

# **The importance of Vinaya (Buddhist law, discipline)**

<http://kantamedhi.blogspot.com/>

## **1. Introduction**

Any society, in order to stay together among many levels and characteristics of people harmoniously must base on the rule or some agreed points. As well known, human life is full of much defilement (kilesa), including selfishness as well as discrimination. Everybody needs to get one own benefit intentionally in every way regardless thinking of others. This is the reason that why the laws or some agreements would be laid down, of course, it is for the peace of society.

Buddhism, at the beginning, there was no any name to identify like the present day. Previously, it used the term Dhamma-Vinaya which means the doctrine-discipline in order to refer to. Of course, the first one who used it would be the Buddha. Actually it became the characteristic of Buddhism, 4 groups of Buddhists (Monks, nuns, lay men and lay women) are mentioned by the Buddha to help each other in terms of maintaining Buddhism. Only such kind of law or some agreements as accepted by others seem not enough for the highest goal of Buddhism.

The animals' realms, for example, seem totally to be very peaceful if without human's disturb even has no any discipline. They always live by searching for food, escaping from dangers, sexual needed and calmly sleeping. There is nothing more than this. Human being is claimed to be the highest level of all beings under the reason that we can be trained, practiced, especially Buddhist concept, which admires the human ability, the Buddha becomes the model of self training who spends one own effort to gain the liberation without any help (from God). By the way of Buddhism, anyone who reaches this step, s/he must practice oneself through the Vinaya or discipline advised by the Buddha.

## **2. Etymology**

### **2.1 The meanings of Vinaya (discipline)**

Vinaya literally can be classified in to 2 terms; Vi and Naya. Vi can be translated negatively as “away” and “many or spacial” in the positive, similarly Naya negatively refers to getting rid or eradicate, another meaning is to guide or lead (root: nî), therefore it can mean the eradicating of bad behavior or leading to the higher step of practice (until the liberation). However more meanings can be depicted from the Commentary of Vinaya called Samantapasadika.

### **2.2 The relationship of the terms Dhamma and Vinaya**

As exhibited earlier, both terms Dhamma (Doctrine) and Vinaya (Discipline) often referred to Buddhism. Firstly, to consider of the Pali grammar, Dhammo ca Vinayo ca, these 2 words, when they are combined together, Dhammavinayo. It becomes the singular form actually should be plural because of 2 things (Doctrine and discipline). In Pali using, if we observe the word-using, there are many implications which advantage

for more comprehension, looking at many words such as the Noble eightfold path (Ariyo atthangiko maggo), this term is also written in the singular form even though it contains of 8 factors. That means, of course, there are 8 factors, but to follow only one or two ways cannot be free from suffering, in deep interpretation, all of them cannot separate from each other, that means no one can fulfill only one way such as right speech so well (Sammavaca) without other factors because the good speech can go out under the foundation of good view, thought etc.

Interestingly, the term Dhammavinaya cannot be separated from one another, that means if there is only Dhamma or doctrine, the assembly or community will not have any standard of living, commonly, to stay together of many and different people, the law should be laid down to control some kinds of act. As well-known, Dhamma or doctrine is quite difficult to practice and follow, consider to the one who spend his/her life according to the desire which means to fulfill one own satisfactions. By this reason, Vinaya becomes necessary to support those who want to control oneself to develop to the good behavior that regarded as the supreme life or Samana. As well as the discipline, if there is only ways of practice, traditions but without the purpose (to reach the doctrine), that kind of practice will be useless. Doctrine is the truth which discovered by the Buddha and cannot be reached by the one who does not qualify himself (by Vinaya).

