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A Survey of the Sources of Buddhist Ethics

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A Survey of the Sources of Buddhist Ethics

Dr. Ian J. Coghlan*

Abstract: This article surveys two sources of ethics in Therāvada Buddhism. Firstly, it briefly surveys the texts that record the process of the proclamation of training rules. Secondly, it investigates the main events which provoked proclamation. This process of setting down an ethical standard itself emerges from both an intuitive sense of ethics held by society and the realized ethics of the Buddha. Further, though the proclamation of the 227 vows is designed to restrain physical and verbal action, the underlying purpose of the vows is to control the mind's motivating unethical action. This survey will show that of the three roots of ignorance, aversion, and attachment, the vows are primarily directed to eliminating the root of attachment.

The Buddha's declaration of ethical rules was seen as one of his two fundamental responsibilities. He states in the *Suttavibhaṅga*: "The enlightened ones, the lords, question the monks concerning two matters, either 'Shall we teach dhamma?' or 'Shall we declare the course of training for the disciples?'"¹ In proclaiming training rules, the Buddha not only delineated the basic modes of behavior that facilitate the attainment of the transcendent state, but he also defined how the lay and ordained may interact ethically within society. This process is not simply the imposition of an ethical code by ecclesiastic edict; it evinces a twofold process that has as much to do with social action as religious innovation. As such the rules demonstrate the inductive tendency of society to intuitively reject various types of action and the complementary deductive tendency of the Buddha to deduce, from the general principle of *nibbāna*, modes of behavior that conform to *nibbāna* and lead to *nibbāna*.

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In this study I shall focus on the record of ethical jurisprudence covering the proclamation of the 227 rules for monks within the Theravāda tradition and the general trends that explain the structure and function of the vows. This process of ethical proclamation reflects the relationship between the laity and the ordained, and the social tension surrounding the idea of the sacred and how it should be represented. This process is revealed in the discourses on discipline (*Vinaya-piṭaka*), which present a diverse field of phenomenological data recorded in the centuries after the passing of the Buddha. They are accounts of religious jurisprudence that not only form the basis of a descriptive phenomenology but also bear the mark of different layers of interpretation. Because this material forms the basis of this investigation, its historicity and the conditions surrounding its accumulation require some examination.

A Survey of the Textual Sources

The rules of ethical training have been recorded and preserved in the four texts of the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, namely the *Suttavibhaṅga*, *Mahāvagga*, *Cullavagga*, and *Parivāra-pāṭha*. The *Parivāra-pāṭha* is regarded as a later work and probably the work of a Ceylonese *thera*.² The *Mahāvagga*, consisting of ten *khandhakas*, and the *Cullavagga*, consisting of twelve *khandhakas*, “give a detailed and connected account of the admission into the *sangha*; of the ceremony of the *uposatha*; of the annually recurring observances connected with the beginning and the end of the rainy season; of the principal disciplinary proceedings; and of miscellaneous details regarding medicine, food, dwelling places, and daily life of the members of the order.” (VT1: xix) In addition, the first section of the *Mahāvagga* gives an account of the Buddha’s life immediately after his enlightenment, and it details the early development of the *sangha*.

In this survey, I shall primarily focus on the *Suttavibhaṅga*, which deals with the proclamation of the ethical code and the analysis of *pāṭimokkha* (VT1: xv) found at the very core of the text. (SV1:xi) The term *pāṭimokkha* itself refers both to freeing oneself from *samsāra*³ and to the standard list of 227 training rules. The training rules are divided in two parts, which indicate two levels of ethical severity. The first part deals with the four defeats (*pārājika*), the thirteen remainders (*saṅghādisesa*), and two indeterminate cases (*anīyata-dhammas*). The second part deals with the thirty forfeitures (*nissaggiya-pācittiya*), the ninety-two expiations (*pācittiya*), the four confessions (*paṭidesaniya*), the seventy-five faults (*sekhiya*), and the seven dispute

procedures (*Adhikaraṇasamatha*).

The *Suttavibhaṅga*, while taking the *pāṭimokkha* as its central theme, explains the significance of the vows from four related perspectives:

1. The incident leading to a training rule being proclaimed
2. The *pāṭimokkha* rule, which also reveals the penalty for breaking it
3. The *Padabhājanīya* (Old Commentary), which defines the rule word by word
4. Further incidents revealing deviations from the rule

This format is generally retained for each rule, though sometimes only the initial precedent is mentioned without reference to further incidents, and sometimes the order of the *pāṭimokkha* and *Padabhājanīya* is reversed. (SV1:ix) Rhys Davids and Oldenberg were of the opinion that the early basis of *vinaya*, the *pāṭimokkha*, was initially proclaimed in the precanonical era, starting during the life of the Buddha (567-487 B.C.); that within fifty years the *Padabhājanīya*⁴ was composed as an interpretive commentary to the *pāṭimokkha*; (VT1:xvi) and that by the time of the Second Council at Vesālī (377 B.C.) the *Vibhaṅga* and the *khandhaka* of the *Cullavagga* and *Mahāvagga* had reached their final form.⁵ Though this interpretation is disputed,⁶ there is general agreement on a very early date for the *Suttavibhaṅga*.

It is reasonable to conclude that the Buddha himself proclaimed many of the vows. By his example, the process of ethical proclamation was continued and completed by the community after the Buddha's *paranibbāna* in accordance with the four *mahāpadesa*.⁷ These principles are enumerated in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*,⁸ and they offer a framework for determining the authenticity of *vinaya* rules and acknowledge that the Buddha was not the only author of ethical precepts. A rule, therefore, may be accepted as genuine if it is (1) the speech of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*); (2) a rule framed by elder and distinguished monks in a particular monastery; (3) a rule framed by learned bearers of the tradition; or (4) a rule framed by a learned professor of the canon, if the rule is found to conform to *sutta* and *vinaya*.

