

The *Vimativinodani* is not yet available in the Roman script. It has been edited (by Ven. Beretudāwe Dharmārāmatissa), printed and published in Sinhala script in 1935.

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**VIMOKKHA**, "deliverance", (Skt. *vimokṣa*), is a term that at times occurs on a par with *vimutti*, "liberation". In a more specific sense, however, *vimokkha* stands for the eight types of deliverances, and it is this more specific sense that will be the theme of the present article, while other occurrences of the term *vimokkha* will be covered under the heading of VIMUTTI.

The eight types of *vimokkha* are eight levels of "deliverance" that involve progressive degrees of mastery in the realm of concentration meditation in particular, with only the last one bearing a direct relation to the development of insight. Though the final goal of deliverance or liberation requires going beyond any attainment in the sphere of tranquillity, early Buddhism nevertheless recognizes and treats in considerable detail levels of *vimokkha* that fall short of being the final goal. Thus the eight deliverances form part of listings of the essentials of the Buddha's teaching provided in the *Saṅgīti Sutta* and the *Dasuttara Sutta* (*D.* III, 262 and *D.* III, 288), the latter specifying that these deliverances should be realized, *sachikātabbā*.

The *Saḷāyatanavibhaṅga Sutta* compares the Buddha's ability to teach these eight deliverances to the ability of the trainer of an elephant, a horse, or an ox, who only teach their animals how to proceed in one of the four directions, whereas the Buddha's disciples learn how to proceed towards altogether eight directions, viz. the eight *vimokkhas* (*M.* III, 222). In fact, a listing of various practices that lead to overcoming defilements includes the eight deliverances (*A.* IV, 349); and according to the *Mahāsakuludāyī Sutta* many disciples of the Buddha had reached direct knowledge through attaining these eight deliverances (*M.* II, 12).

Hence one who develops the eight deliverances even for a short fraction of time can be reckoned to be doing the teacher's bidding and eats the country's alms food not in vain (*A.* I, 40). The ability to attain them is

the distinctive mark of an *arahant* liberated both ways, *ubhatobhāga-vimutto*, who is able to attain the eight deliverances in forward and backward order (*D.* II, 71; see in more detail VIMUTTI).

These eight deliverances comprise (e.g. *D.* II, 112 or *A.* IV, 306):

- (1) to see material forms while being possessed of material form, *rūpīrūpāni passati*;
- (2) to see forms externally while being percipient of no materiality internally, *ajjhataṃ arūpasaññī bahiddhā rūpāni passati*;
- (3) to be resolved upon the beautiful, '*subhan'teva adhimutto hoti*;
- (4) to attain the sphere of boundless space;
- (5) to attain the sphere of boundless consciousness;
- (6) to attain the sphere of nothingness;
- (7) to attain the sphere of neither-perception-non-perception;
- (8) to attain the cessation of perceptions and feelings.

According to an explanation given in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, the first deliverance involves developing the perception of a colour like blue, yellow, red, or white. This colour, or more precisely the 'sign' of this colour, the *nimitta*, is at first to be given attention internally on oneself, *ajjhata paccatta*. Once this has been well developed the same colour sign is to be given attention externally, *bahiddhā* leading to a perception of materiality in terms of the respective colour internally as well as externally (*Ps.* II, 38). The *Atthasālinī* further specifies that to perceive a colour internally here refers to developing a *jhāna* based on taking a colour of some part of one's own body as the object (*DhsA.* 190). Thus to develop perception of the colour blue the hair, bile or the pupil of the eye should be used; for yellow the fat, the skin or the yellow spot of the eyes; for red the flesh, the blood, the tongue, the palms of the hand and feet or the red of the eyes; and for white the bones, the teeth, the nails, or the white of the eye. Next, according to the *Atthasālinī's* explanation, the *jhānic* vision of these colours should be developed externally by way of a *kaṣiṇa* meditation object. The second of the eight deliverances would then represent the case of someone who does not develop the internal vision of colours described under the first *vimokkha*, but directly proceeds to develop the vision of these colours with the help of an external device.

