

Was the Buddha Obligated to Observe Vinaya Rules?

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Abstract

I argue in this paper that according to earliest Pali sources,

1. The Buddha unlike his followers lived above and beyond the Vinaya rules.
2. Throughout his life, the sole moral guideline for his activities was the Dhamma that he had realized, not the explicit Vinaya rules.
3. The earliest three suttas given in full in Mv probably enshrine the nutshell of Dhamma which had been the moral guideline of the Buddha and his followers before explicit Vinaya rules appeared.

1 Introduction

Juo-Hsüeh Shih makes an interesting assumption in her work *Controversies over Buddhist Nuns* when she discusses the historicity of *ñatticatutthakamma* ordination form in Vinaya:

Moreover, evidence in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta of the DN suggests that the Buddha himself may have used this formula [i. e., the *ehibhikkhu* formula]¹ all his life. (352)

So why did the Buddha not follow the procedure [i. e., the *ñatticatutthakamma* procedure]² he had himself prescribed? (355)

It is more plausible to suggest that the last stage in the evolution of the ordination process, the *ñatticatutthakammaupasampadā*, began after the Buddha's death ... (356)

Her argument can be schematized as follows:

1. If the Buddha really prescribed the *ñatticatutthakamma* ordination during his lifetime, he must have adopted it in giving ordination to his followers.
2. But he used the older *ehibhikkhu* formula all his life.
3. Therefore:
 - a) Either he failed to observe his own rule,
 - b) Or the *ñatticatutthakamma* ordination is a later development that has materialized only after his passing away.
4. But the Buddha could not have failed to observe his own rules.
5. Therefore, only the conclusion (3b) is plausible.

As seen above, her argument is based on the assumption that the Buddha was obliged to observe Vinaya rules like his followers. “No one is above the law”, she seems to say, not even the Buddha himself.

However, I find it difficult to take her assumption at face value because it contradicts the orthodox Theravādin view. See the following, which is supposed to be the Buddha's answer when the King Bimbisāra asked why he chose to perform a miracle even though he had already prescribed a rule prohibiting his followers from performing such wonder deeds:

1. *Ehibhikkhu* ordination was “the oldest form of admission and ordination as a monk by pronouncing the formula beginning with the words *ehi bhikkhu* (Skt. *ehi bhikṣu*, come monk)” (Nanayakkara 44). And it was “used only by the Buddha” (44) according to Pali records.
2. It was the traditionally recorded final stage in the evolution of ordination forms during the Buddha's time (See *Vin* vin1: 55–56; Horner 4: 71–72), and is still alive as the only ordination form in Theravadin circles.

Mahārāja, yathā ... attano uyyāne ambādīni khādantassa daṇḍo natthi, aññesaṃ atthi, evaṃ ... attano sikkhāpadapaññattiyā atikkamo nāma natthi, aññesaṃ pana atthi. (Dhp-a 3: 204–205)

O Great king, just as ... there is no punishment for one who eats mangoes, etc., from one's own garden but there is, for others, so also ... there is no transgression of precepts for me but there is, for others.³

A somewhat clearer version is found in Jātaka:

Mahārāja, taṃ mayā sāvakanāṃ paññattaṃ, buddhānaṃ pana sikkhāpadaṃ nāma natthi. Yathā hi, mahārāja, tava uyyāne pupphaphalaṃ aññesaṃ vāri-taṃ, na tava, evaṃsampadamidaṃ datṭhabbanti. (Ja 4: 263–264)

O Great king, that (precept) is prescribed by me for the disciples, there is no precept for Buddhas. O Great king, it should be understood in the same way as the flowers and fruits in your garden being kept away from others but not from you.⁴

So who is right? This problem of the Buddha *vis-à-vis* Vinaya rules will be the topic of this paper. Here I will argue that according to early Pali sources,

1. The Buddha unlike his followers lived above and beyond the Vinaya rules.
2. Throughout his life, the sole moral guideline for his activities was the Dhamma that he had realized, not the explicit Vinaya rules.
3. The earliest three suttas given in full in Mv probably enshrine the nutshell of Dhamma which had been the moral guideline of the Buddha and his followers before explicit Vinaya rules appeared.

2 Textual Evidences

2.1 Subhadda's Ordination as Depicted in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*

Firstly, I will discuss the account of Subhadda's ordination in *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, DN since this is one prominent place where one can have a glimpse of the

3. Cf. Burlingame's version, which is more readable yet less reflective of the literal content of the passage:

Great king, even as ... you are not yourself liable to punishment for eating mangoes and other fruits in your own garden, while others are liable to punishment for so doing, even so ... while I may overstep the precepts which I have myself laid down, others may not do so ... (3: 39)

4. Cf. Rouse's version:

The command, O king, was given to my disciple; there is no command which can rule the Buddhas. When the flowers and fruit in your park are forbidden to others, the same rule does not apply to you. (167)

Buddha's activities beyond Vinaya. Even though Mahāparinibbāna Sutta is a non-Vinaya text and consequently would not mention all legal details, it is supposed to be an account of the Buddha's last days, so one can at least expect a version of that sutta in one particular school to be legally consistent with the supposedly final stage of Vinaya belonging to the same tradition.

However, how I understand the relevant text in the sutta seemingly differs from how other scholars do, so a detailed analysis in the light of Pali Vinaya would be necessary here.

