්මක ආකල්ප පවත්වා ගැනීම ඉතාමත් වැදගත් වන බව පෙන්වා දිය හැකිය. ඒ පිළිබඳ සාකච්ඡා කෙරෙන වැදගත් මනෝවිද්‍යාත්මක ශාඛාවක් වශයෙන් ධනාත්මක මනෝ විද්‍යා විෂයක්ෂේත්‍රය හඳුනාගත හැකිය. පුද්ගලයා තමා තුළ ධනාත්මක චින්තකයෙකු පවත්වා ගත යුතු ආකාරය මෙම විෂයක්ෂේත්‍රය තුළින් නිරූපණය කෙරේ. බුද්ධ දේශනාව තුළද යථාර්ථවබෝධයෙන් යුක්තව ධනාත්මක ආකල්ප සහිතව සිටීමේ වැදගත්කම අගය කර ඇති ආකාරය මනාව පිළිබිඹු වේ. පුණ්ණ සූත්‍රය සහ පුණ්ණෝවාද සූත්‍රය යන දේශනාවන් තුළ මෙම පදනම මනාව විග්‍රහ කර ඇත. පුණ්ණ තෙරුන් විසින් ඉදිරිපත් කරන ලද අදහස් තුළින් පිළිබිඹු වන ධනාත්මක ආකල්ප ඉහත සූත්‍ර දෙක තුළින්ම මනාව පැහැදිලි වේ. ගුණාත්මක අධ්‍යයනය ඔස්සේ ප්‍රාථමික මූලාශ්‍රය හා ද්විතීයික මූලාශ්‍රය ඇසුරෙන් සිදුවන මෙම අධ්‍යයනය තුළදී ඕනෑම දරුණු හා පීඩාකාරී අවස්ථාවකදී පවා මනා කළමනාකරණයකින් යුක්තව ධනාත්මක චින්තනයක් ගොඩ නගා ගැනීමේ ධනාත්මක මනෝවිද්‍යාවක් සහ එහි වටිනාකම පිළිබඳ අවධානයට ලක් වී තිබේ.

ප්‍රමුඛ පද : කළමනාකරණය, ධනාත්මක ආකල්ප, ධනාත්මක මනෝවිද්‍යාව, පුණ්ණෝවාද සූත්‍රය, යථාර්ථවබෝධය,

## Introduction:

Positive psychology has been described in many ways and with many words, but the commonly accepted definition of the field is this: "Positive psychology is the scientific study of what makes life most worth living" To push this brief description a bit further, positive psychology is a scientific approach to studying human thoughts, feelings, and behavior, with a focus on strengths instead of weaknesses, building the good in life instead of repairing the bad, and taking the lives of average people up to "great" instead of focusing solely on moving those who are struggling up to "normal" Positive psychology focuses on the positive events and influences in life, including:



1. Positive experiences (like happiness, joy, inspiration, and love).
2. Positive states and traits (like gratitude, resilience, and compassion).
3. Positive institutions (applying positive principles within entire organizations and institutions).

As a field, positive psychology spends much of its time thinking about topics like character strengths, optimism, life satisfaction, happiness, wellbeing, gratitude, compassion (as well as self-compassion), self-esteem and self-confidence, hope, and elevation. These topics are studied in order to learn how to help people flourish and live their best lives. In general, the greatest potential benefit of positive psychology is that it teaches us the power of shifting one's perspective. The PERMA model is a widely recognized and influential model in positive psychology. The well known psychologist Martin E. P. Seligman proposed this model to help explain and define wellbeing in greater depth. "PERMA" is an acronym for the five facets of wellbeing according to Seligman:

- P – Positive Emotions: Even though seeking positive emotions alone is not a very effective way to boost your wellbeing, experiencing positive emotion is still an important factor. Part of wellbeing is enjoying yourself in the moment, i.e., experiencing positive emotions;
- E – Engagement: Having a sense of engagement, in which we may lose track of time and become completely absorbed in something we enjoy and excel at, is an important piece of wellbeing. It's hard to have a developed sense of wellbeing if you are not truly engaged in anything you do;
- R – (Positive) Relationships: Humans are social creatures, and we rely on connections with others to truly flourish. Having deep, meaningful relationships with others is vital to our wellbeing;
- M – Meaning: Even someone who is deliriously happy most of the time may not have a developed sense of wellbeing if they do not find meaning in their life. When we dedicate ourselves to a cause or recognize something bigger than ourselves, we experience a sense of meaning that there is simply no replacement for;
- A – Accomplishment / Achievement: We all thrive when we are succeeding, achieving our goals, and bettering ourselves. Without a drive to accomplish and achieve, we are missing one of the puzzle pieces of authentic wellbeing.

