

the Buddha and his monks". Jones³ also says that once the Buddha went to the Bamboo Grove and stayed there in the Squirrel's Feeding-place. However both the Pali and the Buddhist Sanskrit texts seem to have used the term Kalandakanivāpa in apposition to the name Veḷuvana or Veṇuvana (*Vin.* II. 145, *Mhv.* III. 60; I. 255). This is also quite clearly indicated by the commentator. The monastery, he says, "is outside surrounded by bamboos, of a bluish splendour, delightful to mind" (*nīlobhāsaṃ manoramam*). Therefore it was called "Veḷuvana" and since a squirrel was here given food, it is also called Kalandaka-nivāpa.

The legendary origin of this name as given by the commentator is as follows. A certain king once entered this grove to enjoy himself. There, being fully intoxicated with liquor, he fell into a deep sleep. His retainers went about looking for flowers, fruits and so forth. A black serpent, attracted by the smell of liquor came out of its hole in a tree and started to crawl towards the king. A tree sprite, seeing the danger to the king's life, came to him in the guise of a squirrel (*kālaka*) and gave a sharp chirp at his ear. The king was put up from his slumber and the snake crawled back, saving the king's life. In gratitude for saving his life the king established the feeding of squirrels at the place (*kālakaṇaṃ nivāpaṃ tattha paṭṭhapesi*). He also declared the place a sanctuary. From that time it came to be called Kalandaka-nivāpa. (*UdA.* 60). *Kālaka* is another name for a *kalandaka* a squirrel.

Veḷuvana, according to the *Suttanipāta* Commentary, was surrounded by a growth of bamboos and also a wall, eighteen cubits in height, endowed with gates, gatehouses and watch towers (*SnA* II. 419). The *Udāna* Commentary (*ibid.* 59) adds a few more details. In the Veḷuvana was a large 'perfumed-chamber' befitting to be the dwelling place of the Buddha, the Blessed One and, also many other constructions as lofty houses, cells, rock cells, halls, cloisters and gatehouses. This description seems to be that of a well developed monastic institution of a somewhat later date.

Veḷuvana is mentioned in the Pali texts as one of the places where the Buddha stayed on his visits to the Magadhan kingdom. As such it was also the location where a large number of his discourses were delivered, and quite a number of important historical events of his life took place (*DPPN.* s.v. Veḷuvana).

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References

- 1 Book of the Discipline, *PTS*, vol. 4.51
- 2 *Ibid* Vol. 5.204
- 3 Tr. Jones, J.J. The *Mahāvastu*, *PTS*, Vol 1.210; III.61 etc.

VERAMAṆĪ stands for "abstinence", in the sense of refraining from a particular deed. Such abstinence is part of the basic moral requirement for being a lay follower of the Buddha, the taking of the five precepts, where *veramaṇī* covers refraining from killing, theft, improper sexual relations, falsehood, and intoxicants (e.g. *D.* III, 235; or the full formula at *Khp.* 1).

This five-fold abstinence is of fundamental importance for early Buddhist practice, and the principle of ethical restraint in general can be seen as a central pillar of the early Buddhist teachings. This is so much the case that a discourse in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* simply defines *Dhamma* to be abstention from killing, theft and improper sexual relations, as well as from unwholesome forms of speech (*A.* V, 257; cf. also *A.* V, 274ff). The fundamental role of such ethical restraint is also evident in the *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta*, according to which the undertaking of the first precept of refraining from killing inaugurates the decisive change from a period of continuous decline in society to a period of gradual improvement and prosperity (*D.* III, 73).

Abstention from killing, theft and improper sexual relations is the factor of right action in the noble eightfold path, and refraining from falsehood is one of the aspects of right speech (e.g. *D.* II, 312). Without such restraint, the path to freedom lacks its ethical foundation.

In addition to falsehood, the path factor of right speech also covers abstention from slander, rude speech and frivolous gossip (see also *VACIKAMMA*). The same aspects of false speech recur in the context of the ten courses of actions, *kammaṭṭhāna*, which cover the threefold bodily restraint of abstaining from killing, theft and improper sexual relations; as well as the fourfold verbal restraint of abstaining from falsehood, slander, rude speech and frivolous gossip (*D.* III, 269). The remaining three courses of action - non-greed, non-hatred and right view - no longer employ the term *veramaṇī*, being mental conditions

to be developed that form the background to actual abstinence by word and deed.