Oldenberg dismissed the stories of incidents that provoked ethical proclamation as inventions made to introduce each vow, but Horner deemed it unnecessary "to hold such a hard-and-fast rule." (SV1:xxxiv) Indeed some stories may in fact be true, especially since both the ethical rules and the stories of precedents were recorded either during the life of the Buddha or

within 100 years of his passing at a time when events in the life of the Buddha survived as firsthand accounts in the memories of actual witnesses. If the origin of the stories is attributed to apologetic tendencies, among the early followers of the Buddha, aimed at authenticating or enhancing the reputation of the Order, the question arises as to how stories of theft, fornication, deceit, and so forth would achieve this goal. It is also clear, as in the case of Purāna,⁹ that adding vows to the list of *pāṭimokkha* was not easy, even if the particular rule fulfilled the necessary criteria. At any rate, because fabricated incidents could have been included as commentary to the *pāṭimokkha* for a variety of reasons, the question of their origin remains open.

The process of the induction of rules to the *pāṭimokkha* was influenced and determined by local culture, and various practices were adopted and included within the *pāṭimokkha* by example from other traditions. As such, many Buddhist training rules reflect the ethics of earlier sects¹⁰ in which major ethical transgressions were universally proscribed. The Jains had precepts corresponding to the *pārājika* rules, as did the common precursors of Jain and Sakyan mendicants, the *saññyāsīn* or *brāhmaṇa* ascetics.¹¹ The rains retreat (*vassa*) was also common to other sects¹² and the tradition of reciting the vows at full and new moons at the *uposatha* assemblies was instigated by the Buddha after King Seniya Bimbisāra criticized the Sakyan *bhikkhus* for remaining idle at these times, unlike the members of other sects who engaged in religious activities.¹³

That there were conflicting opinions regarding the early lists of vows is evident in the dissent of Purāna of Dakkināgiri at the First Council. He disagreed with the noninclusion of seven rules relating to food, but his insistence on a second rehearsal was rejected.¹⁴ By the time of the Second Council, 100 years after the *paranibbāna*, an intense dispute arose regarding the ten unethical actions of the Vesālī monks, themselves minor vows. This quarrel implies the existence of a settled and widely accepted code of rules.¹⁵ In the following centuries, more differences emerged in the presentation of the rules. The *Mahāvibhāṣā*, which was composed after the Council under King Kanishka in around 100 A.D., records details of eighteen different Buddhist sects that each maintained their own versions of the *vinaya*.¹⁶ Since that time however, a number of these traditions have been lost, and today the *vinaya* records of only seven sects survive in part or whole.¹⁷

These different recensions of the vows are at variance with each other only over systems of enumeration, a fact most evident in the lists of training rules (*sekhiya-dhammas*).¹⁸ Their general overall concordance implies a strong intention to preserve an original settled form. This conservative trend

is evident in the living traditions, which tend to reject any further change to the rules as counter to their settled definition of the spiritual path.

The Preconditions for the Proclamation of Vows

It appears that no vows were proclaimed for the first few years after the Buddha's enlightenment, and the *sangha* initially lived without the need for external restraint. The *Mahāvagga* relates the early spread of dhamma from the first turning of the wheel in Saranatha, and indicates that early disciples readily attained one of the four levels of *ariya* realization before ordination (*sotāpanna*, *sakadāgāmi*, *anāgāmi*, and *arahatta*). The ease of attainment of early disciples is attributed to their accumulation of merit (*puñña*) in previous lives, whereas later aspirants who lacked this foundation required greater and more sustained effort. Those who had attained *ariya* levels were not prone to major transgressions of ethics because they had eliminated the dependent arising of ignorance (*avijjā paṭiccasamuppāda*), which acts as the root of unethical behavior and *samsāra* itself. They were, however, subject to minor transgressions such as Ānanda, who though a stream enterer (*sotāpanna*) was still responsible for the proclamation of two vows.

Though the early community lived without the proclamation of formal rules, it cannot be inferred that having no rules of ethical restraint was best. The *Suttavibhaṅga* indicates that a detailed and comprehensive declaration of training rules would help preserve both the *sangha* and *buddhavacana*. The Buddha declares that under the Buddhas Vipassin, Sikhin and Vessabhu “the Brahma life did not last long because they were . . . idle in preaching dhamma in detail to the disciples . . . the course of training for the disciples was not made known, the *pāṭimokkha* was not appointed. After the disappearance of these enlightened ones, these lords, after the disappearance of the disciples enlightened under these enlightened ones, those last disciples of various names, families, social strata, who had gone forth from various families, caused this Brahma-life rapidly to disappear . . . Moreover, Sāriputta, whoever not devoid of passion, is in a terror of the awe-inspiring jungle-thicket, and enters the jungle-thicket, as a rule his hair stands on end. This, Sāriputta, is the cause, reason why . . . the Brahma-life did not last long.” (SV1:18)

Here two factors are listed as essential for preserving the religious life, and they correspond precisely to the two issues the Buddha was concerned to elucidate: view and ethics. If ethics is not extensively taught, it is dif-

difficult to establish the basis for generating the correct view of dhamma, in accordance with the progressive development of the three higher trainings. If dhamma is not extensively taught, it is difficult to understand the need for ethics and the very nature of dhamma itself. Without a stable understanding of these two, negative internal and external conditions will tend to quickly undermine the spiritual life. Aspirants, therefore, need to train for a long period within a proper training structure overseen by others adequately trained in ethics and dhamma. Such realized guides are capable of directly demonstrating the path in accordance with their realization. For example, *paccekabuddhārahants* tend to instruct nonverbally through gestures, whereas *sāvakārahants* openly instruct others in accordance with their own unique experience of the transcendent path.

The relationship between adepts and trainees is capable of producing a stream of realized students. In time, this circle will be broken through the decline of the merit (*puñña*) of trainees that supports and facilitates the continued presence of realized adepts. Without them, the training structure must be maintained through the example of senior students who are capable of teaching the ethical code but who lack transcendent insight. At this point, the training rules act as a substitute for the instruction of living realized guides and embody the training structure.