This model gives us a comprehensive framework for understanding wellbeing as well as a foundation for improving wellbeing. The discussion takes place between the Buddha and Ven. Puṇṇa Thera clarifies the above-mentioned clarifications with reference to the positive psychological approach. Having listened to the Dhamma preached by the Buddha on the request of Ven. Puṇṇa, this monk named Puṇṇa could be happy about the essence of Dhamma. Later with the conclusion of the doctrinal explanations Buddha questions from Puṇṇa Thera about his wishes on a dwelling place. The answer for that question and the responses made by Ven. Puṇṇa about the way of treating by the people at Suṇāparanta village highly represent the qualities and the approaches represented in the field of positive psychology. Both the Suttas available in Saṃyuttanikāya (Puṇṇasutta) and Majjhimanikāya (Puṇṇovādasutta) deal with the same context that is about the story of Puṇṇa Thera. In the Suttas the statement given by the Buddha using two terms dama (self-control) and Upasama (peacefulness) (damūpasamena) emphasize the positive and optimistic relevance in a positive psychological perspective. Both Suttas give a very nice approach to expose about positive emotions an individual should have with him. According to different challenges the man has to experience in his life, it is necessary to develop positivity to deal with those situations. We can apply the facts in this Sutta to compare with the discipline of positive psychology and build up a good therapeutic system to motivate the people in engaging their life works well. It is expected to study about the above mentioned information with reference to Puṇṇovādasutta and relevant sources of it.

### **Puṇṇa Thera's Story and Positive Psychology**

The Puṇṇovādasutta of Majjhimanikāya and the Puṇṇasutta of Saṃyuttanikāya describe in detail the conversation took place between the Buddha and Ven. Puṇṇa. The primary goal here is to identify the therapeutic value of Puṇṇa Thera's story and to study its positive psychological approach. The Buddha was pleased about Ven. Puṇṇa Thera's aspects associated with the understanding of the essence of the Dhamma. Then the Buddha gave him a brief advice on his request. "sādhu maṃ, bhante, bhagavā saṃkhittena ovādena ovadatu, yamaṃ bhagavato dhammaṃ sutvā eko vūpakaṭṭho appamatto ātāpī pahitatto vihareyya"nti. "Tena hi, puṇṇa, suṇāhi, sādhukaṃ manasi karohi; bhāsissāmi"ti." The dialogue ran thus. After providing the advice Buddha asked some questions from Ven. Puṇṇa Thero.

Buddha: "Now that I have given you this brief advice, Puṇṇa, in which country will you dwell?"

Puṇṇa: "Venerable sir, now that the Blessed One has given me this brief advice, I am going to dwell in the Suṇāparanta country."

Buddha: "Puṇṇa, the people of Suṇāparanta are fierce and rough. If they abuse and threaten you, what will you think then?"

Puṇṇa: "Venerable sir, if the people of Suṇāparanta abuse and threaten me, then I shall think: 'These people of Suṇāparanta are kind, truly kind, in that they did not give me a blow with the fist.' Then I shall think thus, Blessed One; then I shall think thus, Sublime One."

Buddha: "But, Puṇṇa, if the people of Suṇāparanta do give you a blow with the fist, what will you think then?" Puṇṇa: "Venerable sir, if the people of Suṇāparanta do give me a blow with the fist, then I shall think: 'These people of Suṇāparanta are kind, truly kind, in that they did not give me a blow with a clod.' Then I shall think thus, Blessed One; then I shall think thus, Sublime One."

Buddha: "But, Puṇṇa, if the people of Suṇāparanta do give you a blow with a clod, what will you think then?"

Puṇṇa: "Venerable sir, if the people of Sunāparanta do give me a blow with a clod, then I shall think: 'These people of Sunāparanta are kind, truly kind, in that they did not give me a blow with a stick.' Then I shall think thus, Blessed One; then I shall think thus, Sublime One."

Buddha: "But, Puṇṇa, if the people of Sunāparanta do give you a blow with a stick, what will you think then?"

Puṇṇa: "Venerable sir, if the people of Sunāparanta do give me a blow with a stick, then I shall think: 'These people of Sunāparanta are kind, truly kind, in that they did not give me a blow with a knife.' Then I shall think thus, Blessed One; then I shall think thus, Sublime One."

Buddha: "But, Puṇṇa, if the people of Sunāparanta do give you a blow with a knife, what will you think then?" "Venerable sir, if the people of Sunāparanta do give me a blow with a knife, then I shall think: 'These people of Sunāparanta are kind, truly kind, in that they have not taken my life with a sharp knife.' Then I shall think thus, Blessed One; then I shall think thus, Sublime One."

