

(*rūpa-kāya*) solely by the power of wisdom without realizing the eight liberations (*aṭṭha vimokkhā*) is called one 'delivered by wisdom'. He is of five types with *sukkha-vipassaka* given as the first of them. The sub-commentary explaining further says "his insight is dry, rough, unmoistened by the moisture of tranquility meditation". Ven Nyanatiloka however states that although this term is rendered often as "dry-visioned" or "having dry insight" it should not lead to the misconception that the nature of insight meditation is 'dry' or 'merely intellectual'. In fact, he asserts, the development of insight produces rapture (*pīti*) and a sense of urgency (*saṃvega*) in the meditator (B.D.s.v *sukkha-vipassaka*).

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VIPULASĀRA, MĀPALAGAMA, See
WIPULASĀRA, MĀPALAGAMA

VIRĀGA, "dispassion", is one of the epithets of final liberation in early Buddhism (e.g. *M. I*, 167). In some contexts, *virāga* can also stand for "fading away". Both meanings are interrelated and derive from the primary sense of \sqrt{raj} or $\sqrt{rañi}$, to "colour", hence *virāga* stands for "decolouration" or "fading away". In contrast to *rāga*, "passion", which 'colours' the mind, *virāga* then has the sense of "dispassion" (see also RĀGA).

To assess the relevance of these two nuances of the term *virāga* as "fading away" and as "dispassion" requires a survey of the occurrence of *virāga* in a series of different contexts.

The nuance of "fading away" appears to be more prominent in contexts where *virāga* is preceded by "impermanence" and followed by "cessation" and "relinquishment", *nirodha* and *paṇisagga*. This sequence occurs in relation to the final four steps of mindfulness of breathing (*M. III*, 83). Alternatively, *virāga* could also be preceded by "impermanence" and "change", *anicca* and *vipariṇāma*. This perspective is applied, for example, to the five

aggregates (*S. III*, 43). Here to "fading away" appears to fit the context best.

The same nuance of "fading away" seems to also apply when *virāga* is preceded by *khaya*, "destruction". This is the case, for example, in a description of how the mind is freed by the destruction and fading away of craving, *taṇhā ... khayā virāgā ... cittaṃ suvimuttaṃ* (*S. III*, 13). Quite often *virāga* is preceded by "destruction" and "decay", *khaya* and *vaya*. Examples are a contemplation capable of leading to final liberation (*A. IV*, 146); or when the three types of feelings are qualified to be subject to destruction, decay and fading away (e.g. *M. I*, 500). The same qualification of being subject to destruction, decay and fading away is also applicable to the five aggregates (*S. III*, 24); to the twelve links of dependent arising, *paṭicca samuppāda* (*S. II*, 26); and to the knowledge of the fixedness of the principle of dependent arising, *dhammaṭṭhiti nāṇa* (*S. II*, 60). In all these instances, the sense of "fading away" appears to be the prominent meaning.

Alternatively *virāga* can be preceded by "removal", *pahāna*. In such cases, the sense of "dispassion" seems to be the more prominent meaning. Examples are the five "perceptions that ripen in liberation", *vimutti-paripācāniya saññā* (*D. III*, 243). Other occurrences of *virāga* preceded by *pahāna* are in relation to five things whose development leads to liberation of the mind and liberation by wisdom, *cetovimutti* and *paññāvimutti* (*A. III*, 85); and which lead to overcoming a whole host of defilements (*A. III*, 277). A list of nine perceptions whose development is of great fruit also culminates in *pahāna-saññā* and *virāga-saññā* (*A. IV*, 387).