A noteworthy perspective on *veramaṇi* is afforded in the *Āṭānāṭiya Sutta*, whose purpose is to serve as a protection against *yakkhas* who have no regard for the *Dhamma*. Their lack of regard for the *Dhamma* is, according to the *Āṭānāṭiya Sutta*, due to the Buddha's teaching of the five precepts (D. III, 195). Since these *yakkhas* are unrestrained in regard to killing etc., it does not please them at all when someone teaches restraint in this respect. Independent of whether this passage is taken in a literal or in an allegorical sense, the point it makes remains the same, in as much as the requirements of *veramaṇi* will inevitably be displeasing to those who are unrestrained.

Even though others are unrestrained in this respect, according to the *Sallekha Sutta* a disciple of the Buddha should make a firm effort to persist in his or her restraint (M. I, 42). The same discourse explains that even to incline the mind towards such abstention is of great benefit, to say nothing of the corresponding bodily and verbal conduct. Just as one would avoid an uneven path by taking an even path, so one who is firm in restraint will avoid any infraction of these basic ethical principles. Such self control will then become a way that leads upwards, a way to extinguish the unwholesome tendencies that underlie such deeds as killing, theft, improper sexual relations, falsehood, slander, rude speech and frivolous gossip.

The rationale that underlies the principle of abstention enshrined in the term *veramaṇi* is enunciated in a discourse in the *Samyutta Nikāya* under the heading of an "exposition of the *Dhamma* applicable to oneself", *attūpanāyika Dhammapariyāya*. According to this remarkably pragmatic and straightforward exposition, in as much as each of us does not want to be the victim of killing, theft, adultery, falsehood etc., it follows logically that we should not perpetrate any action that inflicts such suffering on others. In short: "How can I inflict on another what is displeasing and disagreeable to myself?", *yo kho myāyaṃ dhammo appiyo amanāpo, kathāhaṃ paraṃ tena saṃyojeyyaṃ* (S. V, 353). The same principle is also expressed in a verse in the *Sutta Nipāta*, which indicates that, "just as I am, so are these, just as these are, so am I; comparing oneself [with others in this way], one would not kill or cause to kill"; *yathā ahaṃ tathā ete, yathā ete tathā ahaṃ, attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā, na haneyya na ghātaye* (Sn. 705).

Having presented this straightforward rationale for ethical restraint, the above-mentioned *Samyutta Nikāya* discourse also indicates that *veramaṇi* has several dimensions. In the case of killing, the full gamut of *veramaṇi* covers not only abstaining from killing oneself, *pāṇātipātā paṭivirato hoti*, but also to encourage others in similar abstention, *paraṃca pāṇātipātā veramaṇiyā samādapeti*, and to generally applaud and praise such refraining, *pāṇātipātā veramaṇiyā vaṇṇaṃ bhāsati* (S. V, 354). That is, the altruistic dimension of true restraint covers not only abstinence from directly harming others, but also involves facilitating and encouraging the undertaking of the same form of restraint by others, for their own benefit. This would imply not only teaching others the principles of restraint, but also acting in such a way that the undertaking of killing etc. by others is not supported, facilitated or encouraged in any way, directly or indirectly.

Restraint undertaken in this comprehensive manner, the same discourse concludes, is pure in three respects, *tikoṭiparisuddha*. Another discourse indicates that to be endowed with these three aspects of abstention leads straight to heaven (A. I, 297). Such comprehensive restraint is a mode of practice that is for one's own welfare as well as for the welfare of others, whereas one who only practices restraint himself or herself, without encouraging others to do the same, only practices for his or her own welfare (A. II, 99).

The *Mahādhammasamādāna Sutta* distinguishes between four "ways of undertaking things". Two of these are lack of restraint, which will result in future pain, while the other two involve restraint and will lead to future happiness. The distinction between the latter two is whether the undertaking of restraint will be experienced as painful or as pleasant. This discourse clearly envisages that for someone to abstain from killing etc. can be a painful and frustrating undertaking, *sahāpi dukkhena sahāpi domanassena pāṇātipātā paṭivirato hoti*, and that it is due to that very restraint that pain and frustration could be experienced, *pāṇātipātā veramaṇipaccayā ca dukkhaṃ domanassaṃ paṭisaṃvedeti* (M. I, 314).

