

VIHIMSĀ and the corresponding term *hiṃsā* cover various aspects of violence, such as injury, harm and cruelty. The emphasis given among early Buddhist and other contemporary recluses to abstain from any deed of violence could be understood to stand in direct contrast to the prevalence of *hiṃsā* in ancient Indian society. Judging from the early discourses and the *Vinaya*, violence in various forms appears to have been a rather common occurrence. Examples are the robber *Aṅgulimāla*, a merciless killer who according to the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* was wearing a garland made of the fingers of his victims and had destroyed towns and districts (*M. II*, 98). The novice monk *Adhimutta* was seized by bandits and about to be killed (*Thag.* 705); and a cowherd who had just given a meal offering to the Buddha was assassinated right afterwards by someone else (*Ud.* 39), just to mention a few examples.

In their attempt to control bandits and robbers, kings would react with similar violence, apparently inflicting some of the cruellest types of punishment imaginable (*M. III*, 164). Violence would not only manifest when persecuting brigands, but also when kings quarrelled with each other, causing the violence of warfare and its infliction of death and injury on numerous human beings (*M. I*, 86). Dispensing violence in various ways, kings were themselves afraid of violence and had to be constantly surrounded by bodyguards (*Ud.* 19); in fact king *Bimbisāra* was apparently killed by his own son (*D. I*, 85).

Frequently, women were also the objects of violence. Repeated cases of the rape of nuns are reported in the *Vinaya*,¹ and according to the *Udāna* the female wanderer *Sundarī* was killed by her fellows in an attempt to calumniate the Buddhist order (*Ud.* 44). Nor was traditional Brahminical religion free from violence, as the discourses refer to massive slaughter of animals for the sake of sacrifice (see also *YAÑÑĀ*).

It is against this background of *hiṃsā* prevalent in contemporary Indian society that the emphasis on *ahiṃsā* among early Buddhist monastics as well as other recluses becomes understandable. An incident that well reflects this attitude is described in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, according to which the mere fact that a lay person had slaughtered an animal with the intention of offering a meal to the Buddhist order was sufficient ground for Jain ascetics to create a public uproar, accusing the Buddha of partaking of this meal knowing that the animal was killed on his behalf (*A. IV*, 187).

A regulation given in the *Vinaya* reflects the same issue. According to this regulation, it is not appropriate for a Buddhist monk to partake of meat that is killed on purpose for him (*Vin. I*, 238). Other *Vinaya* regulations are promulgated in order to protect plant life and even the microbic beings in water from any harm, rules that reflect the concern with not harming any living beings among contemporary recluses and ascetics.² The same concern also extends to the laity, in fact the very first precept to be undertaken by a lay Buddhist is to refrain from killing any living being. This goes to show the degree to which abstention from *hiṃsā* was seen as an integral aspect of proper conduct among early Buddhists.

Thoughts and intentions related to harming and violence, *vihiṃsā-vitakka* and *vihiṃsā-saṅkappa*, are singled out specifically in early Buddhism as one out of altogether three unwholesome types of thoughts and intentions (*D. III*, 215). To refrain from them is of such integral importance to spiritual progress that the opposite of such thoughts and intentions constitutes the second factor of right intention, *sammāsaṅkappa* of the noble eightfold path (*M. III*, 73). The other two types of unwholesome thoughts or intentions that are to be overcome in order to develop *sammāsaṅkappa* are those related to sensuality, *kāma*, and to ill-will, *vyāpāda*. It is noteworthy that, with ill-will already being mentioned, *vihiṃsā* should also be reckoned separately. The reason for this could be the above-mentioned importance given to *ahiṃsā* which might have made it seem desirable to explicitly treat thoughts and intentions related to violence and harming, in addition to thoughts and intentions related to ill-will.

The arising of thoughts and intentions related to violence and harming is due to the corresponding type of perception, *vihiṃsāsaññā* (*M. II*, 27). To overcome them requires first of all a clear distinction between such unwholesome thoughts or intentions and their positive counterparts, a distinction intrinsically related to a clear appreciation of the fact that any thought or intention related to *vihiṃsā* will be detrimental for oneself and for others (*M. I*, 115). Based on such clear appreciation, an effort should be made to overcome and remove any such thought or intention, thereby gradually removing the tendency that leads to their arising. To implement this mode of practice is one of the methods recommended in the *Sabbāsava Sutta* for overcoming the influxes (*M. I*, 11), and can be compared

to a cowherd who properly looks after his cows by picking out the eggs that flies have laid on them (*M. I*, 223), a mode of practice that becomes a constituent of the "certain path" to liberation, *apaṇṇakā paṭipadā* (*A. II*, 76).