The interpretation offered in the *Atthasālinī* is not altogether convincing. It is not easy to imagine how someone might use the white colour of his or her own bones as a meditation object, unless the meditator had just gone through a type of accident that renders the bones visible, but then such a condition would make it difficult to develop the vision of the white bones into a deeper level of concentration. The same would to a lesser extent also apply to looking at one's own flesh or blood in order to develop a perception of redness. For a monk or a nun to be able to look directly at the hair of their own head, *kesa*, would also not be an easy task, as due to regular shaving their hair would not be long enough to be seen directly. It is also not clear how such hair or even bile could be perceived as blue; how the dark skin of an Indian could be perceived as yellow or else, in the case of the palms, as red; or how one would be able to see colours in the pupil of one's own eye. All these visions would only be possible if one were to resort to an external aid such as a mirror, in which case, however, the use of another external object of the respective colour would be more straightforward. Moreover, by resorting to a mirror the distinction drawn in the *Atthasālinī* between internal and external visions would be lost. Thus the *Atthasālinī*'s explanation of the first and second *vimokkha* seems contrived, being perhaps modelled on the eight spheres of transcendence, *abhibhāyatana*, several of which do involve external visions of forms whose colour is blue, yellow, red or white (e.g. *D. III*, 260; see also ABHIBHĀYATANA).

An alternative explanation of the first two *vimokkhas* can be found in the *Mahāvibhāṣā* and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* (*T. XXVII*, 437c29 and *T. XXV*, 215a14).<sup>2</sup> These works agree with the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* and the *Atthasālinī* that the first *vimokkha* takes parts of one's body as its object, such as hair, bones, flesh, etc. They differ in as much as these objects are not to be seen directly, but rather to be contemplated in a recollective manner from the perspective of the unattractiveness and impure nature of these different parts of one's own body.

Once the first *vimokkha* has been developed in this way, the same mode of contemplation is then to be undertaken in relation to the bodies of others, which, when carried out successfully, constitutes the second *vimokkha*. The *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* indicates that to progress in this way from the first to the second *vimokkha* is to proceed from having reached

some degree of freedom from conceit and attachment in relation to one's own appearance to developing a similar degree of freedom from attraction and lust towards the bodies of others (*T. XXV*, 215a16),

The undertaking of such recollective contemplation of the anatomical parts of the body is described in detail in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (*M. I*, 57), according to which one should review, *paccavekkhati*, the whole body from the soles of the feet to the top of the head in terms of the various types of impurity found inside such as hair, flesh, bone etc. Similar to the progression from the first to the second *vimokkha*, the *satipaṭṭhāna* instructions also proceed from contemplating one's own body, *ajjhata*, to contemplation of the bodies of others, *bahiddhā*. In both cases, one need not actually see these different parts, which in the case of bones etc. would require supernormal powers or surgery, but to mentally review the constitution of the physical body to the extent to which one is familiar with it. In order to facilitate such familiarity, the *Visuddhimagga* offers a minute description of the various anatomical parts to be reviewed in this manner (*Vism.* 248-265).

A discourse in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* specifies that to review the anatomical constitution of the body in the way described in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* leads to the perception of unattractiveness, *asubha-saññā* (*A. V*, 109). The *Mahāvibhāṣā* then explains that, once the perception of unattractiveness, *asubha-saññā* has been developed in this way, to counterbalance excessive disgust and negativity the third *vimokkha* comes into its place, which develops perception of what is beautiful, *subha* (*T. XXVII* 437c28).

Though on reading the bare instructions given in the discourses one would perhaps not come to the conclusion that the first two *vimokkhas* require contemplation of *asubha*, the idea that they refer to some form of *kaṣiṇa* meditation would also not naturally come to a reader who is not familiar with the explanations given in the *Atthasālinī*. When compared with the latter, the suggestions given in the *Mahāvibhāṣā* and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* appear more straightforward and practically feasible; and they also yield a meaningful dynamics of development for the first three *vimokkhas*.

