

## References

1. The oral nature and characteristics of early Buddhism have been studied by Allon: *Style and Function*, Tokyo 1997; Collins: "Notes on some Oral Aspects of Pali Literature", *Indo-Iranian Journal*, vol. 35, 1992: 121-135; Cousins: "Pali Oral Literature", *Buddhist Studies: Ancient and Modern*, London 1983: 1-11; Coward: "Oral and Written Text in Buddhism", *The Adyar Library Bulletin*, vol. 50, 1986: 299-313; Davidson: "An Introduction to the Standards of Scriptural Authenticity in Indian Buddhism", *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, Delhi 1992: 291-325; Gethin: "The Mātikās: Memorization, Mindfulness, and the List", *In the Mirror of Memory*, Albany 1992: 149-172; Gombrich: "Recovering the Buddha's message" and "How the Mahāyāna Began", *The Buddhist Forum*, 1990: 5-20 and 21-30; Hoffman: "Evam me sutam, Oral Tradition in Nik"āya Buddhism", *Texts in Context: Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia*, New York 1992: 195-219; von Hinüber: *Der Beginn der Schrift und Frühe Schriftlichkeit in Indien*, Wiesbaden 1989; von Hinüber: *Untersuchungen zur Mündlichkeit früher mittelindischer Texte der Buddhisten*, Stuttgart 1994; von Simson: *Zur Diktion einiger Lehrtexte des Buddhistischen Sanskritkanons*, München 1965; and Wynne: "The Oral Transmission of Early Buddhist Literature", *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 27 no. 1, 2004: 97-127.
2. This formulaic opening of a discourse has been examined by Brough: "Thus Have I Heard", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 13, 1950: 412-426; Galloway: "Thus Have I Heard: At One Time", *Indo-Iranian Journal*, vol. 34, 1991: 87-104; Samtani: "The Opening of the Buddhist Sūtras", *Bhāratī, Bulletin of the College of Indology*, vol. 8 no. 2, 1964: 47-63; Tola: "Ekaṃ Samayaṃ", *Indo-Iranian Journal*, vol. 42, 1999: 53-55; and von Hinüber: *Studien zur Kasussyntax des Pāli*, München 1968: 85-86.

VACĪKAMMA, "verbal action", is one of the three main doors of action recognized in early Buddhism. This threefold analysis of deeds is significant in so far as it indicates that early Buddhism does not treat action from the perspective of a body/mind duality,

but instead considers body and mind as two components of a triad of channels for activity.

Verbal action is preceded by volitional formations related to speech, the *vacīsaṅkhāras*, which the *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* defines to be initial and sustained application of the mind, *vitakka-vicāra*. As the same discourse explains, after having applied and directed the mind one will break out into speech, *pubbe vitakketvā vicāretvā pacchā vācaṃ bhindati* (*M. I*, 301). A discourse in the *Samyutta Nikāya* clarifies that volitional formations related to speech could be generated on one's own initiative or prompted by others. Moreover, such volitions could be formed with clear deliberation or without clear deliberation, *asampajāna* (*S. II*, 40). The point made by this passage is that when breaking out into speech, at times such verbal activity might be instigated by others and the speaker may be reacting verbally in a way that is not in accord with his or her original intentions. Only too easily one gets carried away by one's own words and in the end says something that one later regrets. In particular one who speaks much, *bahubhāṇin*, more easily engages in wrong types of speech and will later have to suffer their evil karmic consequences (*A. III*, 254). For this reason the issue of the mental intentions that motivate verbal activity has received considerable attention in early Buddhism. In an analysis of deeds from altogether ten perspectives, the ten "courses of action" (see also KAMMAPATHA), verbal deeds are distinguished into altogether four types. From the perspective of unwholesome verbal conduct, *vacīduccarita* (*A. II*, 141), these four cover:

- (1) falsehood, *musā-vāda*
- (2) slander, *pisuṇā-vācā*
- (3) rude speech, *pharusa-vācā*
- (4) frivolous gossip, *samphappalāpa*

(1) According to the detailed exposition of these four types of unwholesome verbal conduct in the *Sāleyyaka Sutta*, the speaking of falsehood occurs in such situations as when someone is summoned to court or to a meeting and is questioned as a witness, in reply to which this person might say 'I do not know' when in reality he or she knows, or else claim to know or to have seen something that he or she does not know and has not seen (*M. I*, 286). Acting in this way, this person speaks falsehood in full awareness of its untruth, *sampajānamusā bhāsītā*, motivated by some ulterior purpose, be this for his or her own benefit, or for the benefit of another (see also FALSE SPEECH).