The proclamation of rules was not a spontaneous process. Instead, it depended on the occurrence of certain external conditions that when manifest, provided the appropriate context for the Buddha to make a declaration. The *Suttavibhaṅga* relates a story where Sāriputta requested the Buddha to make known the course of training for disciples. When so requested, the Buddha replied “Wait, Sāriputta, wait, Sāriputta. The Tathāgata will know the right time for that. The teacher does not make known, Sāriputta, the course of training for disciples, or appoint the *pātimokkha* until some conditions causing the cankers to appear here in the Order... Some conditions do not... appear... until the Order has attained long standing... [or]... full development... [or]... the chief greatness of gain... [or]... great learning.” (SV1:19)

This statement implies that the process of Buddhist ethical injunction is reactive, not proactive. Ethical rules are imposed to counter the negative actions of individuals only after they have been committed. The Buddha intervened only when events demanded redress and the order and society were predisposed to assimilating a training rule. The Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition asserts that this process began in the sixth year after enlightenment, not long after the ordination of Sudinna.¹⁹

The *Suttavibhaṅga* then lists the reasons for the Buddha proclaiming

rules of restraint on the occasion of proclaiming the first defeat (*pārājika*). “On account of this, monks, I will make known the course of training for monks, founded on ten reasons: (1) for the excellence of the Order, (2) for the comfort of the Order, (3) for the restraint of evil-minded men, (4) for the ease of well-behaved monks, (5) for the restraint of cankers belonging to the here and now, (6) for the combating of the cankers belonging to other worlds, (7) for the benefit of non-believers, (8) for the increase in the number of believers, (9) for establishing dhamma indeed, (10) for following the rules of restraint.” (SV1:37)

These ten reasons may be summarized in four categories. Reasons 1, 2, 4 and 10 are directed to establishing positive internal or psychological conditions for the *sangha*; reasons 3, 5 and 6 are directed to eliminating negative internal conditions; reasons 7 and 8 are directed to providing positive external conditions such as food, daily requisites and so forth; and the reason 9 is directed to providing positive conditions for the preservation of the *Dharma*. The last point deals with the idea that dhamma as transcendent realization is the source of ethics, and ethics provides, in turn, the support for the continued existence of dhamma. When the *sangha*, who constitute the group who formally maintain ethics within society, no longer exists and there are no ordained beings practicing restraint of the four *pārājika*, then dhamma will disappear as a living cultural tradition.

The Relative Severity of the Vows

The vows do not carry equal weight, but are classified in seven divisions of *sikkhāpada* in order of declining severity. This seven-fold division may have existed in some form at the time the vows themselves were proclaimed as an essential aspect of the description of the vow. However, the ordering of the vows in seven divisions of declining severity is certainly the work of later editors. In terms of relative severity, the vows may be divided into major and minor vows. The range of major vows may therefore include the defeats, remainders, and indefinite cases. The range of the minor vows would include forfeitures, expiations, confessions, training rules, and dispute procedures. The *Cullavagga* describes a discussion by elders to determine the minor vows. This discussion occurred after the death of the Buddha, when Ānanda informed the Order that the Buddha gave permission for the minor vows to be abolished after his death.²⁰ The *Cullavagga* relates that there was general disagreement as to which of the seven divisions were minor vows. Finally, Kassapa proposed that all vows be retained to prevent the

laity from accusing the Order of backsliding after the Buddha's *paranibbāna*, which demonstrates the pervasive influence of lay opinion on the Order.

Secondly, with regard to the major vows the measure of absolute severity is the defeat (*pārājika*).²¹ One who is defeated is likened to a “man with his head cut off [who] cannot become one to live with that bodily connection. . . [he] is not a true recluse.” (SV1:48) The offence cannot be purified, just as a severed head cannot be reattached to the torso. The offender is no longer in communion, where communion means “one work, one rule, an equal training.” (SV1:48) Defeat, therefore, is the measure of absolute severity for there is no possibility of purifying a transgression.²²

The next level is the remainder (*saṅghādisesa*)²³, or formal meeting (SV1:xxx). Remainders are offences which require a formal meeting of the *sangha* where “The Order places (the offender) on probation on account of the offence, it sends him back to the beginning, it inflicts the *mānatta* discipline, it rehabilitates.” (SV1:196) By submitting to the penalty imposed by the formal meeting of the *sangha*, the offence is purified.

The two indefinite cases (*aniyata dhammas*) are called indefinite because they are “not determined as to whether [they] involve defeat, or formal meeting of the Order, or expiation.” (SV1:335) Therefore, these two are effectively subsumed within the divisions of defeat, remainder, or expiation.

Next in severity are the two divisions of expiation (*pācittiyam*). The first are the thirty forfeitures (*nissaggiya*)²⁴ described in the *Vibhaṅga* as “*āpatti desabbā*” (SV2:xxv), which implies forfeiture of the offending article plus confession. Here an article is deemed unsuitable for an ordainee practicing the life of a mendicant either by its very nature or by its size or quantity. The *Vibhaṅga* briefly describes the procedure for purifying the offence in regard to the first forfeiture: “Having forfeited it, the offence should be confessed. The offence should be acknowledged by an experienced competent monk; the robe forfeited should be given back.” (SV2:8) This procedure is common to all cases of forfeiture.

The second division is the ninety-two expiations (*pācittiyam*). Horner asserts them to be confessions unaccompanied by forfeiture (SV2:xxv), and they deal with a variety of offences related to the daily activities of mendicants that required purification through repentance. The four confessions (*paṭidesaniya*)²⁵ deal with improperly soliciting and distributing alms. The next division is the seventy-five training rules (*sekhiya-dhamma*), which are the same for both monks and nuns and which set out appropriate modes of behavior for travel, eating, teaching dhamma, relieving oneself, and so on. The final division, the seven dispute procedures (*adhikaraṇa*), set out the proper means for dealing with dispute in the order.

In summary, the seven dispute procedures and the seventy-five training rules are guidelines for quelling dispute and for proper modes of etiquette, respectively. Their transgression requires no formal purification. The four confessions are purified through their individual confession. The thirty forfeitures plus the ninety-two expiations are purified, respectively, through confession conjoined with or without forfeiture. The two indefinite cases are subsumed in the three divisions of defeat, remainder, and expiation. The remainders are purified through a formal meeting of the *sangha* and the imposition of appropriate penalties. The defeats cannot be purified.