Esāhaṃ bhante Bhagavantam saraṇaṃ gacchāmi dhammañ ca bhikkhu-saṃghañ ca. Labheyyāhaṃ Bhagavato santike pabbajjam, labheyyaṃ upasampadan' ti.

[Emphasis added] (DN 2: 152)

Lord, this I⁵ go for refuge to the Lord, the Dhamma and the Order of bhikkhus.

May I receive the going-forth *under the Lord*. May I receive ordination.

First, Subhadda declared his faith in the Triple Gem and afterwards begged for ordination from the Buddha. Here Juo-Hsüeh Shih observes, "... before making the stereotyped profession of going forth, Subhadda uttered the threefold going for refuge" (352), but the optative mood of the main verb, i. e., *labheyyaṃ* in *labheyyāhaṃ* (< *labheyyaṃ* + *ahaṃ*), shows that he was making only a *request* for going forth, not a *profession* of it. Getting admitted to any society is a two-way business—one party applying for admission and the other party giving it—and there is no reason to think that the monastic Order would have been otherwise.

Moreover, it should be noted that

1. I have rendered the phrase *Bhagavato santike* as "under the Lord" instead of using the literal sense "in the presence of the Lord" because I believe the literal sense does not fit in with this context. (See p-6)
2. I use the traditional interpretation of *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* as getting novicehood and getting fully ordained respectively, i. e., as different stages in renunciation. (See p- 4.)

The Buddha replied to Subhadda as follows:

Yo kho Subhadda aññatitthiya-pubbo imasmiṃ dhamma-vinaye ākaṅkhati pabbajjam, ākaṅkhati upasampadam, so cattāro māse parivasati. Catunnaṃ māsānaṃ accayena āradha-cittā bhikkhū pabbājenti upasampādentī bhikkhubhāvāya. Api ca m'ettha puggala-vemattatā veditā'ti. [Emphasis added] (DN 2: 152)

5. The phrase *Esāhaṃ* is a *sandhi* combination of *eso* and *ahaṃ*, of which the former serves as the pronominal adjective of the latter. Accordingly, the whole phrase should be literally translated as "this I". The role of the pronoun *eso* here appears not more than providing emphasis.

Subhadda! A former member of another school, seeking the going-forth and ordination in this Dhamma and Vinaya, stays four months on probation. At the end of four months, monks *whose minds are conciliated* let (him) go forth and ordain him for the status of monkhood. *However, I know the distinction of individuals in this case.*⁶

In the Buddha's reply above, he referred to a Vinaya rule applicable to former members of another school who aspire to the membership of the Buddhist monastic order (See *Vin* 1: 69–71; Horner 4: 85–89).

Then Subhadda proclaimed that he could even stay four years on probation if, by doing so, he could really achieve monkhood in the Buddha's *Saṅgha* order (*DN* 2: 152; Walshe 269). Next,

Atha kho Bhagavā āyasmantaṃ Ānandaṃ āmantesi: 'Tena h'Ānanda Subhad-dam pabbājethāti. (DN 2: 152)

Then the Lord told Venerable Ānanda, "Then, Ānanda, (you) let Subhadda go forth".

Several important facts can be deduced from the Buddha's statement above:

1. Subhadda requested, as seen above, for *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* but the Buddha said *pabbājetha* ("let him go forth") only, not *upasampādettha* ("let him get ordained"). It shows that at the time when this sutta was finalized, the official renunciation procedure in Vinaya already consisted of two stages—*pabbajjā* ("going forth") and *upasampadā* ("ordination")—and that going forth

6. Cf. Walshe's version:

Subhadda, whoever, coming from another school, seeks the going-forth and ordination in this Dhamma and discipline, must wait four months on probation. And at the end of four months, those monks *who are established in mind* may let him go forth and give him ordination to the status of a monk. *However, there can be a distinction of persons.* [Emphasis added] (269)

Walshe translates *āraddhacittā* as "who are established in mind" and explains it as "i. e., properly qualified." (574). Perhaps it is an adaption of the older version, "exalted in spirit" (Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 168). However, the original Vinaya source has the sentence, *evaṃ kho bhikkhave aññatitthiyapubbo ārādhako hoti, evaṃ anārādhako* (*Vin* 1: 70) ("Monks, thus is a former member of another sect conciliatory, thus is not conciliatory."), in which *ārādhaka* means "who conciliates, wins approval; accomplishing, fulfilling; successful" (Cone "ārādhaka"). Since *āraddha* is a past participle derived from the same root as that of *ārādhaka*, namely, from (*ā* √*rādh*), it should be translated as "one which is conciliated". Then *āraddhacitta* is a relative compound meaning "one whose mind is conciliated". In the context of the *Mv* passage quoted above, being conciliated essentially means gaining confidence in the sincerity and motivation of the would-be renouncer who was a former member of another sect.

And Walshe translates the sentence *Api ca m'ettha puggala-vemattatā viditā'ti* as "There can be a distinction of persons". It is not exactly wrong but not accurate enough in this context. The 1st person pronoun *me* is the agent of the main verb *viditā*, a passive form, so the literal translation should be "However, the distinction of individuals is known by me". I believe that the usage of the 1st person agent carries much significance here. On the other hand, the *Dialogues* translates this sentence correctly: "Nevertheless in this case I acknowledge the difference of persons" (Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 168).

usually preceded full ordination. This is consistent with the orthodox interpretation, in which *pabbajjā* means obtaining novicehood while *upasampadā* means getting full ordination;⁷ this is why I have differentiated *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* in my translation.