Such deliberate speaking of falsehood takes place even among those who are affluent and have a high standing in society (*S. I*, 74). For those who live the life of a householder the speaking of truth is not always easy to observe (*M. II*, 205), but for an *arahant* it is impossible to knowingly speak a falsehood (*D. III*, 133). A discourse in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* compare speaking lies to excrement, whereas to speak truth compares to a flower (*A. I*, 128). Be it for one's own sake or for that of another, who speaks untruth deserves to be reckoned an outcast indeed (*Sn.* 122).

According to the *Aggañña Sutta*, the appearance of falsehood together with theft are responsible for the deterioration of living conditions in the world and for the need to institute a ruler who will ensure the persecution and punishment of such wrong doings (*D. III*, 92). A verse in the *Dhammapada* explains that those who are willing to speak untruth will be unrestrained to such an extent that any evil deed can be expected of them (*Dhp.* 176). Even speaking a lie for fun is strongly censured in the *Ambalaṭṭhikā-Rāhulovāda Sutta*, according to which one who is not ashamed to speak falsehood is comparable to thrown away water or to a vessel that is turned upside down (*M. I*, 414). *Jātaka* tales report that even in his past lives the Buddha-to-be refrained from speaking falsehood and would not engage in it even for fun (*J. I*, 439 and *J. V*, 481).

(2) The second of the four unwholesome types of verbal conduct is slander or malicious speech, *pisuṇā-vācā*. The *Sāleyyaka Sutta* explains that slander involves repeating what one has heard elsewhere in order to cause division among people, leading to disharmony and quarrelling (*M. I*, 286). According to the definition given in the context of the third *pācittiya* regulation in the *Vinaya*, slander takes place with the intention of endearing oneself and with the purpose of creating dissension among others (*Vin. IV*, 12). Verses in the *Sutta Nipāta* refer to slander in conjunction with conceit (*Sn.* 862: *mānātimānā saha pesuṇā ca*), anger (*Sn.* 928: *kodhaṃ pesuṇiyaṇca*), and hypocrisy (*Sn.* 941: *amāyo ritta-pesuṇo*). Though these verses do not state so explicitly, to engage in slander and malicious speech would indeed seem to be closely related to conceit and anger, as well as hypocrisy.

Unworthy persons are only too willing to proclaim the failings of others, even if they are not asked to do so, whereas even when asked they find it difficult to disclose the virtues of others (*A. II*, 77). To engage in

slander has the propensity of leading to an evil rebirth, and also causes the breaking up of friendships in one's present life (*A. IV*, 247). In the account of the gradual deterioration of living conditions given in the *Cakkavatti-sihanāda Sutta*, once slander and malicious speech manifest the life span of human beings decreases by half (*D. III*, 69). A tale in the *Petavatthu* depicts the dire retributions for slander, recording that a monk who had engaged in falsehood and slander was reborn as a *peta* with a stinking mouth (*Pvu.* 2). A *Jātaka* tale describes how through slander two animals that had been close friends were turned into deadly enemies, comparing the effect of slander to a sharp sword driven into someone's flesh (*J. III*, 151).

(3) The third unwholesome type of verbal conduct involves the speaking of rude or harsh words, *pharusavācā*, which according to the *Sāleyyaka Sutta* occurs when someone speaks words that are hurtful and offensive to others, words bordering on anger, thereby engaging in a type of speech that is not conducive to calmness of the mind (*M. I*, 286). The definition of harsh speech in the context of the second *pācittiya* rule in the *Vinaya* gives the example of insulting words spoken in regard to such things as someone's birth, name, clan, work, craft, disease, distinguishing [bodily] marks, defilements, attainments and modes of address (*Vin. IV*, 6).

The background narration to this regulation illustrates the need to refrain from harsh speech with a tale that has also been included in the *Jātaka* collection (*J. I*, 191). According to this tale, the owner of an ox had waged on the capacity of his oxen to pull a considerably large row of carts. When the time of the actual contest came, he addressed his oxen with insulting words, with the result that the ox did not perform the feat it was supposed to accomplish. On a second occasion, however, when addressed with gentle and pleasing words, the ox did what was expected of him. The morale drawn from this tale is that one should always refrain from using harsh speech. In contrast to the offensive and hurtful effect of rude and harsh speech, the words of one who speaks what is harmless and agreeable will be sweet like honey (*A. I*, 128).