Traditionally, the seven levels of vows are regarded as progressive layers of defense against the intrusion of afflictive mental states (*kilesa*) that would destroy renunciation and the life of a recluse. These rules are like concentric circles of levy banks that restrain the fourfold flood (*ogha*) of desire (*kāma*), existence (*bhava*), view (*ditthi*), and ignorance (*avijjā*). Minor offences are like the failure of the outer levies, which expose the inner walls to erosion. Just as the outer walls of a levy system can be repaired, so too remedial measures, such as confession, can reestablish the minor vows and restore their protective function. However, if the minor vows are not maintained, the danger of a complete loss of the ethical basis increases.

Both defeats and remainders also possess internal degrees of severity, such as full offence, grave offence (*thullaccaya*), and wrongdoing (*dukkata*). Although a full offence cannot be purified for a defeat, a grave offence and wrong doing can be purified by the appropriate remedial action. A grave offence may signify the absence of a factor required for a full and actual offence, whereas a wrongdoing signifies the absence of more than one essential factor. For instance, if a person intent on stealing an object of sufficient value touches that object in the process of stealing it, it is a wrongdoing. If he moves it, it becomes a grave offence. If he removes it completely from its original place, it becomes a defeat.(SV1:70) Conversely, grave offence and wrongdoing may indicate degree in a single factor. For instance, the theft of an object of greater value than five *māsaka* entails defeat, four *māsaka* entails a grave offence, and one *māsaka* a wrongdoing.(SV1:xxii)

A Survey of the Events Initiating the Proclamation of Training Rules

The stories in the *Suttavibhaṅga* present a broad and often detailed picture of the lives of ordinary people in early Indian society. They place the ethical dilemmas that the Buddha adjudicated within their appropriate social con-

text and put a human face to the dry enumeration of rules. These disputes center on how the religious life should be lived, both within the circle of ordained *sangha* and in relation to the wider lay community.

Many vows were defined and clarified by a series of precedents. The first precedent in particular, introduced the nature and type of action which was being censured. Later precedents sharpened the definition and eliminated doubt and ambiguity.

The stories precede the declaration of a rule, and generally start by locating the place of residence of the Buddha. The *Suttavibhaṅga* lists just seven general locations where offences occurred: Vesālī, Rājagaha, Sāvattthī, Kosambī, Ālavī, Kapilavatthu, and Bhagga. Three of the four defeats were proclaimed in or near Vesālī, which reflects its reputation as a center for intellectual dissent. It was also the site of the dispute in the order over the ten unvinayic actions, which led to the convening of the Second Council. The vast majority of the remaining vows were proclaimed in Sāvattthī, while the Buddha was resident at Anāthapindika's park in Jeta's Grove, a site where he spent many rains.

With regard to the offenders, there were twenty-two different agents listed as precedent setters. The category of monks include the monks at ālavī, the followers of Mettiya and Bhummika, the followers of Assaji and Punnabasu, as well as wandering monks. The four defeats were committed by different individual monks not recorded to have offended again. Because they were precedent setters, their offence did not lead to their expulsion from the order. The remaining vows were often proclaimed through the actions of repeat offenders. Udāyin set precedents for the proclamation of four remainders and influencing a fifth, both indefinite cases, four forfeitures and four expiations, all related to sexual activity. Upananda set precedents for eight forfeitures all related to the improper acquisition of robes and eight expiations related to different offences. By far the most prominent were the Group of Six (*chabbagiyas*), six monks who set precedents in 126 cases.

There are a variety of complainants mentioned in the *Suttavibhaṅga* whose criticism led to the proclamation of a rule. Two nonhuman complainants are mentioned, a *deva* for the first defeat and a *devatā* for the expiation concerning the cutting down of a tree (5/11)²⁶ The Buddha acted as complainant in nine cases. Ordainees acted as complainants in seventy-eight instances, of which six involved nuns. In general, the ordained were more prominent as complainants in the five most serious divisions of vows. The laity were more active in the minor vows, acting as complainants in 129 cases, seventy related to etiquette.

Although the laity formally took a minor role in religious activities, it is

clear they were influential during the period of the formation of the rules. The laity held strong opinions concerning what recluses could or should do, because they formed the economic support of the mendicants. By freeing them from the harvest and other economic activities, they granted the ordained *sangha* a privileged social position. However, their recognition of this status depended on the way the mendicants behaved and whether they properly represented the religious ideal held by society. In return for economic support, the laity were seen to benefit by their accumulation of merit (*puñña*). However, the theory of merit depended on the actual ethical status of the *sangha* in relation to whom merit was accumulated. Therefore, the laity had a vested interest in the *sangha* maintaining high religious and social standards.

A Brief Analysis of the Precedents

The defeats were the measure of absolute ethical severity. Transgression is the defeat of an individual's life as a recluse where one is expelled and no longer in communion. The *Suttavibhaṅga* describes the circumstances leading to the first defeat concerning sexual activity (1/1). Sudinna had received novice (*pabbajjā*) and full-ordination (*upasampadā*) and dwelt on alms near a village of the Vajjians. A famine occurred and he returned to Vesālī, his parents' neighborhood, where food was plentiful. His parents attempted to entice him to resume lay life with his former wife and employ the extensive family wealth for meritorious action. He declined, but when urged to produce an heir to stop the Licchavi from taking over their property, he relented and engaged in intercourse with his former wife three times, and she conceived a son. The *devā* loudly proclaimed this immoral act. In time, Sudinna's former wife gave birth to a son and, Sudinna suffered acute remorse. (SV1:23-33)

Here the agent Sudinna acts through both family pressure and sexual attachment, both of which are renounced by the *bhikkhu* and form essential elements in the definition of a recluse. The *Mahāvagga* relates the story of the Buddha's reunion with the five *bhikkhus* at Isipatana. The Buddha exhorts them to realize "here and now by your own super-knowledge that supreme goal of the Brahma-faring for the sake of which young men of family rightly go forth from home into homelessness."²⁷ A recluse, therefore, is one who renounces all family concerns and leads a celibate life to realize the goal of dhamma.