2. The verb *pabbājetha* is the 2nd person, plural Imperative form of *pabbājeti*, which in turn means “to make go forth (into the homeless state), to make somebody take up the life of an ascetic” (*PED* pedped“Pabbājeti”).

The 2nd pers. plural form indicates that it was not the Buddha but Ānanda and other monks who gave Subhadda going forth (*pabbajjā*).

But why is it in plural? Was it not possible for Ānanda alone to confer novicehood on Subhadda? If we check out the Vinaya procedure for conferring novicehood:

bhikkhūnaṃ [Emphasis added] *pāde vandāpetvā ukkuṭikaṃ nisīdāpetvā añjalim paggaṇhāpetvā evaṃ vadehīti vattabbo: buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, ...* (*Vin* 1: 82)

[After having the candidate get shaved and put on his robes] having made him honour the *monks*' feet [Emphasis added], having made him sit down on his haunches, having made him salute with joined palms, he should be told: ‘Speak thus: “I go to the awakened one for refuge ...”’. (Horner 4: 103–104)

We can see that novicehood is usually conferred in the presence of several monks even though it is not a formal monastic function (*saṅghakamma*). So I interpret the plurality of the verb *pabbājetha* in the DN passage as reflecting the procedure of conferring novicehood as depicted in Pali Vinaya.

3. Even though the Buddha talked about the probation period, he did not press Subhadda into actually going through the probation but permitted him to go forth immediately.

There are in Vinaya only two categories of persons that, even though they have been former members of other schools, are exempted from such

7. Some scholars see a wide difference between the Sutta and Vinaya traditions as regards the starting point of probation:

This statement of the Sutta version is clear enough on the point that both *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* come after the period of Parivāsa [“probation”] ...

The details of the Khandhakas on this point place the Parivāsa on the newcomer after his admission as a *sāmaṇera*. Here Parivāsa is a qualifying test for the conferment of higher monastic status or *upasampadā* and not for admission to recluseship as it is in the Sutta Versions ... (Dhirasekera 220)

I do not agree with Dhirasekera and I hope to deal with this topic in a future paper.

probation: (a) fire-worshipping matted-hair ascetics (b) Sakyans by birth (*Vin* 1: 71; Horner 4: 89). Subhadda however was a *paribbājaka* (“wandering ascetic”) and apparently belonged to neither category. In fact, this must be the reason why the Buddha mentioned the compulsory probation for persons like him, probably to impress upon him the special favour that he was about to receive. If he had belonged to either exempted category, the Buddha need not have mentioned anything about probation.

What was the Buddha’s excuse for this favour? He simply said: *api ca m’ettha puggala-vemattatā veditā* (Lit. “However, the distinction of individuals is known by me in this case”, i. e., “However, I know the distinction of individuals in this case”). Now we can clearly see that the Buddha *ignored one particular Vinaya rule* in the case of Subhadda’s going forth, and his usage of the 1st person agent (*me*) seemingly implies that the right to do so was the privilege of the Buddha alone.

Then Venerable Ānanda followed the Buddha’s order for Subhadda’s ordination:

‘Evaṃ bhante’ ti kho āyasmā Ānando Bhagavato paccassosi ... Alattha kho Subhaddo paribbājako Bhagavato santike pabbajjaṃ, alattha upasampadaṃ ... Aññataro kho paṇ’ āyasmā Subhaddo arahataṃ ahosi. So Bhagavato pacchimo sakkhi-sāvako ahosīti. (DN 2: 152–153)

“Yes, sir”, said Ānanda. Then the ascetic Subhadda received the going-forth under the Lord, and the ordination ... And the Venerable Subhadda became another of the Arahants. He was the last disciple witnessing (the Lord).

Here it should be noted that:

1. The phrase *Bhagavato santike* is again used in the context of Subhadda’s going forth and ordination. If it were interpreted to mean that Subhadda got ordination personally from the Buddha, it would have contradicted the previous statement of the Buddha, which clearly shows that it was Venerable Ānanda and others who let Subhadda go forth, not the Buddha himself. Therefore I interpret it to mean “in the Buddha’s community, i. e. in the Saṅgha order”; hence the consistent translation as “under the Lord”.
2. Nothing particular is mentioned about Subhadda’s ordination procedure. It means Subhadda was ordained just like many other monks had been, through whatever ordination procedure officially adopted at the time. The special favour he got from the Buddha was to skip the probation period only.
3. Walshe translates the term *sacchi-sāvaka* as “personal disciple” (269) while PED gives “contemporaneous or personal disciple” (“sakkhi”); these renditions

seem to imply that Subhadda was personally ordained by the Buddha. But a close examination of the term shows us a different picture.

This term is a compound of two members, *sacchi* and *sāvaka*, of which the former has the Skt. form *sākṣin* meaning, beside others, "... observing, witnessing, seeing ... a witness, an observer, an eye-witness" (Apte "sākṣin"). Accordingly *sacchi-sāvaka* can be interpreted as "a disciple who was an eye-witness". Then the phrase *pacchimo sacchi-sāvako* would mean "the last disciple who was an eye-witness". But what did he witness? In the context of the term *sāvaka* ("disciple"), the object of his witnessing should be the Master, i. e., the Buddha. So this term simply indicates that Subhadda was the last disciple to see the living Buddha; anyone converted after him would lose the chance since the Buddha achieved Parinibbāna soon after Subhadda's conversion. Interpreted thus, this term has nothing to do with Subhadda's ordination.