To be resolved upon the beautiful, the third of the eight deliverances, requires according to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* the development of the four

*brahmavihāras* as a liberation of the mind in the form of a boundless radiation. The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* explains that due to such development beings appear as non-repulsive, *appaṭikula*, hence one has reached the liberation of being resolved upon the beautiful (*Ps.* II, 39). The *Atthasālinī*, however, understands the third deliverance to refer to *jhāna* attainment through a colour device that is thoroughly purified, *suvisuddha* (*DhsA.* 191). This gloss is noteworthy as it shows the degree to which the explanations in the *Atthasālinī* are influenced by the idea of *kasiṇa* meditation, so much so that the *Atthasālinī* would even venture to go against the otherwise highly respected exposition given in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*.

A discourse in the *Samyutta Nikāya* relates only *mettā* to the *subha vimokkha* (*S.* V, 119), whereas the other three *brahmavihāras* lead to the subsequent types of *vimokkha*, namely those related to the first three immaterial spheres. The *Pāṭika Sutta* clarifies that at the time of having attained *subha vimokkha*, one will not perceive phenomena as 'ugly', but rather as 'beautiful' (*D.* III, 34). The commentary then explains that this passage refers to an attainment that is based on a colour device, *vaṇṇa-kasiṇa* (*DA.* III, 830), thereby again opting for an explanation that involves *kasiṇa* meditation, against the indications provided by the *Samyutta Nikāya* discourse.

From the perspective of the explanation of the first two *vimokkhas* given in the *Mahāvibhāṣā* and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*, however, the practice of *mettā* would be fitting the series well, since the development of loving kindness would indeed effectively counterbalance any negativity that might have arisen through excessive contemplation of the repulsive nature of one's own body or that of others. The contrast provided in the *Pāṭika Sutta* between perceiving phenomena as ugly or as beautiful could also be related to this topic, in the sense of highlighting that with the third *vimokkha* the perceptions of *asubha* that had been developed earlier are now definitely left behind.

Whatever may be the final word on the implications of the first three deliverances, the remaining set is quite straightforward. Deliverances four to seven involve the attainment of the four immaterial spheres. In practical terms, based on the mental stability of the fourth *jhāna* any perception related to materiality or diversity is to be overcome in order to attain the sphere

of boundless space (See also ĀKĀSĀNAÑCĀYATANA). Next the experience of space is attended to from the perspective of the consciousness that experiences the sphere of boundless space, which then leads to attaining the sphere of boundless consciousness (See also VIÑÑĀNAÑCĀYATANA). Giving attention to the cessation aspect of the experience of boundless consciousness leads to attaining the sphere of nothingness (see also AKIÑCAÑÑĀYATANA). Further practice leads to subduing perceptions until a state is reached which can neither be reckoned as percipient nor as non-percipient, this being entry into the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (see also NEVASAÑÑĀNĀSAÑÑĀYATANA).

With the final of the eight deliverances, the sense of true liberation from a Buddhist perspective comes into fore, as the cessation of perception and feeling requires the development of insight up to the level of non-return or arahant-hood (*Vism.* 702; see also *A.* III, 194 and SAÑÑĀVEDAYITANIRODHA).

Anālayo

#### References

- 1 Similar descriptions can be found in the Chinese Āgamas (e.g. in the *Dīrgha Āgama*, T. I, 52b13, or in the *Madhyama Āgama*, T. I, 582a17), and in the *Mahāvīyūtpatti* § 70 / 1511-1518.
- 2 *T.* stands for the Taishō edition.

VIMUTTĀYATANA is a "sphere of liberation", an expression that stands representative for what forms an occasion for the break-through to liberating insight. There are altogether five such occasions, which are:

- (1) when hearing the *Dhamma*
- (2) when teaching the *Dhamma* to others
- (3) when reciting the *Dhamma*
- (4) when reflecting about the *Dhamma*
- (5) during meditation<sup>1</sup>

On each of these five occasions, what happens according to the canonical description is that one comes to have a direct grasp of the teachings in spirit and letter, due to which delight and joy arise, which in turn lead to tranquility and concentration, *tassa attha-*

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