

A Brief Introduction to the Significance of Dhamma-Vinaya

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Introduction

The doctrine of the Buddha consists of both *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*. The *Dhamma* deals with the purity of mind as related to spiritual problems and moral doctrines. *Dhamma* (the truth) is what the Buddha discovered and pointed out as advice for all who want to gain release from suffering. *Vinaya* (discipline) is what the Buddha formulated as rules, ideals, and standards of behavior for those of his disciples who go forth from home life to take up the quest for release in greater earnestness.¹ The range of the *Dhamma* is indeed wider than the *Vinaya*, but it is through the *Vinaya* that the whole Buddhist doctrine attained stability; if the *Dhamma* is the doctrine and theory, the *Vinaya* is its practice (both are equally) because it is only through the practical application a doctrine is put into test.² Venerable *Buddhaghosa*, in the *Samantapāsādikā*, calls the *Vinaya* the very life of the teaching of the Buddha and adds that all Buddhist doctrine and precepts are an outcome of the *Vinaya* along.³ Therefore, In this article, the researcher intends to briefly examine the nature and significance of the Dhamma-Vinaya.

The Nature and Significance of the Dhamma-Vinaya

The early message of the Buddha, that is believed to have been delivered to the world in the sixth century B.C. is what goes today under the name *Dhamma*. It essentially carries the concept of *brahma-cariya* referred to as the totally pure and totally complete religious life.⁴ This life of *brahma-cariya* leads man out of the painful cyclical continuance in *samsāra* in which he is caught up into his final liberation in *Nibbāna*. It is by hearing this *Dhamma* that religiously more mature people, both men and women give up their household life and take into a totally new and different life of *Pabbajjā*. The extension and expansion of this monastic institution called the *Saṅgha* also began to witness signs of decay and decadence. This necessitated the establishment of a codified legal disciplinary system called the *Vinaya*.⁵

Buddhaghosa *thera* defines the term *Vinaya* as the discipline which by various means controls the body and speech, and prevents them from erring.⁶ Hence, the book of *Vinaya* is known as a compilation of rules, which clearly state what, is wrong, and what is right, what is offence and what is non-offence together with the principle of restraint.⁷ These precepts were looked upon as the command of the worthy Buddha.⁸ The subject of *Vinaya* is the moral training known as '*Adhisīla sikkhā*' in Pali.⁹

Another analysis of the concept of *Vinaya* is found in *Suttanipāta* commentary. Commenting here on the word *Vineti* in the *Uruga Sutta*, the commentator gives a twofold analysis of the term *Vinaya* as a discipline or training through restraint (*Samvara Vinaya*) and discipline through elimination. (*Pahāna Vinaya*).¹⁰

This analysis of *Vinaya* in *Suttanipāta* commentary is quite significant. Unlike the *Vinaya Piṭaka* commentary where only the injunction of that *Piṭaka* are taken into account, here the explanation of the term has gone beyond the *Vinaya* injunction, to include both *Vinaya* and *Dhamma*. In the five constituents of 'discipline through restraint' only *Sīla saṃvara* could clearly be included within the traditional interpretation of *Vinaya Piṭaka* injunctions. Here the full course of spiritual development has been interpreted in terms of self-disciplining or self-training. In fact, the whole teaching of the Buddha could be included under the term *Vinaya*, where the unwholesome factors are gradually extricated and wholesome factors are cultivated and made to increase.

In theory, the dhamma-Vinaya may separate, but in the person, who practice them they merge as qualities developed in the mind and character.¹¹

However, the most popular and most widely used sense of the word *Vinaya* in Buddhist literature is its use to denote the rules of discipline of the members of the *Saṅgha*, both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni*, governing things disallowed (*vāritta*) as well as things allowed (*cāritta*) to them by the Buddha. It is the second branch of the teaching of the Buddha denoted by the twin term *Dhamma-Vinaya*.¹² It was the general accepted view in ancient India that the teachings of any religious teacher should contain both these aspects, viz. the doctrinal part dealing with philosophy and the practical part comprising the rules of conduct to be followed by those who choose to follow the teaching.

Prof. Jayawickrama stated the contrast of what it affords to the own statement of Buddha in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* which makes no distinction between *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya*. By this, the Buddha makes *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* he has

declared and laid down, respectively, to his disciples, their teacher after his demise.¹³ Further, he also points to a statement, attributed by *Buddhaghosa* to *Mahākassapa* himself, a little while earlier, "As long as *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* endure, so long will the sacred word, be such that its teacher has not passed into oblivion"¹⁴

Both *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* are necessary for a monk to make steady progress in spiritual advancement of his life. However, even the *Dhamma* alone can head him to the attainment of the spiritual goal, provided he earnestly, and truly, adheres to them. The fact that before the promulgation of *Vinaya* rules, many disciples attained the state of *Nibbāna* amply reveals that the *Dhamma* provides a safe and sure conveyance to reach the destination of the final goal of deliverance.