On the other hand, the *Dialogues* translates *pacchimo sacchisāvako* as "the last disciple whom the Exalted One himself converted" (Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 169), which is essentially correct even though not literally accurate.

To sum up, two conclusions can be drawn from the relevant text of Pali Mahā-parinibbāna Sutta:

1. It carries no evidence of Subhadda getting personally ordained by the Buddha. (This fact greatly weakens Juo-Hsüeh Shih's assertion based on this sutta that the Buddha used the *ehibhikkhu* formula throughout his life for giving ordination.)
2. It shows a clear instance of the Buddha acting beyond the Vinaya rules.

2.1.1 Buddhaghosa's account

There is an altogether different story in the commentary. According to Buddhaghosa, Ānanda made Subhadda a novice and led him back to the Buddha, after which the Master himself ordained him (*Sv* 2: 590; *An* 174–175).

The problem with the Buddhaghosa's account above is: what was the ordination procedure that the Buddha used at that time? If the Buddha had used the *ehibhikkhu* formula, there would have been no need for a separate *pabbajjā* ("going forth") since all instances of *ehibhikkhu* formula usage are found to be direct ordinations. If he did not use that formula, what could be the one he used? Buddhaghosa is silent on this point.⁸

8. To be fair to Buddhaghosa, I should note that he used the word *kira* ("they say") to give this account, seemingly indicating that he himself finds it difficult to accept this story even though he had to give it as part of the the Mahāvihāra orthodox records.

Anyhow the *Dialogues* remarks:

According to this [Buddhaghosa's account], no set ceremony for ordination [Saṅghakammam] (*sic.*), as laid down in the Vinaya, took place; and *it is otherwise probable that no such ceremony was usual in the earliest days of Buddhism.* [Emphasis added] (Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 170)

Juo-Hsüeh Shih also appears to have followed Buddhaghosa in her analysis:

Subhadda, the last disciple of the Buddha, was ordained by the Buddha but the text does not spell out the formula by which Subhadda was ordained. The utterance "Come, monk" does not appear ... (352)

Here I would observe:

1. If Buddhaghosa is correct, it would of course follow that Subhadda was personally ordained by the Buddha through a certain procedure that cannot be identified yet. However, as shown above, the chain of events in the sutta text itself is clear enough without assuming the Buddha's act of personally ordaining Subhadda. So why should Buddhaghosa's statement be taken at face value without any corroborating evidence?
2. The sutta itself shows how the Buddha would ignore a Vinaya rule if and when necessary, so even if Buddhaghosa is correct, the Buddha's personal ordination of the Subhadda would still be open to two alternative interpretations: a) either a formal ordination procedure (*saṅghakamma*) did not exist at the time b) or the Buddha did not bother to adopt an official procedure that he had prescribed only for his disciples. Therefore I believe we will need further evidence if we are to agree with Mr. and Mrs. Rhys Davids, who conclude that "it is otherwise probable that no such ceremony [formal ordination procedure] was usual in the earliest days of Buddhism".
3. In contrast, if Buddhaghosa is wrong, one would be justified to say that:
 - a) The sutta text does not mention the ordination formula used for Subhadda because it was not worthy of special mention, being the same official procedure commonly adopted at the time.
 - b) "The utterance 'Come, monk' does not appear" (352) simply because it was not the procedure used.

On the other hand, other versions of this sutta bring some credibility to Buddhaghosa's account:

The Skt version, however, has precisely the formula “Come, monk; practise the holy life” (*ehi bhikṣo cara brahmacar(ya)m*).

Of the three Chinese recensions of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, one gives precisely the same formula as does the Skt version, whereas the other two give no clear indication. Furthermore, it would seem that, according to these two texts, nothing particular took place to mark the admission of a new member into the *Saṅgha*. (Juo-Hsüeh 352)

The appearance of *ehibhikkhu* formula in the Skt. and one Chinese version indicates that Buddhaghosa’s account might be an ancient record embedded in the older commentaries of this sutta, not something made up later in Sri Lanka at the Buddhaghosa’s time or before him. I should note however that these versions still conflict with the Pali version, which states that the Buddha asked Venerable Ānanda to let Subhadda go forth, i. e., to confer novicehood on him whereas noviciation was never required in other instances of *ehibhikkhu* ordination.

I cannot access the two Chinese versions that “give no clear indication” of how Subhadda was ordained but if they are similar to the Pali version, I think they might also be explained in the same way, i. e., Subhadda was ordained in an ordinary manner just like many other monks at the time.

2.2 Other Textual Evidences

As seen above, the Buddha ignored a Vinaya rule in the case of Subhadda’s ordination. Subhadda was actually only one of the several ascetics that received similar favours. Others that I have noted are:

1. Kassapa, the naked ascetic (*DN* 1: 176; Walshe 157; *SN* 2: 21; Bodhi 547–48)
2. Seniya, the naked dog-practice ascetic (*MN* 1: 391; Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi 497)
3. Vacchagotta, the wandering ascetic (*MN* 1: 494; Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi 599)
4. Māgaṇḍiya, the wandering ascetic (*MN* 1: 512; Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi 617)
5. Sabhiya, the wandering ascetic (*Sn* 102).