The *Sallekha Sutta* describes a whole range of different approaches towards overcoming *vihimsā* (*M. I*, 42). The discourse begins by encouraging the making of an effort at non-violence, *avihimsā*, even when faced with others who are engaged in *vihimsā*. The same discourse then implicitly brings up the kind of mental training that will enforce one's resolve to avoid *vihimsā* by pointing out that even to incline the mind towards non-violence is of great benefit, not to mention non-violent bodily and verbal actions. Just as one might avoid an uneven path by taking an even path, so *vihimsā* can be avoided by following the path of *avihimsā*, a path that leads upwards just as the path of *vihimsā* leads downwards. If a person has a tendency to *vihimsā*, the *Sallekha Sutta* concludes, then conscious development of *avihimsā* is the way to extinguish this tendency.

The *Sallekha Sutta's* instruction on making an effort at non-violence when confronted with *vihimsā* by others would also imply refraining from reacting violently when being oneself the victim of violence. The *Kakacūpama Sutta* illustrates the degree of patience required in such situations with the famous simile of the saw. According to this simile, even when one's body is cut to pieces by bandits, one should nevertheless maintain an attitude of unwavering compassion and loving kindness, without giving rise to any hatred in the mind, let alone react with violence by way of speech or body (*M. I*, 129).

In addition to patience when faced with violence, the practice of loving kindness in particular is an effective protection against violence by others (*A. IV*, 150). This can be understood both in the sense that loving kindness will be the appropriate attitude when faced with violence, as well as in the sense that the regular practice of loving kindness will act as a protection against becoming the victim of violence.

For one who practices the path, *avihimsā* thus becomes like the weaponry of a chariot (*S. V*, 6), or like the front foot of an elephant (*Thag.* 693). Both images highlight how non-violence has to be put right in the front, in fact according to a succinct statement

given in the *Dhammapada*, patience should be considered the highest austerity and one who harms others is not worth even being reckoned a recluse (*Dhp.* 183-184). Someone who harms other beings, which are but wishing for happiness, will himself or herself be bereft of happiness in the future (*Ud.* 12). But one who does not harm any being, deserves to be reckoned a noble one indeed (*Dhp.* 270). Hence *vihimsā* needs to be well left behind in order to proceed on the path to the final goal.

The Wise Ones, free from violence,
Always restrained in [their] bodily [actions],
They go to the deathless state,
Having gone to which they will be free from grief.

*Ahiṃsakāye munayo,
niccaṃ kāyena saṃvutā,
te yanti accutaṃ thānaṃ,
yattha gantvāna socare (Dhp. 225).*

See also VIHESĀ.

Anālayo

References

- 1 *Vin. I*, 89; *Vin. III*, 35; *Vin. IV*, 63; *Vin. IV*, 65; *Vin. IV*, 228; *Vin. IV*, 229.
- 2 *Vin. IV*, 34; *Vin. IV*, 49; *Vin. IV*, 124; *Vin. IV*, 125.

VIJAYĀRĀMA. A Mahāyāna monastery now in ruins lying about two kilometres north of Anurādhapura, an ancient capital of Sri Lanka. This belongs to that group of Mahāyāna *ārāmas* popularly known as *pabbatavihāras* (Sk. *Parvata-vihāra*) lying scattered around the city of Anurādhapura and elsewhere in the island. The main feature common to these monasteries is that they have been built on a preconceived plan in accordance with an architectural tradition that was in vogue in ancient Sri Lanka, unlike the great monasteries like Mahāvihāra, Abhayagiri and Jetavanārāma which became full-fledged monasteries over a period of time. They are comparatively small in size with a building area almost square in shape raised within a retaining wall (about 10 feet high) filled with earth dug out most probably for the construction of the moat that ran round the monastery complex. Another interesting feature of these *ārāmas* is that all the religious and non-religious buildings were housed in one and the

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