Sudinna's breaking of celibacy (*abrahmacariya*) marks an ethical crisis

and the breaking of a sacred trust. The goal of *nibbāna* demanded ethical purity. Loss of this purity marked the fall of an individual and discredit to the order. Here, the Buddha outlined two basic results, one concerning the offender and the other the lay community, a convention maintained for each of the four defeats. For the first result, the Buddha stated “It is not fit. . . not becoming. . . not proper. . . unworthy of a recluse. Is not dhamma taught by me for the sake of passionlessness. . . the waning of passion. . . the destruction of pleasures of the senses. . . the allaying of the fever of the pleasures of the senses? . . . after death you would pass to the waste, the bad bourn, the abyss, hell.” (SV1:36) The recluse Sudinna, by his action, had destroyed the foundation of his practice as a recluse.

Although the consequence of defeat for an individual is expulsion from the order, spiritual development is still possible if the action was purified. The Theravāda tradition does not, however, permit readmission to full ordination. On the other hand, the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition asserts expulsion is not necessary if the agent had no intention to conceal the offence from the moment the offence was committed, and the offender undertakes prescribed measures for purification. The Mūlasarvāstivāda assert that the offending monk remains an ordaineer for four reasons: (1) an offender may act as the agent of further offences; (2) he may act as the ordained object of denigration by other monks; (3) such an offender can break in order all four defeats; and (4) when such an offender attains the state of arahant they can again assume their rank in the assembly.²⁸

Secondly, the Buddha declared the public result: “It is not. . . for the benefit of non-believers, nor for the increase in the number of believers, but it is. . . to the detriment of both non-believers and believers, and it causes wavering in some.” (SV1:37) This is the more serious and pervasive result. It potentially affected the entire order, creating doubt for those with sympathy for the Buddha’s dispensation and adding fuel to those not in favor of it. By bringing the order into disrepute, Sakyan mendicants could expect alms and requisites to be more difficult to acquire in a society where many different sects competed for respect and resources. Serious loss of public confidence could inhibit the growth of a new religious order or even destroy it. The measure adopted by the Buddha to restore confidence was to strongly and publicly chastise the offender and make known that any future offender would be expelled. Further, the fact that the initial precedent does not require expulsion of the offender also implies that the proclamation is as much directed to the reputation of the order for breakage of the vows and does not automatically disqualify someone from formal recognition as a Buddhist contemplative.

The initial precedent concerning the second defeat(SV1:64-72) of stealing(1/2) occurred on the Isigili mountain-slope above Rājagaha. The recluse Dhaniya tried to construct a hermit's hut of grass and wood, but each time women dismantled it and carried away the wood. He built and fired a clay hut, which the Buddha ordered destroyed because its construction harmed insects. Then, claiming the king had given him wood to construct a hut, Dhaniya requested the overseer of the king's timber yard to give him the king's timber that had been set aside for repair of the city. Having obtained the wood, he constructed a hut but was later arrested along with the overseer. Dhaniya confessed his act to the king and the person who freed him because he was a monk. The people became angry with Dhaniya's release, and in response the Buddha proclaimed a training rule by stating, "Whatever monk should by means of theft take from a village or from the jungle what has not been given to him in such a manner of taking as kings, catching a thief in the act of stealing, would flog him or imprison him or banish him, saying, 'You are a robber, you are foolish, you are wrong, you are a thief', even so a monk, taking what is not given him, is also one who is defeated, he is not in communion."(SV1:71)

Dhaniya had great trouble building himself a hut, and at each turn his plans were frustrated. When, however, he falsely claimed that the king's wood had been given to him and took that wood away, he had committed theft. Dhaniya had destroyed the foundation of the life of a recluse by committing an illegal act. Although the recluse renounces worldly concerns, the special status granted by society demands his strict adherence to legality. Again the Buddha had to strongly chastise the offender to regain public confidence.

The third defeat is killing a human(1/3). The Buddha at Vesālī spoke in praise of contemplating the impure nature of the body, then he entered solitary retreat for two weeks. Applying this technique, the *bhikkhus* soon realized the nature of their physical impurity and became ashamed and depressed. They requested Migalaṇḍika to kill them, and he agreed to assist them by slitting their throats, receiving in turn their robes and bowls. He then became repentant, but, deceived by a *deva* into thinking his acts were meritorious, he proceeded to kill other monks. The Buddha, on finishing his retreat, questioned Ānanda about the lack of monks, who revealed the situation. The Buddha then proclaimed the defeat of killing. "Whatever monk should intentionally deprive a human of life or should look about so as to be his knife bringer, he is one who is defeated, he is not in communion."(SV1:116-123)

The act of killing is both illegal and counter to the notion of recluse.

The Buddha proscribed killing since it directly opposes ethics: the act of not harming either oneself or others. The act of taking life, whether through murder, suicide, abortion, euthanasia, and so on, is regarded as a natural nonvirtue, because it is nonvirtuous regardless of the context or motivation. In other words, the motivation to kill is always a harmful motivation, but such a negative motivation can be associated with other positive motivations. For example in an act of euthanasia, the motivation to kill is nonvirtuous, the motivation to free another of suffering virtuous, and choosing the wrong method to end suffering a product of ignorance. In other words, killing another in order to end their suffering, even when motivated by compassion, may actually increase their suffering if it inadvertently creates the conditions for rebirth in states of greater suffering. Also, abortion is regarded as murder because a fetus is regarded as a fully qualified human being from the first moment of conception. This is evident in the presentation of the twelve links of dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), where the fourth link of name and form represents the first moment of the complete basis for designation as a human being.

The first three defeats also correspond to discipline (*sīla*) held by the Jain and *saññyāsīn* recluses (SV1:xxiv) and reflect a shared societal view of the behavioral limits of a mendicant. However, the fourth defeat is not shared by other traditions. It concerns a mendicant lying (1/4) about the attainment of mundane and transcendent meditative states. (SV1:159) Though a detailed knowledge of the philosophic implications of meditative attainments would not be common in society in general, claims to *ariya* status would be recognized, just as claims to the status of a saint would be broadly understood in Christian society.

The initial precedent occurred during a famine in Vajji when in order to gain alms some monks spoke in praise of having attained superhuman states when they had not actually attained those levels. At the end of the rains, they visited the Buddha who questioned them on their robust health at a time of scarce resources. They admitted their offence and the Buddha proclaimed the defeat of lying. (SV1:151) A recluse who gains alms in this way is the worst type of thief, or as the Buddha states “the chief great thief,” (SV1:157) for here public religious sympathy was manipulated for alms at a time of general social hardship.