All of them above got the privilege to skip the probation period, for which the Buddha gave the same excuse, “I know the distinction of individuals”.

However, he never granted to his followers such a right to ignore Vinaya rules, not even to arahants, who have already accomplished their training and no longer need explicit rules to guide their activities. In one instance, he ordered a monk named Kappina to go to an Observance (*uposatha*) function even though the latter was reluctant to do so since he had already achieved arahanship (*Vin* 1: 105; Horner 4:

137). On the other hand, the Buddha himself declined, at a certain point in his life, to participate any more in the Observance act of monks:

Tumheva dāni, bhikkhave, uposathaṃ kareyyātha, pātimokkhaṃ uddiseyyātha. Na dānāhaṃ, bhikkhave, ajjatagge uposathaṃ karissāmi, pātimokkhaṃ uddissāmi. Aṭṭhānametaṃ, bhikkhave, anavakāso yaṃ tathāgato aparisuddhāya parisāya pātimokkhaṃ uddiseyya. (AN 4: 206)

O monks! You alone perform the Observance, declare the *pātimokkha*. Monks! From now on, I will not perform the Observance, will not declare the *pātimokkha*. Monks! There is no reason, no cause for the Tathāgata to declare the *pātimokkhas* in an impure gathering.

When the evidences above are pieced together, it can be safely concluded that the Buddha considered himself above and beyond the Vinaya rules.

3 Dhamma as the Buddha's Personal Guideline

Now another question arises: if the Buddha was above Vinaya, what was the moral principle that he used to guide and regulate his deeds and day-to-day activities? I answer that the Dhamma that the Buddha had realized was his sole guideline throughout his life:

Ekam idāhaṃ bhikkhave samayaṃ uruvelāyaṃ viharāmi ... paṭhamābhīsambuddho. Tassa mahyaṃ ... evaṃ cetaso parivitakko upadapādi: dukkhaṃ kho agāravo viharati appatisso, kin nu kho ahaṃ samaṇaṃ vā brāhmaṇaṃ vā sakkatvā garukatvā upanissāya vihareyyanti? ...

Tassa mayhaṃ bhikkhave etad ahoṣi—Yannūnāhaṃ yo pāyaṃ dhammo mayā abhisambuddho tam eva dhammaṃ sakkatvā garukatvā upanissāya vihareyyanti ...

Yato ca kho bhikkhave saṃgho pi mahattena samannāgato, atha me saṃghe pi gāravo ... (AN 2: 20–21)

At one time, monks, I stayed at Uruvela first after having been fully enlightened. A thought occurred to me thus, “It is miserable to live without respect (for someone else), without refuge. Which ascetic or brahmin should I live by honouring, paying respect to, and depending upon?” ...

(When he had realized that no one living in the world was better than him in morality, etc.,⁹ and accordingly, not worthy of his respect)

Monks, a thought occurred to me thus, “I would rather live by honouring,

9. The Burmese and PTS versions of AN enumerate 4 qualities in which no one was superior to the Buddha: 1) morality (*sīla*) 2) concentration (*samādhi*) 3) wisdom (*paññā*) 4) deliverance (*vimutti*). However, its commentary said:

respecting and depending upon the very Dhamma realized by me” . . .

Monks, the Order becomes also endowed with greatness; accordingly I have also respect for the Order.¹⁰

From the quoted text above, it can be concluded that:

1. If the Buddha could not find a person better than himself at a time just after his enlightenment, there is no evidence that he did so later in his life. So Dhamma, not the Vinaya rules created by him, must have been his sole moral guideline throughout his life.
2. Even arahants cannot have such a claim, since they have, at least, in the Buddha a person greater than themselves. Accordingly, they were obliged to honour, respect and depend upon him. Then, in the context of Vinaya, it means all monks including arahants must observe the rules laid down by the Buddha. Probably this might be what the Buddha implied in this sutta; it should not be forgotten that it was delivered to monks.

Ettha ca sīlādayo cattāro dhammā lokiya-lokuttarā kathitā; vimuttiñānadassanaṃ lokiyaṃ eva, paccavekkhanañāṇaṃ eva h’ etam. (manort)

And among those qualities are mentioned 4 dhammas of *sīla*, etc., both mundane and supramundane. The insight and vision of deliverance (*vimuttiñānadassana*) is mundane only; indeed, it is nothing but the reviewing insight (*paccavekkhanañāṇa*).

So I think Buddhaghosa’s AN text must have shown five qualities including *vimuttiñānadassana*, not four as in the available editions. Has the part of the text concerning *vimuttiñānadassana* been lost in the transition process down to our times? I believe this question deserves further exploration.

10. What did the Buddha mean by having respect for the Order? The commentary says:

Kismiṃ pana kāle bhagavatā saṅghe gāravo katoti? Mahāpajāpatiyā dussayugadānakāle. Tadā hi bhagavā attano upanītaṃ dussayugaṃ “saṅghe, gotamī, dehi, saṅghe te dinne ahañceva pūjito bhaviṣṣāmi saṅgho cā”ti vadanto saṅghe gāravaṃ akāsi nāma. (manort)

When did the Buddha pay respect to the Order? It was when the Great Queen (Gotamī) offered a pair of robes. To elaborate, (it can be said that) the Buddha paid respect to the Saṅgha when he said, “Gotamī, offer to the Order. When you offer to the Order, myself as well as the Order would be honoured”.