In numerous instances, "removal" and "dispassion", *pahāna* and *virāga*, are followed by "cessation", *nirodha*, a triad that occurs frequently in listings of types of perception. Examples are the six "perceptions conducive to penetration", *nibbedha-bhāgiya-saññā* (*D. III*, 251). These are at the same time the six "things conducive to knowledge", *viññābhāgiyā dhammā* (*S. V*, 345; *A. III*, 334); and the six things that lead to the removal of various defilements (*A. III*, 452). Another example are the seven

"things that prevent decline", *aparihāṇiyā dhammā* (D. II, 79 and A. IV, 24); which are seven "perceptions" (D. III, 253); whose development leads to overcoming all kinds of defilements (A. IV, 148); and which therefore are "things to be aroused", *dhammā uppādetabbā* (D. III, 283). The theme of "things to be aroused" recurs also in a nine-fold and a ten-fold formulation (D. III, 289 and D. III, 291), both of which are to be developed to overcome various defilements (A. IV, 465 and A. V, 309). The triad *pahāna virāga nirodha* also features in a list of ten perceptions that are of great fruit and with which the mind should be well familiarized, *paricitaṅca cittaṃ bhavissati* (A. V, 105 and A. V, 107); and in a long list of meditation topics whose development even for a short time is highly recommendable (A. I, 41; cf. also S. V, 132).

In most of these listings, the triad "removal, dispassion, cessation" *pahāna, virāga, nirodha*, is preceded by the triad "impermanent, unsatisfactory, not-self", *anicca, dukkha, anattā*, or by a set of terms that, in addition to *anicca* and *anattā*, may involve "impure", *asubha*, or "disadvantage", *ādīnava*, etc.

The basic pattern that emerges from a survey of the role of *virāga* in these different listings is that when *virāga* is preceded by terminology related to impermanence alone, its predominant sense appears to be that of "fading away".¹ When, however, *virāga* is preceded by "removal", instance where often all three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness (or related terms) and not-self also precede *virāga*, then the sense of "dispassion" appears to be the most prominent implication of the term.

Such "dispassion" is thus the outcome of a full appreciation of the true nature of reality, preceded by "removal", *pahāna*, and almost always followed by "cessation", *nirodha*. This triad thus forms a counterpart to the triad *anicca, dukkha, anattā*, which describes the three main characteristics of reality in regard to which insight needs to be developed, while the triad *pahāna, virāga, nirodha* depicts the detachment that ensues once this insight matures. Just as the sequence underlying the insight triad *anicca, dukkha, anattā* is of significance, as it is based on awareness of *anicca* that *dukkha* is appreciated, and

based on appreciation of *dukkha* insight into *anattā* arises, so too in the case of this affective triad a certain progression can be discerned. This progression moves from the more active "removal" to "dispassion", which then reaches its culmination point in "cessation".

A more detailed explanation of the implications of these three types of perception can be found in the *Girimānanda Sutta* (A. V, 110). According to this discourse, *pahāna-saññā* requires not indulging in any thought related to sensuality, anger and harming. *Virāga-saññā* and *nirodha-saññā* then stand for reflecting in accordance with the maxim that "this is peaceful, this is excellent, namely the stilling of all formations, the relinquishment of all substrata, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, *Nibbāna*", *etaṃ santaṃ etaṃ paṇītaṃ, yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho sabbupadhipaṭinissaggo taṃhakkhaya virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ*. The only difference is that in the case of *virāga-saññā* the maxim does not mention "cessation", and in the case of *nirodha-saññā*, "dispassion" is not mentioned. This suggests the last two perceptions to be closely similar in meaning, perhaps *nirodha* representing a slightly more definite and final form of leaving behind attachment to the world and of inclining the mind towards *Nibbāna*. The preceding *pahāna-saññā*, however, clearly sets in at a more gross level, when unwholesome thoughts are still to be overcome, whose removal would then be the basis for implementing the above maxim.

The topic of *Nibbāna* is also prominent in another series of terms that includes *virāga*. This series of terms qualifies the type of teaching or conduct that is conducive to liberation as leading to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, peace, higher insight, awakening and *Nibbāna*, *nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattati* (e.g. D. I, 189). This thus depicts in more detail the outcome of *virāga*, namely inner peace, higher insight and awakening. In short, *nibbidā, virāga* and *nirodha* are the essential steps that lead to final liberation (e.g. S. III, 163).