This presentation in the *Mahādhammasamādāna Sutta* shows that in early Buddhism the injunction to observe restraint was undertaken with clear awareness of the fact that in some cases this does involve

frustration. The belief that such frustration has to be avoided at all cost and negativities should rather be expressed and lived out fully is, from an early Buddhist perspective, short-sighted. It offers a short-term relief at the cost of a long-term deterioration of personality. Such deterioration comes about inevitably because to live out negativities will strengthen the mental tendencies and dispositions that stand behind such negativities. This is the case even when negativities are lived out only in a symbolic manner. From an early Buddhist perspective, instead of living out negativities, restraint should be undertaken. Such restraint is not seen as the final solution, however, but only as a necessary step that provides the basis for developing freedom from the influence of those mental tendencies and dispositions that are responsible for the arising of negativities in the mind.

In this way, the early Buddhist approach offers a middle path solution. As a basis for this middle path solution, the fundamental principles of moral restraint need to be enacted. Once this much has been achieved, the mental repercussions of restraint are to be observed with mindfulness. Mindful observation, as the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* shows, comprises awareness of the presence of unwholesome states in the mind without immediately reacting to them. The meditator's task is to just clearly acknowledge that there is lust or anger etc. in the mind (*M. I, 59*). This ingenious method of mindful observation takes care of the negative repercussions of restraint by placing them in the full light of awareness. It turns the effects and mental repercussions of restraint into a field for the arising of insight, without thereby falling into the extremes of either repression or else compulsory expression. Combined with the practice of mindfulness in this way, the principle of restraint and abstention inherent in *veramaṇī* will lead the practitioner gradually out of those mental obsessions and tendencies that are responsible for the undertaking of those unwholesome types of action that are better avoided.

The principle of restraint inherent in the five precepts comes up for discussion in the *Kathāvatthu*, which tries to ascertain if one could still speak of restraint, *saṃvara*, in those higher celestial planes where killing, theft, improper sexual relations, falsehood, and intoxication do not exist (*Kvu. 258*). The point behind taking up this issue for discussion is that to speak of restraint appears only meaningful as long as it involves an active abstaining from something

that is within the range of one's possibility. The same theme comes up from a complementary perspective in the *Samaṇamaṇḍikā Sutta*. In this discourse, the Buddha confronted the proclamation made by another contemporary teacher that someone who neither performs evil deeds, nor speaks evil words, nor has evil intentions, nor practises wrong livelihood, should on that account be reckoned as supremely accomplished (*M. II, 24*). The Buddha was quick to point out that these stipulations do not suffice, since even a small infant would fit such a description. An infant would not even have the notion of a bodily deed, speech, intention or livelihood, what to say of him or her performing any evil in this respect. Yet, the condition of an infant surely falls short of being supremely accomplished.

The *Samaṇamaṇḍikā Sutta* continues by examining wholesome conduct and unwholesome conduct, in each case pointing out that its origins are to be found in the mind. This complements the requirements of ethical conduct and restraint with a psychological perspective, showing their interrelatedness. Notably, the discourse does not stop at this, but also tackles the theme of the cessation of wholesome conduct. According to its presentation, the cessation of wholesome conduct should be seen in the conduct of an awakened one, who is virtuous without identifying with this virtue, *sīlavā hoti no ca sīlamayo* (*M. II, 27*).

This provides a significant perspective on ethical restraint in early Buddhism. Once liberation is attained, virtuous conduct becomes a natural expression of the liberated mind, so much so that it takes place without any sense of identification. As the *Naḷakapāna Sutta* explains, it is precisely due to having overcome all defilements that the Buddha continued to practice restraint (*M. I, 464*). That is, the practice of ethical restraint is not only the central means to reach the goal, but at the same time it is also the perfect expression of having reached the goal.