Buddha: "Bravo, bravo, Puṇṇa! Possessing such self-control (dama) and peacefulness (upasama), you will be able to dwell in the Sunāparanta country. Now, Puṇṇa, it is time to do as you think fit."

In the Buddhist dispensation, qualities such as patience, compassion and perseverance were always exalted. Examination of the Puṇṇasutta reveals that the same characteristics were prevalent within Ven. Puṇṇa. It was because of such

positive attitudes that he was able to live in a place inhabited by such a rough and fierce people. At one point, when he was being bullied, Ven. Puṇṇa Thero had the quality and ability to focus on the better aspects and think positively about it. With the above information, it appears that he never took his mental state to a low or lazy mood. Positive Psychotherapy has a wide range of applications that are not limited to helping with mental health challenges. People can benefit from these positive psychological interventions. They can control and manage their mental stress, anxiety etc. and would be able to build resilience and improve mental well-being as benefits of positive psychotherapeutic approach.

This mind, monks, is radiant. (pabhassaramidaṃ, bhikkhave, cittaṃ.) And it is freed from passing corruptions. (tañca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi vippamuttaṃ.) An educated noble disciple truly understands this. (taṃ sutavā ariyasāvako yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti.) So I say that the educated noble disciple has development of the mind. (tasmā 'sutavato ariyasāvakassa cittabhāvanā atthī'ti vadāmi'ti).

It is useful here to look at how the mental phenomenon of attitudes relates to this Buddhist analysis. According to this statement, individual's mind is completely pure. It undergoes various changes due to different defilements. While a person is growing up, environment and cultural factors influence the formation of attitudes, psychological factors invisible to him will also play a role here. Therefore, according to the Buddhist analysis, in addition to the cognitive, perceptual and behavioral bases, attitudes are also influenced by certain phenomena of the cycle of birth (Saṃsāra). They act as long-term psychological trends. Here the external environment can be mentioned as a powerful factor influencing the formation of the mental attitudes of Ven. Puṇṇa.

It is excellent that Ven. Puṇṇa intends to continue his spiritual development program by enduring various forms of harassment, troubles, accusations, persecution, and harms from the external environment and dealing with them having the compassion. When examine through the positive psychological features of the Ven. Punna thero's story, one can see a number of features reflected in the sutta as mentioned below. The Puṇṇovādasutta provides valuable role models for developing these qualities within the individual which help to improve the overall mental well-being of him/her.

01. Emotional intelligence
02. Gratitude
03. Friendly nature (loving kindness)
04. Happiness

05. Knowing the meaning and value of what one is doing
06. onsciousness
07. Optimistic mindset
08. Positive communication
09. Positive emotions
10. Positive social relationships
11. Resilience and ability to face any type of situation
12. Self-awareness
13. Self-esteem
14. Strengths and qualities

The common denominator of all such interpreted attitudes is that they are always comforting to the human mind and can have an infinitely positive effect on human behavior. These facts also help a lot in maintaining the balance of the mind. Life is never perfect. Many of the difficulties we face in our lives are unavoidable and we all have to face them. Resistance theory argues that what matters most is not the nature of the disaster, but how we deal with it.

"Venerable sir, if the people of Sunāparanta do take my life with a sharp knife, then I shall think thus: 'There have been disciples of the Blessed One who, being humiliated and disgusted by the body and by life, sought to have their lives deprived by the knife. But I have had my life deprived by the knife without seeking for it.' Then I shall think thus, Blessed One." Trauma is a part of life and at some point, we will all have to face such situations. It causes some to suffer for a long time, while others are able to face the challenge and return to a purposeful life without being overwhelmed by moments when they need to be strong in mind and soul. Ven. Puṇṇa has expressed his feelings about how to deal with even at the greatest loss or harm of life.

Self-consolation is an emotional regulatory strategy used to regain balance after a traumatic event. When life brings us down, we become accustomed to adapt in those situations. Although some people are overcome by challenges, they return as a stronger person than before. Recovering quickly from personal failures and setbacks is a very positive psychological benefit. When we are in a good mood, everything can be managed properly. Due to the good mental state and positive attitudes of Venerable Puṇṇa Thero, he had the ability to face any situation in life with strength. The resilience

of positive psychology means being able to face whatever life offers as challenges or difficulties. It also has the ability to overcome setbacks and adapt to challenging situations that need to thrive. Its foundation is a psychological tool that gives us the ability to feel effective and deal with uncertainties. Not everyone has the ability to withstand shocks. In fact, some people break down in the face of adversity and face whatever obstacles come their way in life, overcome obstacles and they continue to go up by managing their work properly. Such people (eg. Ven. Puṇṇa) tend to prosper and become stronger. The Puṇṇovādasutta gives some background and description of the approaches used to solve problems and to develop resilience at all times.

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