The relationship between *virāga* and disenchantment, *nibbidā*, is taken up in a discourse in

the *Samyutta Nikāya*, which points out that *virāga* has disenchantment as its proximate cause (*S. II, 30*). The same discourse continues by indicating that liberation has *virāga* as its proximate cause. That is, the whole purpose of *virāga* is liberation, *virāgo vimuttattho* (*S. III, 189*), or knowledge and vision of liberation, *virāgo vimuttiñāpadassanatto* (*A. V, 312*). Conversely, without dispassion to reach knowledge and vision of liberation is impossible (*A. V, 314*). Hence it is through dispassion that one reaches liberation, *virāgā vimuccati* (e.g. *M. I, 139*), and through dispassion that beings are purified, *virāgā visujjhanti* (*S. III, 70*).

The mental factors particularly required for reaching final liberation are the factors of awakening, *bojjhaṅga*, and it is in relation to these that *virāga* also makes its appearance. For the seven *bojjhaṅgas* to lead to knowledge and liberation, they need to be practiced in dependence on seclusion, dispassion and cessation, so that they will culminate in letting go, *vivekanissita*, *virāganissita*, *nirodhanissita*, *vossaggapariṇāmin* (*M. III, 88*). The same set of four applies not only to the seven factors of awakening, but is also of relevance for the development of the five faculties or powers (e.g. *S. IV, 365*), and for the noble eightfold path (e.g. *S. V, 45*).

In sum, then, *virāga* can be seen to comprise in a nutshell the whole gamut of the *Dhamma*, being a term that stands for the path to be taken as well as for the goal to be reached. As a path to be taken, *virāga* counteracts the chief culprits for the *saṃsāric* predicament: lust, desire and craving. Their hold on the mind is to be gradually reduced by seeing all the enticing aspects of experience for what they truly are, by allowing their attraction to 'fade away', their superficially colourful appearance to 'decolour'. The central means for such decolouration or fading away is awareness of their impermanent nature.

Such direct experience of the impermanent nature of all aspects of experience needs to be complemented by a clear apprehension of the other two characteristics, *dukkha* and *anattā*, in order to issue in 'dispassion'. With the onset of true dispassion the path gains momentum, which leads from the gradual 'fading away' of 'passion', *rāgavirāga*, in regard to any aspect of experience, to a most thorough 'fading away' and disappearance of all aspects of experience with the attainment of stream-entry.

This first experience of the supramundane, of *Nibbāna*, at stream-entry, is the most total 'fading away' possible. Here even the sense of 'I' that otherwise pervades all experiences has to yield to such 'fading away', and therewith all identifications are similarly subject to 'decolouration'. At this stage, *virāga* in its supreme sense as an epithet for the final goal has become an experienced reality. With progress to the higher stages of awakening *virāga* will then further unfold its 'dispassioning' potential. For the arahant, then, *virāga* has become so all-encompassing that not only any trace of sensual passion, but also any passion for self or existence have been forever turned into 'dispassion', as the mind has become totally 'decoloured' of the colouring forces of unwholesome states and tendencies.

The broad compass of the term *virāga* and its significant nuances make it easy to understand why, according to a succinct statement by the Buddha, whatever things lead to *virāga*, these can definitely be understood as the proper teaching and training promulgated by him (*A. IV, 280*). Of all things, be they conditioned or unconditioned, *virāga* is indeed the highest. Hence those who have confidence in *virāga* have confidence in the highest and will gain the highest profit (*It. 88*).

Highest of all paths is the eightfold [noble path],
And of all truths the four part [noble truths],
Highest of [all] phenomena is dispassion,
And of two-footed [humans] the one with vision.

*Maggān'atthaṅgiko seṭṭho,
saccānaṃ caturo padā,
virāgo seṭṭho dhammānaṃ,
dipadānañca cakkhumā* (*Dhp. 273*).

Anālayo

Reference

- 1 An exception to this pattern can be found in a verse in the *Ratana Sutta*, where *virāga* is preceded by "destruction", *khaya*, alone, without any reference to *anicca* or *vaya*. In this verse, *virāga* is followed by *amata*, the "deathless" (*Sn. 225*), a context where *virāga* would have the sense of "dispassion" and act as a synonym for *Nibbāna*.

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