The attainments that are the objects of the lie refer to both sublime states (*mahagatta*) such as the *jhānas*, and transcendent states (*lokuttara*) such as the *ariya*, truths of the path (*maggā-sacca*), and cessation (*nirodha-sacca*). By falsely claiming to have surpassed the status of an ordinary human and convincing others of it, a *bhikkhu* is defeated. Further, *bhikkhus*

or *bhikkunīs* who have attained such states and reveal this attainment others without adequate cause incur the offence of expiation(5/9).

It is clear that the vows against the four defeats are the final defense of the ordained, and when a complete infraction occurs one is defeated and no longer in communion. The thirteen remainders act as a second line of defense and prevent an ordained being from entering states preparatory to defeats. Committing any of the first five remainders clearly enhance sexual attachment and predispose a *bhikkhu* to breaking *brahmacariya*.

The generation of sexual attachment was identified by the Buddha as the main obstacle to renunciation and the most difficult passion for a human to renounce. All five precedents were proclaimed with reference to the actions of the lascivious Udāyin. In the first incident he recommended masturbation to another monk as a way of relieving sexual tension(2/1). In the second, he touched the body of a married woman in his cell(2/2). In the third, he spoke lewd words to females in his cell(2/3). In the fourth, he requested sex from a female,(2/4) and in the fifth he acted as matchmaker(2/5).

The implications of the sixth and seventh remainders are less clear. The initial proclamation regarding the improper construction of meditation huts (*kuti*)(2/6) clearly rebukes monks for harassing the lay community to give building materials for constructing large individual dwellings. Further proclamations reinforce this interpretation and stress that excessive begging ruins the mendicants' relationship with their patrons. It would be improper use of a patron's resources to commence construction without first ensuring full sponsorship of the work. The incident resembles the precedent for declaring the defeat of theft. It implies that this remainder is a potential preparation for theft. Improper construction of a monastery (*vihāra*)(2/7) was proscribed since Channa, while dwelling at Kosambī, cut down a tree used as a shrine in order to build a *vihāra*. The local people were angry that a monk could commit such an act of destruction to a revered site, and the Buddha declared that because sentient beings inhabited the tree it should not have been destroyed. A site for a *vihāra*, therefore, must be an open space, properly marked, involve no destruction, and so forth. The proclamation of this remainder emphasizes the prevention of harming or killing sentient beings. Disregard of this remainder would potentially lead to the defeat of killing.

Baseless accusation(2/8) was proscribed when Dabba, while dwelling at the Bamboo Grove, was appointed to assign lodgings. He was denigrated by the ordained followers of Mettiya and Bhummajaka, who falsely accused him of committing a defeat. Both this and the remainder of implying(2/9) involve deceit and lying about the defeat of another. Although they do not

directly lead to defeat, because they are serious instances of deceit they create predispositions to lying about one's attainments, the fourth defeat. Dividing the *sangha*(2/10) was proscribed when Devadatta, while living at the Bamboo Grove, requested the implementation of the five ascetic practices, which the Buddha had rejected. Devadatta and his supporters then denigrated orthodox monks and their practices, persisted in this divisive course, and finally withdrew from the *sangha*, creating a schism. Although creating a schism is regarded as one of the five heinous acts (*ānantarika-dhamma*), it is not included within the defeats along with the heinous acts of killing one's mother, father, or an arahant. Instead, creating a schism is designated a remainder while spilling the blood of a Buddha is not included in the training rules. That a schism is designated a remainder is indicative of the freedom granted to the order to dissent and even split from the main body of monks. Informally, this designation recognizes legitimate reasons for forming new sects.

Discontent with advice(2/12) was proscribed when Channa in Kosambī rejected the advice of monks who criticized his bad habits. He persisted in this course and, after the third warning, a remainder was declared. His fault was to reject the valid advice of learned monks directed to eliminating his faults, the very purpose for him undertaking such training. Rejecting their advice is tantamount to rejecting the advice of the Buddha himself, and draws comparison with the motivation for schism where also valid advice is rejected. The remainder of not spoiling the faith of the laity(2/13) was declared when the followers of Assaji and Punabbasu indulged in various bad habits in Kitāgiri. Lay followers who supported them were corrupted and failed to support virtuous monks, yet the offenders persisted in this course of action even when warned. The precedent resembles the previous remainder, yet here a monk's bad habits involves the corruption of householders and the misuse of donor resources. It is the potential preparation for theft.

Whereas the defeats indicate individual instances of interaction between the lay and ordained, the remainders more clearly reflect the development of a religious communal structure. Here, the first rules governing shelters (*āvāsa*), huts (*kuti*), and monasteries (*ārāma*; *vihāra*) were codified. They provide a foundation for the emergence of the settled patterns of monastic life exemplified by the rites of ordination (*pabbajjā*; *upasampadā*), rains (*vassa*), and the *pavāraṇā* and *kathina* rituals at the end of the rains retreat.

The two indefinite cases involve standing(3/1) and sitting(3/2) in seclusion with a female and involve potential preparation for the first five remainders and the first defeat. In contrast, the next division of vows, the thirty forfeitures, involve the wrong acquisition of articles, and their purification

requires that the article be forfeited. The forfeitures are less serious than the thirteen remainders. Two forfeitures, not to have a robe washed or dyed by a *bhikkhuni* who is not a relative (4/5) and not to accept a robe from a *bhikkhuni* who is not a relative, (4/5) are related to sexual attachment and prevent potential preparatory states to the first five remainders. Twenty-eight forfeitures involve improper use of donor resources and potentially relate to three remainders. (2/6-7,13)²⁹ From among those, eighteen involve robes, robe funds, or cloth or yarn for making robes. Seven involve rugs, or silk or wool for making rugs. Two involve bowls, one involves medicine, and two are related to gold and silver. Fourteen complainants are ordainees and sixteen lay, including the actual donors. The forfeitures indicate the existence of a sophisticated culture of mendicancy and strong expectations of both the mendicants and laity of the donor-mendicant relationship. These vows proscribe ordainee's misuse of donor resources, and they check any drift to attachment to worldly goods. Further, they prevent monks from engaging in financial activity, which is the exclusive and legitimate field of the laity.