What the commentator says is a way of expressing regard, not the nature of regard itself which should be known in this context. On the other hand, I argue that the Buddha’s regard for the Order is mainly concerned with its role as the maintainer of his teachings after his passing away, for:

- He himself told Sāriputta that long-lasting are the teachings of Buddhas who teach in detail, make extensive discourses, set up Vinaya rules and declare *pātimokkha* (*Vin* 3: 9; Horner 1: 17).
- He also indicated that he meant his teachings to last long:
 - By teaching in detail and making extensive discourses (The collection of major Nikāyas in Pali Buddhism alone is much bigger than the Bible or Koran.) and,
 - By expending an immense effort to set up and maintain the whole set of elaborate Vinaya rules to retain the stability and well-being of the Order.
- Detailed teachings and extensive discourses are best learnt by monks and nuns who have ample time to do so while Vinaya rules and *Pātimokkha* have nothing to do with the laity.

Then what exactly was the Dhamma that the Buddha relied upon? It was what realized by him (*dhammo mayā abhisambuddho*), so certainly it could not be the Vinaya rules that he created. What could it be?

In the historical outline of the early Order as depicted by Mv, there are some discourses of which ancient redactors are content to give only the titles; for instance, the Discourse on Donation (*dānakathā*), etc., given to Yasa (*Vin* 1: 15; Horner 4: 23). On the other hand, there are also some suttas that they choose to include in full even though it is not contextually necessary to do so. The latter are:

Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta (*Vin* 1: 10–11; Horner 4: 15–17), in which the Buddha told the *Pañcavaggiya* monks to avoid the two extremes—sensual pleasure and self-mortification—and pointed out the Noble Eight-fold Path as the Middle Way between them.

Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta (*Vin* 1: 13–14; Horner 4: 20–21), in which the Buddha taught the *Pañcavaggiya* monks the concept of non-self, and thereby made them achieve arahantship.

Āditta Sutta (*Vin* 1: 34–35; Horner 4: 45–46), in which the Buddha taught Kassapa and other monks who had been formerly matted-hair ascetics about how everything is burning, and thereby made them achieve arahantship.

Now I argue that:

1. There must be great significance in the fact of including these suttas in Vinaya, especially in the account of events that occurred during the earliest period of the monastic order.
2. That significance is probably nothing but that the concepts these suttas enshrine were the general framework in which Vinaya was founded and developed, and based upon which Vinaya rules must be understood.
3. These concepts were the Dhamma that the Buddha and his earliest followers had relied upon as the moral guideline in their lives before the Vinaya rules were formulated.

The second point above needs some elaboration, which I give in the following section.

3.1 The Earliest Three Suttas in Relevance to Vinaya and Monastic Life

Out of these earliest three suttas, *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* embodies the proper code of conduct and methodology of practice for a Buddha's follower. Especially the Middle Way depicted therein seems an important formative factor

of Vinaya rules. For instance, the Buddha in this sutta demanded celibacy from those who wishing to follow his path, which resulted in monasticism born together with the religion itself unlike some other religions where priestly classes are later additions to the original religious communities. On the other hand, the more difficult forms of austerities known as *dhutaṅgas* (*Vim* 59–61; *Ñāṇamoḷi* 59–61) do not make it into Vinaya rules but remain optional practices for those stronger both mentally and physically.

On the other hand, *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* shows the intellectual aspect of the Buddha’s attitude towards the world: everything is *anatta* if not anything else. Therein, one typical argument of his supporting the *anatta* concept is as follows:

rūpaṃ, bhikkhave, anattā. rūpañ ca h’ idaṃ, bhikkhave, attā abhavissa, nayidaṃ rūpaṃ ābādhāya saṃvatteyya, labbhettha ca rūpe evaṃ me rūpaṃ hotu, evaṃ me rūpaṃ mā ahoṣīti. Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, rūpaṃ anattā, tasmā rūpaṃ ābādhāya saṃvattati, na ca labbhati rūpe evaṃ me rūpaṃ hotu, evaṃ me rūpaṃ mā ahoṣīti. (Vin 1: 13)

Monks, materiality is not self. For, monks, if *this* materiality were self, *this* materiality would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to have it of form “Let my materiality be thus; let my materiality not be thus”. However because materiality [in general] is not self, materiality [in general] leads to affliction, and it is not possible to have it of form: “Let my materiality be thus; let my materiality not be thus”.¹¹

The same argument goes for the remaining four aggregates.

11. Cf. Bhikkhu Bodhi’s version:

Bhikkhus, form is not self. For if form were self, this form would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to have it of form: “Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.” But because form is not self, form leads to affliction, and it is not possible to have it of form: “Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.” (1: 901–902)

I do not agree with his rendition of *rūpaṃ* as “form” since we can infer its correct sense “the material aggregate” (*rūpakkhanda*) from the fact that four other aggregates—feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formation (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*mind*)—are present in the same context.