Ven. P.A. Payutto suggests to observe the different terms used by the Buddha that Dhamma is the truth of nature found by the Buddha (not created), he just understands it, as a result, he uses the term Deseti (in Pali) or to reveal the doctrine. Oppositely, Vinaya is only the way to guide the practitioner go nearby the Dhamma more and more, of course, it is given/generated by the Buddha himself, so he uses the term Paññatti (in Pali) means to lay down (generate). Another interpretation is Vinaya is the way to control/practice bodily and verbal acts, while the Dhamma or doctrine is the way to control/practice the mind. (Dictionary of Buddhism, Mahamakut Buddhist University)

### **3. Why is Vinaya important?**

Vinaya can exhibited as the highest master of Buddhism, Ven.Ananda once asked the Buddha of the next master after his passing away, the replied answer is Yo vo Ananda maya dhammo ca vinayo ca desito pannatto so vo mamaccayena sattha.... Ananda, after my passing away, the doctrine and discipline which discovered as well as laid down by me will be your master....(Dighanikaya Mahavagga)

To rise the question that why did not the Buddha give the master-hood to any body? The proper answer is he appreciates the Dhamma and Vinaya. If we think of the human characteristic, they are commonly bias or lacking of some knowledges, that means it is too difficult to find the perfect one. At that time, there was no problem because there were many Arahanta monks who were full of high quality such as Patisambhida (Analytic insight), but he probably thought of the future that such kind of monk will be rare. Sometimes the bad one (Adhammavadi) will be accepted by most of people and they will follow that teaching. This will be the destruction of Buddhism.

Interestingly, when he gives all authorities to the Dhamma and Vinaya which taught rightly by himself, everybody must follow, it can guarantee the peace and good behavior

will be beneficial, no need to follow the changeable leader. When Vinaya is talked to, in common sense, it will be understood as only 220 articles of monk rule. The Buddha values the Vinaya so much, he also put one law that the new monk (who has become a monk less than 5 years) must stay under his teacher's control in order to check and guide him the right behavior. This is so useful, however if we consider to The reasons for lying down the course of training for monk (Sikkhapada-Pannatti atthavasa), it will be clearer

1. Sanghasutthutaya For the excellence of Order
2. Sanghaphasutaya For the comfort of Order
3. Dummanakunam puggalanam niggahaya For the control of shameless person
4. Pesalanam bhikkhunam niggahaya For the living in comfort of well-behave monk
5. Ditthadhammikanam asavanam samvaraya For the restraint of the cankers in the present
6. Samparayikanam asavanam patighataya For preventing of the cankers in the future
7. Apasannanam pasadaya For the confidence of those who have not yet gained confidence
8. Pasannanam bhinyovaya For the increase of the confidence of the confident
9. Saddhammatthitaya For the lastingness of true doctrine
10. Vinayanuggahaya For the support of the discipline (Vinayapitaka.III.20)

Here, you are requested to think of the article 9, for the lastingness of the true doctrine. This shows the main factor to protect Buddhism or true teaching is Vinaya. In Samantapasadika, the commentator said the life span of religion depends on discipline as below

**Vinayo nama buddhasasanassa ayu vinaye thite buddhasasanam thitam hoti....  
Vinaya or discipline is the life of Buddhism, if there is the discipline, there is  
Buddhism.....(Samantapasadika, commentary of Vinaya)**

This is actually not strange if we compare to the Buddha's aim in lying down the Vinaya. This definition, in fact, is quite narrow. That is because if it referred to only monks, the remain people will not get any benefit. Vinaya as its meaning, the guidance of right living, Anyone who wants to develop oneself should not abandon it.

The Buddha also gives the reason to reveal his doctrine and discipline which utters to Ven.Mahapajapati to allow the others or next generations to verify his teaching, that is if that teaching is claimed to be Buddhist concept, it must follow these aims namely

1. Viraga for the way of detachment
2. Visamyoga for the way of release from bondage
3. Apacaya for the way of dis-collection of defilement
4. Appicchata for the way of wanting little
5. Santutthi for the way of contentment/ sufficiency
6. Paviveka for the way of seclusion (not to immerse in the crowd )
7. Viriyarambha for the way of exertion (not to be lazy)
8. Subharata Being easy to support (Vinayapitaka. II.259)

To explain this verse, I will pick up only number 5. Santutthi that means His doctrine and discipline must be for the way of contentment/ sufficiency. Recently, monks, when they are prohibited to take dinner or any food since the noon, claims that the reason that made the Buddha lay down this article of Vinaya is he does not want monks to disturb lay people, only 1 or 2 times before noon are considered as too much of disturb, so if monks cook or buy that food by themselves, it should be allowed by the Buddha. This seems like reasonable enough but it shows the misunderstanding of Buddhism. Unforgettably, number 5 of the verse, the Buddha wants his followers to be sufficiency, of course, food is important, the Buddha himself never prohibits monks not to take at all but it should be on time especially not to be greed in food. If the time to take meal reduced, the time to practice must automatically increase.