The ninety-two expiations are regarded as equal in weight to the forfeitures, and they contain a wide variety of offences, each purified by confession. In brief, sixty-four expiations proscribe physical actions and twenty-nine verbal actions. Again, nine refer to robes or requisites, four deal with incorrect measurement, (5/89-92)³⁰ and two involve giving an unrelated nun robes or robe material. (5/25-26)³¹ That these did not require forfeiture reflects the difficulty nuns faced in gaining requisites and the fact that forfeiture would punish the nun, not the offender. Three involve the misuse of robes: not marking robes for identification, (5/58)³² using other's robes without permission, (5/59)³³ or hiding other's robes. (5/60)³⁴ Such misuse of robes is not as serious as storing robes for more than six nights in the jungle and potentially ruining them (4/29) and did not require forfeiture. Similarly, wearing a robe the size of the Buddha (5/92)³⁵ did not require forfeiture, and the *Suttavibhaṅga* notes there is no offence if the offender "makes it less. . . having cut it down, he makes use of it; . . . makes a canopy."³⁶ Thirteen expiations relate to improper ways of begging and eating alms (5/29,31-42) and are generally related to the misuse of donor resources. The Group of Six figure in forty-one precedents, which occurred mainly in *Sāvattihī*. Upānanda figures in eight, also mainly in *Sāvattihī*. In summary, nineteen expiations potentially lead to sexual activity, twenty-five to theft, fifteen to killing, ten to lying, and twelve to slander.

The four confessions are concerned with improperly begging and distributing alms. Two are related to *bhikkhunīs*: not accepting food from

a *bhikkhuni* (6/1) or ordering *bhikkhunis* to leave a meal(6/2). Two are related the method of accepting food: either not to beg alms from impoverished donors(6/3) or not soliciting and eating alms in a place of danger to the donor. Three of the four were committed by the Group of Six. In summary, the confessions relate to the etiquette of soliciting alms, and committing them potentially leads to transgressing expiations or more serious offences of similar type.

The seventy-five training rules relate to the etiquette of travel, food, teaching and relieving oneself. For seventy-two rules, the agents are the Group of Six committed at *Sāvattihī* and the complainants are the general public. The thirty rules pertaining to food may be regarded as improper use of donor resources. The rest appear to be mainly motivated by ignorance and inattentiveness, and they potentially lead to any of the seven negative actions of body and speech. Training rules do not require confession for purification, and they function as behavioral guidelines. Thirty guidelines related to food are marginally less serious than the confessions, which all relate to food.

Conclusion

We can infer from this brief analysis that the Buddha formulated the 227 vows to prohibit verbal³⁷ and physical³⁸ actions that obstruct entry to the path. The vows, therefore, reveal the deeper purpose of countering the generation of the three negative motivating roots (*hetu*): attachment (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). Though the seven negative verbal and physical actions can be motivated by any of the three roots separately or in combination, from the perspective of the dominant motivation, attachment is foremost in both sexual misconduct and theft, aversion is foremost in killing, ignorance is foremost in lying, and so on. In this light, attachment has provoked the proclamation of as many as 110 vows, where twenty-nine are related to sex and eighty-one to theft. Aversion had provoked thirty-three vows, sixteen for killing, fifteen for slander, and two for harsh words. Ignorance has motivated as many as twenty-seven vows related to lying and so on, and as few as one for gossip.

It is evident that attachment directly initiated many more ethical proclamations than aversion or ignorance. Attachment to sexual activity provoked the Buddha's proclamation of the first defeat and the first five remainders. This suggests that sexual attachment is the strongest obstacle for an ordainee. Attachment to other's possessions provoked the Buddha's proclama-

tion of the second defeat and the sixth and seventh remainders, and signifies a potentially less destructive but more common type of attachment. That vows related to sex and theft were first proclaimed by the Buddha reflects the importance he placed on eliminating attachment (*lobha*). In contrast, the Jain presentation of *sīla*, which contains precepts equivalent to the first three defeats, lists killing as the first precept, which reflects the importance Jains placed on *ahimsā*.³⁹

The destructive function of attachment is also evident in the presentation of the twelve links of dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), where attachment is represented by the eighth link of craving (*taṇhā*) and the ninth link of grasping (*upādāna*) as essential elements in the causal process of *saṃsāra*. We must, therefore, conclude that the prime significance of the vows for the individual was to lessen and eliminate attachment. Although ignorance (*avijjā*) or delusion (*moha*) acts as the root of *saṃsāra* in accordance with the presentation of the twelve links, ignorance remains a secondary object of elimination within *pāṭimokkha*.

Abbreviations

- CV5 Cullavagga: Book of the Discipline, Vol. 5 (I.B. Horner)
 GMV The General Meaning of Vinaya (Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen)
 MV4 Mahāvagga: Book of the Discipline, Vol. 4 (I.B. Horner)
 SV1 Suttavibhaṅga: Book of the Discipline, Vol. 1 (I.B. Horner)
 SV2 Suttavibhaṅga: Book of the Discipline, Vol. 2 (I.B. Horner)
 SV3 Suttavibhaṅga: Book of the Discipline, Vol. 3 (I.B. Horner)
 THIH Thus I Have Heard (M. Walshe)
 VT1 Vinaya Texts, Part 1 (Rhys Davids, T.W. & Oldenberg, H.)

Notes

¹I.B. Horner, *Suttavibhaṅga: Book of the Discipline*, Vol. 1, p.13. (SV1)

²Rhys Davids, T.W. & Oldenberg, H., *Vinaya Texts*, parts 1, p.xxiv. (VT1)

³The Pāli *pātimokkha* or the Sanskrit *prātimokṣa* consists of the two components: *prāti* + *mokṣa* where the prefix *prati* indicates “towards” or “near” and *mokṣa* is derived from *moks* the desiderative form of *muc*: “to liberate,” “to free.” The term therefore implies liberation or deliverance. See *A Sanskrit English Dictionary* by Monier-Williams p. 669. Also see Holt page 35. Rhys Davids and Oldenberg suggest “disburdening, getting free” Rhys Davids, T.W. & Oldenberg, H., *Vinaya Texts*, parts 1, p. xī.