Though this makes it indubitably clear that *veramaṇī* as abstinence and ethical restraint is of central importance for the entire Buddhist path, nevertheless, it also needs to be mentioned that if taken to extremes, restraint can become an obstruction. Excessive concern with minor aspects of restraint surfaces from time to time in the background narrations given to various rules in the *Vinaya*, which feature

monks that at times seem to be somewhat obsessed with adherence to external details without proper regard for the deeper meaning of restraint. This deeper meaning, however, is restraint of the influxes here and now and the prevention of their recurrence, *diṭṭhadhammikānaṃ āsavānaṃ saṃvarāya, samparāyikānaṃ āsavānaṃ paṭighāṭāya* (Vin. III, 21), for which purpose the detailed rules are merely providing a framework.

Excessive concern with restraint can also lead to conceit, to exalting one's own conduct and looking down on the conduct of others. Such would be, according to *Mahāsāropama Sutta*, comparable to taking only the bark of a tree when being in need of the tree's heartwood (M. I, 193). The significance of this simile can be seen to extend in two directions. One of these it that to mistake virtuous conduct for the essence of the holy life is like mistaking bark for heartwood. Yet, for the tree to grow the protective shelter afforded by the bark is an indispensable requirement. That is, as long as obsession with minor externals and conceit can be avoided, the bark of moral restraint provides the required conditions for the heartwood of liberation to come to growth and maturity.

*Kāyena saṃvaro sādhu,
sādhu vācāya saṃvaro,
manasā saṃvaro sādhu,
sādhu sabbattha saṃvaro,
sabbattha saṃvuto bhikkhu,
sabbadukkhā pamuccati.*
Restraint of the body is well,
Well is restraint of speech,
Mental restraint is well,
Well is restraint in every way,
A monk restrained in every way,
[Will be] free from all *dukkha* (Dhp. 361).

Anālayo

VESAK: Derived from the Pāli name *Vesākha* (Skt. *Vaiśākha*) it is the Sinhala name of the lunar month April-May, the fullmoon day which is regarded by Theravāda Buddhists as the thrice-blessed day to commemorate the three principal events in the life of the Buddha Gotama, viz his birth, Awakening to Buddhahood and the final passing away, all believed to have taken place on Vesak fullmoon days (eg. DA.1.425, *Jinak*.26). The importance of the day is

further enhanced by the *Buddhavamsa* commentary which claims that all the twenty four Buddhas preceding the Buddha Gotama realized Buddhahood on Vesak fullmoon days and the claim of some sources (*Jinak*.39) that these three events of the life of all Buddhas take place on Vesak fullmoon days.

Significantly this information about the Vesak fullmoon day, completely absent from the Pāli canonical texts of all strata, is confined to Pāli commentarial and post commentarial literature and the Buddhist works written in the native languages of the Theravāda Buddhist countries. However, according to the Tibetan historian Bu-ston¹, one Buddhist Sanskrit canonical work, the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*, states that the Buddha passed away at midnight on the 15th day of the month of Vaiśākha, in spring. But the *Lalitavistara* (p.43) holds that the Bodhisattva entered the mother's womb in spring (*vasantakālasamaye*) in the month of Vaiśākha at the Viśākha asterism and was born exactly ten months later. The Theravāda post-canonical literature, on the other hand, assigns this event, as well as the renunciation of home life of prince Siddhattha and the delivery of the first sermon by the Buddha, the fullmoon day of the lunar month *Uttarāsāḷha* (June-July).

The northern Buddhist tradition, except in the case pointed above, does not accept the Vesak fullmoon as the day on which the three principal events in the life of the Buddha took place. The Chinese translation of Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita* (Buc.p.3 n.9) gives the 8th of the fourth month as the day on which the Buddha was born. The *Vinayaśūdraka* commentary of the teacher Śīlapālita states that the Buddha passed away on the 8th day of the ascending moon of the month *Kārtika*, at the end of autumn. The great Pandit Śākyaśrī confirms this but adds that it took place at midnight². It is interesting to note that according to the Pāli tradition all these events took place on the third watch of the Vesak full moon night. Pāli canonical sources also confirm (eg. M.1.249) that the Buddha realized liberation during the final watch of the night (*rattiyā pacchime yāme*) but without specifying the day. Bu-ston has not specified the days of the Buddha's birth or the Awakening to Buddhahood.

Commemoration of the Three Blessed Events

Clearly Vesak is today one of the most popular festivals in the Buddhist world and definitely so

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