One cannot say that after the promulgation of the *Vinaya* rules, *Dhamma* was relegated to the background and *Vinaya* emerged into prominence and was considered more superior than that of the *Dhamma*. On the contrary, the *Vinaya* really augmented the *Dhamma*, and continued to retain its position.¹⁵ Thereafter, both the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* continued to have a harmonious history in the Buddhist monastic order.

It is appropriate at this stage to find out the difference between the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*. According to Oldenberg, it would be difficult to lay down any very broad line of distinction between the two.¹⁶ The reason was that many sections of the *Vinaya* are met with again in the *Dhamma*, and not un-frequently are repeated word to word.¹⁷ No doubt such repetitions could be seen, but as Oldenberg says, they are not without reasons. He states; "Many additions were made to the text of the *Vinaya*, in order to explain the origin and the meaning of the different ecclesiastical ordinances, and various passages from the *Dhamma* came to be inserted in the *Vinaya*

Piṭaka in this way.”¹⁸ Thus, it is seen, how passages from the *Dhamma* appear in the *Vinaya* texts. It is to be noted as stated earlier, that the *Vinaya* was a later development, and the *Dhamma* came into being much earlier. So far, for the purposes of explaining the *Vinaya* in detail, *Dhamma* undoubtedly came to be adopted, and thus find similar passages in both the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*.

Further, there are a few differences between the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*. *Dhamma* is generally related to both the laity and the *bhikkhūs* and *bhikkhuṇīs*. Whereas the *Vinaya* is only applicable to the *bhikkhūs* and *bhikkhuṇīs*, and it serves as a mode of regulating their outward conduct. Broadly, *Vinaya* not only regulates or controls the outward conduct of *bhikkhūs* and *bhikkhuṇīs*, but it also controls the mind, which produce outward actions. It is said, that the doctrine regarding the cease from suffering, which forms so central and ideal in the ancient Buddhist faith, belongs to the province of the *Dhamma*.¹⁹

The doctrine deals with a great variety of subjects which are directed towards the development of both the worldly and spiritual life of the *bhikkhus* and laity. However, the main objective of the *Dhamma* is to show the path to the complete extinction of suffering, for which the Buddha has preached his doctrine. *Vinaya*, on the other hand, deals with the discipline of the disciples of the Buddha, for which rules and regulations were made. The conduct of *bhikkhūs* and *bhikkhuṇīs*, or regulating their lives according to *Vinaya*, and following along the path of the *Dhamma*, would finally help them to attain the *Nibbāna*.

The *Vinaya* rules pay the way for an important and significant part in the lives of the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhuṇīs*, in disciplining their behavior, both internally and externally.

Such disciplined conduct is the foundation of spiritual advancement which every *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuṇī* has to strive hard to achieve.

Conclusion

It is appropriate to examine whether the Buddhist monastic order cannot exist without the *Vinaya* rules; or whether *Vinaya* rules are indispensable for the stability and the continuation of the order. Thus, it is clear that rules of *Vinaya* are indispensable for the *Dhamma* and *Sāsana* to remain for a long period.²⁰ Unless the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhuṇīs* who form part and parcel of the *Sāsana* conduct themselves in an exemplary, pious, and well-behaved manner, both the *Saṅgha* and *Sāsana* are bound to suffer. Thus, one may call the discipline of the monks and nuns ‘the life-blood of the *Sāsana*’.

End Notes

- 1 Tanissaro, bhikkhu. (1994). *Buddhist Monastic Code I*. Metta Forest Monastery, p. 11.
- 2 Bhagavant, Durga, N. (1940). *Early Buddhist Jurisprudence*. Poona: The oriental Book Agency. p. 43.
- 3 *Samantapāsādikā I*. (1924-1938). ed. Takasu, J. Nagai, M. London: PTS. p. 13.
- 4 “kevala paripuṇṇaṃ brahma-cariyaṃ parisuddhaṃ brahma-cariyaṃ pakāseti.” *Dīgha Nikāya I*, p.62.
- 5 In this examine, it is really useful to discuss the ten aims of promulgating *Vinaya* rules. The Buddha having indicated the unfavorable conditions which were seen emerging among the membership of the monastic order, and having stressed the need to lay down a codified system of legalized discipline, containing within it unquestionable authority for prosecution and punishment, by the members of the monastic order themselves, pointed out ten beneficial results which would come about as a result of this proposed legalized maintenance of discipline;
 1. *Saṅghasutthutāya* – The well-being of the *Saṅgha*
 2. *Saṅghaphāsutāya* – The convenience of the *Saṅgha*.