⁴The ‘Old Commentary’ no longer exists as a separate work but is contained word for word within the *Vinaya-piṭaka*.

⁵(VT1:xvii) He states, “The *Vibhaṅga* and the Twenty Khandhakas were at (the time of the Council of Vesālī) (circa 350 BC) already held in such high repute that no one ventured to alter them; a sanctity of this kind is not required without the lapse of a considerable time. . . these books must have been in existence, as we now have them, within thirty years, earlier or later of, at least, 360 or 370 BC. . . the Old Commentary they have preserved must be considerably, perhaps fifty years, older. . . the Kammavādās and the *Pātimokkha* must be older still.”

⁶It is conceivable that the *pātimokkha* was composed as a summary or commentary to the *khandhaka*, but a lack of supportive evidence does not favor this conclusion. See Holt, p. 36.

⁷G.S.P. Misra, *The Age of Vinaya*, p. 23.

⁸M. Walshe, *Thus I Have Heard*, p. 255. (THIH)

⁹N. Dutt, *Buddhist Sects in India*, p. 112.

¹⁰Pachow asserts the influence of the *pa ncasīla* on the formation of the Buddhist ethical code, according to Horner, in I.B. Horner, *Suttavibhaṅga: Book of the Discipline*, Vol. 1, p. xxii. (SV1:xxii)

¹¹Jacobi, *Jaina Sutras, I*, in I.B. Horner, *Suttavibhaṅga: Book of the Discipline*, Vol. 1, p. xxii.

¹²“This custom was certainly not distinct to the Buddhists, but rather was observed by many sects within the *parivrājaka* community, e.g. the Jainas and Brāhmanical Sa n nyāsins.” C. Prebish, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline* p. 4.

¹³I.B.Horner, (Transl.) *Mahāvagga: Book of the Discipline* Volume 4, p.131. (MV4)

¹⁴N. Dutt, *Buddhist Sects in India*, p. 112.

¹⁵ibid., p.114.

¹⁶K.C. Chaudhuri, *History of Ancient India*, p.228.

¹⁷Nanjio lists the *vinaya* literature of 7 schools in his *Catalogue of the Chinese translations of the Buddhist Tripiṭaka*, in G.S.P. Misra, *The Age of Vinaya*, p. 3.

¹⁸The Theravāda assert seventy-five vows, while the Sarvāstivāda assert 112 vows.

¹⁹The Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition asserts that the first instance of ordination by a formal ceremony was conducted by Sāriputra who acted as abbot and ordained Sudinna (*'char ka*) six years after the Buddha's enlightenment. As Sudinna committed the first defeat not long after his ordination, it is assumed that the proclamation of the first defeat occurred six years after the Buddha's enlightenment. See Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen, *The General Meaning of Vinaya*, p. 44. (GMV:44)

²⁰I.B. Horner, *Cullavagga: Book of the Discipline*, Vol. 5, p. 398. (CV5)

²¹(SV1:xxvi) Horner translates *pārājika* as defeat.

²²In the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition defeats committed without intention to conceal may be purified by appropriate confession and purification.

²³Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen (*rje btsun chos kyi rgyal mtshan*) suggests an explanation of the etymology of the term. The offence does not completely eliminate the vow, a remnant of the vow survives that may be purified through a meeting of the *sangha* and imposition, acceptance and completion

of a penalty.

²⁴I.B. Horner, *Suttavibhaṅga: Book of the Discipline*, Vol. 2, p. 7. (SV2)

²⁵I.B. Horner, *Suttavibhaṅga: Book of the Discipline*, Vol. 3, p. 103. (SV3)

²⁶To assist in the identification of individual vows, each vow has been assigned two numbers in brackets. The first number refers to the division of vows from among the seven fold division of vows that the particular rule belongs to, and the second number refers to the specific number of the vow in that division.

²⁷I.B. Horner *Mahāvagga: Book of the Discipline*, Vol. 4, p. 13. (MV4)

²⁸The Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition here classifies two types of offence, concealed and unconcealed defeat. The first involves the deliberate concealment of a defeat once committed and cannot be purified. The second involves no concealment and can be purified. See Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltzen, *The General Meaning of Vinaya*, p. 220. (GMV)

²⁹(2/6) Not to build a dwelling with dimensions exceeding 2.70 by 1.60 meters or less than that required for normal movement, without permission from *sangha* and/or harming living beings in the process; (2/7) Not to build a monastery without the approval of the *sangha*, harming living beings in the process, or with dimensions less than that required for normal movement; (2/13) Not to harm the faith or regard that laity have for the dhamma.

³⁰(5/89) Not to use a cloth mat exceeding 2.20 by 1.72 meters with a border exceeding 1.15 meters; (5/90) Not to make or have a rash cloth exceeding 4.50 by 2.20 meters; (5/91) Not to make or have made a rains robe exceeding 6.50 by 2.70 meters; (5/92) Not to make or have made a robe exceeding 10 by 6.50 meters

³¹(5/25) Not to give robes to a *bhikkunī*; (5/26) Not to make a robe for a *bhikkunī*

³²(5/58) Not to use a robe without first discoloring it with maroon, brown, or black marks

³³(5/59) Not to wear a robe shared with a *bhikkhu*, a *bhikkunī*, a *sikkhamāna*, a *sāmaṇera* or a *sāmaṇerī*, without the latter having pronounced in turn the formula for sharing this robe

³⁴(5/60) Not to conceal or hide the property of another *bhikkhu*

³⁵(5/92) Not to make or have made a robe exceeding 10 by 6.50 meters.

³⁶I.B. Horner, *Suttavibhaṅga: Book of the Discipline*, Vol. 3, p. 101.
(SV3:101)

³⁷The four negative verbal actions: Lying (*mūsāvāda*), slander (*pisunavācā*), harsh speech (*pharusavācā*) and gossip (*sampapphalāpa*)

³⁸The three negative physical actions: Killing (*pānātipāta*), stealing (*adinnādāna*) and sexual misconduct (*kāmesu-micchācāra*)

³⁹I.B. Horner, *Suttavibhaṅga: Book of the Discipline*, Vol. 1, p. xxiv.
(SV1:xxiv)

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