And he omits the pronoun *idaṃ* in the sentence *rūpaṃ ca h’ idaṃ*, which seemingly obscures the Buddha’s reasoning. Why? When the Buddha says, *rūpaṃ ca h’ idaṃ* . . . (“this materiality”, etc.), we can almost see the Buddha pointing towards his own body, as an immediate and undeniable premise. Accordingly the pronoun *me* (“my”) of the phrase *me rūpaṃ* (“my materiality”) in the following sentence must refer to the Buddha himself. In the following *Yasmā* . . . *rūpaṃ anattā*, etc., however, the pronoun *idaṃ* is absent; this is obviously the conclusion supposed to be reached by generalizing from the premise above. Then the pronoun *me* of *me rūpaṃ* in the last two sentences cannot refer to the Buddha; rather it represents each individual that has materiality as his or her part. In other words, what the Buddha means is that just as he cannot prevent the degeneration, nor bend the nature, of his own materiality, every other being has no control over his or her own individual materiality. All this inference becomes obscure by omitting *idaṃ* in the translation.

Such an outlook is probably the reason for Vinaya rules being the monopoly of the Buddha as regards their modification and extension, for their immunity to the democratic vote of the Order.¹² Why?

1. If five aggregates are *anatta* (whatever it means), in the context of Vinaya, the lawmaker (the Buddha himself) and the lawful citizens (monks and nuns) both must also be *anatta* since both comprise of five aggregates.
2. Then, according to the Buddha's own logic, he must also have seen that both himself and the Order would inevitably lead to affliction. How?
 - a) In the case of the Buddha, affliction means the death that awaited him; he could not be forever around to make and update the rules for the Saṅgha.
 - b) On the other hand, moral degeneration is the affliction inherent in the Order, even though it would survive long after the Buddha's death by means of new generations succeeding the old ones. The Buddha himself mentioned the four factors that would cause the Order to be tainted: a) worldly gain, b) fame, c) great learning, and d) long-standing renown.¹³ And the moral degeneration of the Order, set off by these four factors, was already in motion even while the Buddha was living. We can see this fact by comparing the Order in the pre-Vinaya phase and Vinaya-managed phase respectively.¹⁴

And those tainting factors have never gone away but, as we can see even now, grown stronger with the passing of time. If the Buddha could not prevent the moral degeneration of the Order while he was living, he could not have hoped to do so after his own death.

12. In one instance, he praised a monk named Upasena for the latter's refusal to recognize a rule that other monks had set up in the Buddha's absence:

Sādhu sādhu, upasena, apaññattaṃ na paññapetabbaṃ, paññattaṃ vā na samucchinditabbaṃ, yathāpaññattesu sikkhāpadesu samādāya vattitabbaṃ. (Vin 3: 231)

That is very good, Upasena; what is not (yet) laid down should not be laid down, nor should what is laid down be abolished, but one should dwell in conformity with and according to the rules of training which have been laid down ... (Horner 2: 85)

If the Buddha alone swayed the legislative power throughout his life, he declined to transfer it to anyone, individual or community, at the time of his death. He did permit monks to abolish the minor rules (whatever they are) if they wished (*DN* 2: 154; Walshe 156), but he never gave them authority to set up new rules.

13. (*MN* 1: 445; *Ñāṇamoḷi* and *Bodhi* 548). See also (*Vin* 3: 9–10; *Horner* 1: 18–19)

14. When the Buddha refused to set up Vinaya rules when Venerable Sāriputta requested him to do so while they were staying together at Verañjā, his excuse was the perfect condition of the Order at the time:

nirabbudo hi Sāriputta, bhikkhusaṅgho nirādīnavo apagatakāḷako suddho sāre paṭiṭṭhito, Imesaṃ hi Sāriputta, pañcannaṃ bhikkhusatānaṃ yo pacchimako bhikkhu so sotāpanno avinipāta-dhammo niyato sambodhiparāyaṇo'ti. (Vin 3: 10)

Sāriputta, the Order of monks is devoid of immorality, devoid of danger, stainless, purified, based

3. If the Order would certainly degenerate, the monastic code, if kept in the discretion of the Order, would degenerate too, leaving little chance for the posterity. On the contrary, if the monastic code can be maintained free from the whims and fancies of the Order, at least a minority of good monks would be able to follow it and get benefits even if the majority is corrupt beyond all repair. The Buddha appears like a doctor who gives professional help as long as he can to a terminally ailing patient yet who refuses to refer him to any unqualified person.

Finally, *Āditta Sutta* shows the emotional aspect of the Buddha's world outlook—how he felt about the world. Herein he described everything, internal or external, as burning with the fires of attachment, hatred, delusion, birth, death, etc. It appears from this sutta that the world is something that the Buddha shrunk from, something that he felt all beings including himself are forced to put up with. Then the moral would be: the worldly experience is something to be minimized as much as possible, not to be magnified.

This outlook seems, I argue, the main factor that has made the Buddha and his follower monks and nuns to lead what I would like to call a “minimalistic lifestyle”. For instance, we can look at the Four Requisites (*cattāro nissayā*)—food, clothing, lodging and medicine—that the Buddha has permitted for his followers' survival. The following text shows the permission of lodging for monks:

*rukhamūlasenāsanam nissāya pabbajjā, tattha te yāvajīvam ussāho karaṇīyo.
atirekalābho vihāro adḍhayogo pāsādo hammiyam guhā. (Vin 1: 96)*

That going forth is on account of a lodging at the root of a tree; in this respect effort is to be made by you for life. (These are) extra acquisitions: a dwelling-place, a curved house, a long house, a mansion, a cave. (Horner 4: 75)

The range of permitted lodging types looks rather interesting. At one end is residence under a tree, an ideal state of homelessness, while at the other, only the sky seems the limit to the quality of a monastic lodging. We do not know the exact forms and natures of a “curved house”, a “long house”, or a “mansion”, but at least we know that the term *pāsāda* (“a long house”) was used to describe residences of the social elite—kings, queens, etc.—at the time:

*Tena kho pana samayena rājā Māgadho Ajātasattu vedehiputto ... upari-
pāsāda-vara-gato nisinno hoti. [Emphasis added] (DN 1: 46)*

on the essential. Sāriputta, the most backward of these five hundred monks is one who has entered the stream, not liable to be reborn in any state of woe, assured, bound for enlightenment. (Horner 1: 19)

If we compare the Order at that time with that in later times when many members, as depicted in the Vinaya, committed all imaginable mistakes, we can even say that the Vinaya is the story of how the Order declined in spite of all the Buddha's efforts to the contrary while he was living.