This is the purpose and concept of Buddhism which anybody should comprehend. From the explanation, we can see the importance of Vinaya, the good way to train oneself is difficult to go on in the right way without Vinaya, in turn, if Vinaya used to be the foundation in practice, the result will surely productive. As mentioned from the beginning, the meaning of Vinaya is not focused on only Patimokkha (Monk's law), sometimes Vinaya can be replaced by the term Morality which is not limited in the field of Sangha but all people who want to be free from their desire, that Vinaya called Parisuddhasila Morality consisting in purity (Visuddhimagga 16);

- |                          |                                   |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Patimokkhasamvarasila | Restraint in the monastic code    |
| 2. Indriyasamvara        | Restraint of the senses           |
| 3. Ajivaparisuddisila    | Purity of livelihood              |
| 4. Paccayasannisitasila  | Pure conduct in necessary objects |

We can see from here that Patimokkha is only one of 4 kinds of Vinaya or Sila that should be taken by all especially monks. Number 2 restraint of senses, this matter is concerned to the doctrine obviously because even the Buddha used to preach it in Sutta to Ven. Bahiyadaruciriya. Moreover, this kind of Vinaya becomes the conclusion of all discipline. Thai tradition of becoming a monk in the short time of all Thai men who are 20 years old, it is advised by many senior monks to the new comers not to remember all disciplines such as Pathimokkha, but before doing anything must be restrain of such and such things. That is called Indriyasamvara.

However, it should be talked to the Apatti or mistaking the Pathimokkha rules for a little bit, Apatti can arise anytime which monks do something prohibited by the Vinaya regardless the name, status as well as the age in becoming monks. Nowadays, it is said that the Buddhist monks are full of many Vinaya rules, just moving one organ must be Apatti, so in order to follow the rule, monks must not do anything even to move. This idea should be understood that totally wrong, out of this claim, according to the Vinaya, if anyone becomes a monk and do nothing just lays down on his bed, that also considered to be Apatti, Many duties such as Uppajjayavatta, the one who stays with his master must serve the master by many ways namely to prepare some water for face-washing in the morning, put down the drinking water, clean master's room and so on. However, monks can be free from Apatti by fulfillment these duties and supported to do anything based on awareness.

When anybody has committed Apatti, 2 kinds of solutions are provided that is Vutthanagamini (to be free by Parivasa) and Desanagamini (to be free from confession). Monks who have committed Apatti will not allowed to join in the Sangha's duties, before that they must be pure by 2 ways of exit above. This seems to force monks reveal their mistake and want to apologize for being the better persons as mentioned that Candamandalam bhikkhave vivatam virocati no paticchannam suriyamandalam bhikkhave vivatam virocati no paticchannam tathagatappavedito dhammavinayo bhikkhave vivato.....The full moon, when it is covered, does not shine. As well as the Doctrine-Discipline which spread by the Buddha, Bhikkhu, it will not shine (beautiful and beneficial) under the cover.... (Suttantapitaka Anguttaranikaya)

#### **4. Conclusion**

After understanding the scope of Vinaya, we will see that it is not only the ordinary laws or rules to make the difficulty for the ones who practice, in fact, it given to play together and support the doctrine. Without any Vinaya, Buddhism can be only the knowledge to satisfy many philosophers but cannot get rid away of all sufferings as the purpose in laying down (the discipline) by the Buddha, moreover it is only one aim of Buddhism even it will full of many teachings. As the stanza given in Vinayapitaka Cullavagga **Sayyathapi bhikkhave mahasamuddo ekasaso lonaraso evameva kho**

**bhikkhave ayam dhammavinayo ekaraso vimuttiraso....**To be compared with the taste of the ocean, it is only salt, as well as this doctrine-discipline (Buddhism) which has only one aim, it is liberation.....