3. *Dummañkūnaṃ puggalānaṃ niggahāya* – restrain evil minded persons.
4. *Pesalānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ phāsuvihārāya* – ease of the well behaved monks.
5. *diṭṭhadhammikānaṃ āsavānaṃ saṃvarāya* – restraint against defilements of this life.
6. *Samparāyikānaṃ āsavānaṃ paṭighātāya* – eradication of the defilements of this life after directly concerned with the life and conduct of *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhuniṣ*.
7. *Appasannānaṃ pasādāya* – Conversion of new adherents.
8. *Pasannānaṃ bhiiyobhāvāya* – enhancement of the faith of those already converted.
9. *Saddhammaṭṭhitiyā* – stability and continuance of the *Dhamma*, is concerned with the doctrine, and this aim could be achieved if the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhuniṣ* behave well and in an exemplary manner.
10. *Vinayānuggahāya* – furtherance of the good discipline covers the *Saṅgha* in particular and the *Sāsana* in general. (“tena hi, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ sikkhāpadaṃ paññapessāmi dasa atthavase paṭicca Saṅghasutṭhutaṃ, saṅghaphāsutāya, dummañkūnaṃ puggalānaṃ niggahāya, pesalānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ phāsuvihārāya, diṭṭhadhammikānaṃ āsavānaṃ saṃvarāya, samparāyikānaṃ āsavānaṃ paṭighātāya, appasannānaṃ pasādāya, pasannānaṃ bhiiyobhāvāya, saddhammaṭṭhitiyā, vinayānuggahāya. Evañca pana, bhikkhave, imaṃ sikkhāpadaṃ uddiseyyātha.”) *Vinaya Piṭakaya* III. (1993). p. 21.
- 6 ‘Vividha visesanayattā vinayato ceva kaya vacanānaṃ, vinayatthavidhūhi ayaṃ vinayo vinayoti akkāto’ *Samantapāsādikā* I, (1924-1938). ed. Takasu, J. Nagai, M. London: PTS. p. 19. *Atthasālinī*. (1897). ed. Müller, E. London: PTS. p. 19.
- 7 ‘vinayakathā nāma kappiyākappiya-āpātānānapatti samara-mahānapati – samyutta-kathā.’ *Samantapāsādhikā* IV, p. 760.
- 8 *Atthasālinī*. (1897). p. 21.
- 9 *Ibid* p. 21.
- 10 *Suttanipāta Atthakathā*. (1918-1926). Ed. Smith, H. London: PTS. p. 8.
- 11 Ultimately, the Buddha said, just as the sea has a single taste, that of salt, so too the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* have a single taste: that of release. The connection between discipline and release is spelled out in a passage that recurs at several points in the Canon: “Discipline is for the sake of restraint, restraint for the sake of freedom from remorse, freedom from remorse for the sake of joy, joy for the sake of rapture, rapture for the sake of tranquility, tranquility for the sake of pleasure, pleasure for the sake of

- concentration, concentration for the sake of knowledge and vision of things as they have come to be, knowledge and vision of things as they have come to be for the sake of disenchantment, disenchantment for the sake of dispassion, dispassion for the sake of release, release for the sake of knowledge and vision of release, knowledge and vision of release for the sake of total unbinding through non-clinging.” Tanissaro, bhikkhu. (1994). p. 11.
- 12 The ascetic *Siddhārtha*, who after leaving home life went to the two teacher’s *Ālāra kālāma* and *Uddhakarāmaputta*, expressed his wish to lead the religious life in their *dhamma-vinaya*. (*Majjhima Nikāya* I, p.163-165). Similarly, venerable *Assaji* tells the wandering ascetic *Sāriputta* that he was very recently admitted to the *dhamma-vinaya* of the *Sākyan* sage. (*Vinaya* I, (1964), London: Pali Text Society, p. 41). Here the twin term may indicate both the teaching of the Buddha as well as his Order of discipline. The two terms are also used, sometimes, separately as the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya*. Thus, in one example, the dispensation of the Buddha is introduced using the two terms separately as, “this is the *Dhamma* and this is the *Vinaya*; the dispensation of the Buddha” (*Satthu-Sāsana*). See, (*Ānguttara Nikāya* II, p. 168).
 - 13 “yo vo ānanda mayā dhammo ca vinayo ca desito so vo mamaccayena satthā” *Dīgha Nikāya* II, p. 154.
 - 14 *Samantapāsādikā* I. (1924-1938). p. 4.
 - 15 Ananda Grero, C. (1996). *An Analysis of the Theravada Vinaya in the Light of Modern Legal Philosophy*. Colombo: Karunarathna and Sons, p. 11.
 - 16 *The Vinaya Pitaka* I. (1964), London: Pali Text Society, p. xiii.
 - 17 *Ibid*.
 - 18 *Ibid*.
 - 19 *Vinaya Pitaka* I. (1964). p. xiv.
 - 20 For this, The *Vinaya Piṭaka* provides the answer. “One day venerable *Sāriputta* questioned the Buddha; “Which Buddha’s dispensation endured long, and which did not.” The Buddha’s reply was that the dispensation of the *Buddhas*, *Vipassi*, *Sikhī* and *Vessabhū* did not endure long, while the dispensation of the Buddha *Kakusada*, *Konāgamana* and *Kassapa* endured long.” (*Vinaya Piṭaka* III, pp. 7-9). The Buddha attributed this to the fact that some *Buddhas* did not make such effort in preaching the *Dhamma* in detail and promulgated no rules and regulations for the discipline of the disciples, while other Buddha’s did not do so. *The Book of the Discipline* Vol. I (1949), Tr. I.B. Horner, London: Pali Text Society. p. 17.