At that time King Ajātasattu Vedehiputta of Magadha, having gone up to the roof of his palace, was sitting there ... (Walshe 91)

Tena kho pana samayena nimirājā ... uposathiko uparipāsādaragato nisinno hoti. [Emphasis added] (*MN* 2: 79)

Now on that occasion, King Nimi had ... ascended to the upper palace chamber, where he was seated for the Uposatha observance. (Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi 695)

Tena kho pana samayena rājā pasenadi kosalo mallikāya deviyā saddhiṃ uparipāsādaragato hoti. [Emphasis added] (*Vin* 4: 112)

Now at that time King Pasenadi, the Kosalan, came to be on the upper storey of the palace together with Queen Mallikā. (Horner 2: 390)

In fact, excepting some restrictions, there is no upper limit to the quality of the four requisites that a monk or a nun can enjoy. Then how will it be different from a lay life? *Āditta Sutta* can be our guideline here to understand the Buddha's intention. How?

I will use the case of lodging again as an example. As given in the text above, the Buddha recommended that after getting ordained, a monk should make an effort to live under a tree as a truly homeless renouncer, obviously because such a lifestyle will do away all the usual chores with lodging—mortgages, rents, taxes, maintenance, etc.—leaving the monk with ample time to concentrate on his real job, i. e., working towards liberation. However, such a life is also accompanied by physical hardships, and the ability to cope with such hardships differs from person to person, depending on various factors such as their upbringing, health, age, etc. Having to sleep under a windy tree is not a big deal for some people, but it may be a very hard life for some others. When such hardships outweigh the benefits for a monk, the worldly experience for him becomes acute, intensive and distracting, no longer minimalistic like what the Buddha must have wished for. It is for such cases that “extra acquisitions” are permitted; if a monk can meditate properly only in an air-conditioned and fully carpeted building and if he can acquire such a place legitimately, so be it. As long as the worldly experience can be maintained at the minimalistic level, poverty or luxury should not matter. This kind of ideal is outwardly similar to, but rather different in essence from, the ideal of a “life of poverty” cherished in Christianity.¹⁵

Later, as the Order expanded, it became no longer possible to enforce the proper conduct by means of just those concepts. One instance would be Sudinna, who had sex with his former wife (*Vin* 3: 17–18; Horner 1: 31–33) despite the various discourses in which the Buddha spoke against indulgence in sensual pleasures. So

15. “Believe me, my brothers, poverty is the special way of salvation. It is the source of humility and the root of all perfection and its fruit is manifold, though unseen.” [LM:VII, 1] (“A Life of Poverty” capuchincapuchin)

the Buddha had to form Vinaya rules, which all monks and nuns, even arahants, must observe without exception. But, as seen in the evidences above, the Buddha himself seemingly never condescended to observe the Vinaya rules, which are supposed for his followers only.

4 Conclusion

As seen above, the Buddha's immunity to Vinaya as asserted by the Theravādin orthodoxy is not a mere later attempt to eulogise the Master but does have a firm basis in the older sources. If the Buddha was really immune to Vinaya rules that he had made for his followers, it will imply that:

1. We cannot judge the Buddha's activities by Vinaya rules. In other words, it does not make sense to say his activities are legal or not. Then Norman's following observation, for instance, will call for reconsideration:

Two theras, Bhadda (473–79) and Sopāka (480–86) state in their verses that they are ordained at the age of seven. This was forbidden by the Vinaya teaching (Vin i 78) that the minimum age for ordination was 20 ... It may be, then, that such child-ordinations and admissions were earlier than the Vinaya ordinance. (xxvii-xxviii)

Why? In both cases of *theras* Bhadda and Sopāka, the Buddha himself called for their ordinations (“Th” 476–478; “Th” 485), which can be interpreted in two alternative ways: either these ordinations are earlier than Vinaya ordinance or the Buddha deliberately ignored the already extant Vinaya procedures. To choose one of them will require further evidence.

2. We cannot judge Vinaya rules by the Buddha's activities. In other words, it does not make sense to argue, like Mr. and Mrs. RhysDavids do (See 2.1.1), that a particular rule or procedure did not exist at the Buddha's time just because the Buddha did not bother to observe it.
3. The Buddha was not a democratic leader as popularly conceived but only a *benevolent dictator*, if we also take into account the fact that he never let go of his monopoly over legislative power (See the footnote 12).

As an old saying goes, “the best form of government is the benevolent dictator—there's only one problem, *finding* the benevolent dictator” (Ts'o). Have we failed to recognize the Buddha as one? This is I think a question calling serious consideration from Buddhologists and sociologists studying Buddhism.

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