A tale in the *Petavatthu* describes rather drastic repercussions of engaging in harsh speech. According to this tale, a miserly woman had been addressing her husband with harsh words when the latter would make offerings to monks, wishing the food to become urine, excrement, pus and blood. In retribution for this deed,

she was reborn as a *peta* feeding on urine, excrement, pus and blood (*Pvu.* 8).

The right attitude towards harsh speech spoken by others is illustrated in a discourse in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, which depicts how the king of the *asuras*, on being captured and led to the presence of Sakka, the king of the *devas*, abused and reviled the latter with harsh words (*S.* I, 221). When asked by his charioteer why he kept silent on being abused in this way, Sakka explained that this was neither due to fear or weakness. Much rather, he kept silent when faced with abuse and harsh words out of patience, reflecting that for a wise person like himself it was not fit to engage in combat with a fool.

(4) The fourth unwholesome mode of verbal conduct occurs when someone indulges in frivolous speech and gossiping. The *Sāleyyaka Sutta*'s description mentions speaking at the wrong time and useless words, discoursing on matters that are trivial and unbeneficial (*M.* I, 287). Such frivolous speech is often an expression of an unbalanced and agitated mind, *uddhata citta* (*A.* II, 23). The discourses provide a whole list of topics for gossip that involves various types of "animal talk", *tiracchāna-kathā*, such as talk on kings and robbers, food and drinks, clothing and garlands, villages and cities, women and heroes, and other similar trifles (*M.* I, 513). Several discourses depict heterodox wanderers discoursing on such topics, conversations that are quickly stopped once the Buddha or one of his disciples approaches, as it was well known that the Buddha and his followers were not in favour of such pointless speech. Not only heterodox wanderers, but also some Buddhist monks were apparently fond of loose talk, *vikīṇṇavācā*, which motivated *devas* to upbraid them (*S.* I, 61 and *S.* I, 204), and on one occasion caused *Mahāmoggallāna* to perform a feat of supernormal power in order to bring his fellow monks to their senses (*S.* V, 270).

Several of the marks of a superior being, *mahāpurisalakkhaṇa* (see also MAHĀPURISA), with which according to the traditional account the Buddha was endowed, were according to the *Lakkhaṇa Sutta* the karmic result of his abstention from all of the above described four types of unwholesome speech during previous existences (*D.* III, 170). During his present life, the Buddha's aloofness from the four types of unwholesome speech was a source of inspiration to others and a motivation to pay him a visit (*Sn.* 159). As the *Abhayarājakumāra Sutta*

clarifies, the Buddha would speak only words that are true and beneficial (*M.* I, 395).

Abstention from the four unwholesome verbal deeds is a noble mode of speech, *ariya vohāra* (*D.* III, 232), and the instructions given by the Buddha in this respect are a manifestation of his supreme way of teaching (*D.* III, 106). Any recluse or Brahmin who is free from these four unwholesome modes of verbal activity is a worthy recipient of gifts comparable to seeds sown in earth that is free from salt (*A.* IV, 238), and by speaking true words that are not harsh or offensive is worthy of being reckoned a real Brahmin (*Sn.* 632).

A discourse in the *Samyutta Nikāya* offers a straightforward rationale for avoiding these four unwholesome modes of verbal activity. This discourse draws attention to the undeniable fact that one would not like to be deceived, slandered, addressed harshly, or with irrelevant gossip oneself. Hence it is only natural and logical that one should refrain from engaging in these types of speech oneself (*S.* V, 354). To refrain from these four evil verbal action makes one a worthy person, *sappurisa*, but even more worthy is the one who, in addition to abstaining, also encourages others to exercise restraint in regard to verbal deeds (*A.* II, 221).

The importance of avoiding the four unwholesome modes of verbal expression comes to the forefront in the standard description of the noble eightfold path (see also EIGHTFOLD PATH, NOBLE), according to which their avoidance constitutes the path factor of right speech, *sammā-vācā* (e.g. *M.* III, 251). The *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* explains that to implement this path factor requires the presence of right view, in the sense of the ability to clearly distinguish between unwholesome and wholesome verbal activities, and the development of right effort and right mindfulness, in the sense of making an effort to avoid unwholesome verbal activities and being clearly aware during such efforts (*M.* III, 74). In this way, the implementation of wholesome *vacīkamma* involves a substantial part of the noble eightfold path, thereby being of considerable importance for progress on the path to final liberation.

# ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF BUDDHISM

*Founder Editor-in Chief*

G. P. MALALASEKERA, M. A., Ph. D., D. Litt., Professor Emeritus

*Editor-in Chief*

W. G. WEERARATNE, M. A., Ph. D.

VOLUME VIII

**FASCICLE 3 : Vācā – Z hong a-han**



2009