THE PLACE OF AHIMŚĀ IN BUDDHA—DHAMMO

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(In memory of Richard Abeyasekera)

Nokkhamma-sañkappo avyāpāda-sañkappo
avihindī-sañkappo, avam vuccati bhikkhave
samma-sañkappo.

Mahāsatipatthāna-suttantaṃ (D XXII 21)

The intention of renunciation,
the intention free of ill-will,
the intention of non-violence,
this is called, bhikkhus, the right intention.

I

In Pāli, non-violence is designated by the term ahimsā, as in Sanskrit (cf. Dhp 225, 261, 270, 300; D XXXI 1, 6; S I 165, etc.), or by a-vi-himsā, an etymologically stronger term of the same stem, as in the definition of the second component of the Eightfold Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering, quoted above (cf. D XXII 21; D XXIII 1.9, 10; 2.1 (XXIV); Sn 292; It IV 4,8, etc.).

In the short definition quoted above and most often in other texts on the Noble Eightfold Path, ahimsā is the climax of a threefold gradation of the same basic virtue of right intention.

In Jainism, the religion closest to Buddhism, considering itself to be the oldest on the high level of universal cultures (as it is still extant also in the pre-Biblical and pre-Islamic tradition of the ancient Arabia Felix), "ahimsā is the highest law" (ahimsā parama dharmaḥ). This is the only essential tenet which could be considered as its exclusive dogma. All the rest of the normative teaching are maxims deduced from this categorical imperative, tolerating also exceptions, since Jainism is the religion of extreme tolerance, defined as the "toleration of many modes of truth": "The faith in one truth or even in a plurality of truths, each simply given as determinate, would be rejected by it as a species of intolerance." ¹

The eightfold path of the Buddha starts from the stance taken against "the pursuance of views, adherence to views, jungle of views, contortion of views, vacillation of views, fetter of views" (M 2 and several other texts).

This critical prerequisite is the reason why the sifting of world-views (dīthi) and dogmatisms is placed before ahimsā as a preliminary step on the
eightfold path of the Buddha. His "right views" do not consist of any dogmatically infallible propositions and beliefs, such as are dismissed in the oft-repeated warning against the affirmation "this only is true, all the rest is false". The best analysis of the shortcoming of his authoritarian opponents is given in Cañki-sutta (M 95). The basic definition of "right views" (sammā ditthi) in our context underscores the purely existential restriction of the problem to which the intention of this first decisive step refers: "The understanding of suffering, the understanding of the origin of suffering, the understanding of the cessation of suffering, the understanding of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. This, bhikkhus, is called right view" (D 22 and other texts).

The Buddha often warned his worldly minded interlocutors (putthujjanā) against "untrustworthy teachers" who are used to "take and apply the correct criterion in such a way that, while it extend only to one side it excludes other...right criteria concerning good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct and good mental conduct". The Buddha taught the method of detecting such "unripe criteria" by independent mature thinking (Apannaka-sutta, M 60) - the best known instance of such advice is contained in the Kālāma-sutta (A III 65), in the Buddha's answer to the complaint:

- Some sammā and brāhmaṇā...expound only their own tenets while they abuse and rend and censure and rail at the tenets of others.
- Kālāma, do not be satisfied with hearsay or with tradition or with legendary lore or with what has come down in your scriptures or with conjecture or with logical inference or with weighing evidence or with liking for a view after pondering over it or with someone else's ability or with the thought "The monk is our teacher". When you know in yourselves "These things are wholesome, blameless...then you should practise them and abide in them.

Such was the original teaching of the Buddha's Noble Truth on acquiring correct standpoints in an historical epoch of Indian culture considered still by modern scholars in comparison with the highest standard of European culture as an age of "Renaissance".

Swami Vivekananda, in a talk on "Buddha's Message to the World" (in San Francisco, 1900) boldly affirmed that 600 years B.C. "Indian civilization had already completed its growth". A few decades later the same assessment was confirmed by the best known European sociologist, Max Weber, who considered the atheist and caste-free Jainist and Buddhist movements at that time as "intellectualist heterodox soteriology" characteristic of the "drawing-room" elitist ideology in the cultural ambience of royal courts and cities.
In the later twentieth century a new and most brutal wave of Western penetration to the Asian East, reaffirming with its authoritarian dogmatism that "this only is truth, all the rest is false", often threatens with a direct attack the first step of our Noble Path. At the other end, the last and highest eighth step and attainment of samādhi is being sapped by the new wave of Western fashion in "meditation", advertising "shortcuts to Nirvāna" by eliminating not only the beginning but also the end of this Noble Path for the convenience of hippies. The next immediately endangered steps are the second - ahimsā - and the sixth, in the concluding section of the Path dealing with the contemplative attainment of jhānam, "right effort" - samā vāyāmo. On this point I wish to underscore a recently ripened statement (apannaka dhamma) of one of the eldest gurus (or rather anti-guru in up-to-date anti-cultural terms), Krishnamurti: "Meditation is hard work. It demands the highest form of discipline - not conformity, not imitation, not obedience - but a discipline which comes through constant awareness.... Without laying the foundation of a righteous life, meditation becomes an escape and therefore has no value whatsoever. A righteous life is not the following of social morality, but the freedom from envy, greed and the search of power." 4

II

Historically, on the ground of several discourses of the Buddha, I consider the origin of Buddhism as an apostasy of Jainism at the time of Lāhāvira's conservative reform aiming at a purely formalistic rigorism. In the Buddha's discussions with and about Jains, a resolute break with their overloaded tradition is always strongly underscored, not to speak of the often obsessive commentarial expatiations on background stories. In comparison therewith, the Buddha's criticism of brahmanic traditions appears most often as a mild irony or rebuke for some more or less dangerous stupidity. 5

On the other hand, the Buddha's renunciation of the same kind of ascetic penances, described even in formal details in terms identical with the practices of Jain munis, 6 is still today most often superficially understood and discussed as an episode of exclusively negative and even misleading Jain influences on the sāmāna Gotama, who before he became a buddha, had to break through them and liberate himself from this last "error" after all the aeons of strenuous endeavours to attain his ultimate perfection.

Richard Abeyasekera, in the course of 25 years of his dedicated work for the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy, has published only one tiny booklet of his own. His recent death evoked in me the value and relevance of this meditation on "The Master's Quest for Light" for the subject of my long years of studies of the historical relations between Jainism and Buddhism.
The Place of Ahimsā in Buddha-Dhammo

The origin of the bad faith, praising Buddhism as an anti-ascetic religion appears at our time to be prevalently, though not exclusively, of "modern" Western origin. R. Abeyasekera begins his "Reflections" with singling out "amidst the great characteristics of the Bodhisattva...his boundless compassion, his indomitable courage and his unwavering allegiance to truth. To achieve the supreme knowledge of the Buddhas, the Master had to perfect himself through severe ordeals of suffering in his innumerable past lives."

All this superman's power personified in ascetic heroism was essential and imperative for the attainment of "firm control of mind" with which "he checked all inclinations to indolence..." Only through a relentless increasing of the ordeal of such self-inflicted penances "right through those long years of trial, this power to surmount every obstacle on his path to Enlightenment grew stronger in him."

R. Abeyasekera quotes a discourse with Sāriputta in which the Buddha confesses "to have practised the four kinds of ascetic life and discipline. Rigorous have I been in my ascetic discipline, rigorous beyond all others. Repulsive have I been in my ascetic practice; repulsive beyond measure. Scrupulous have I been in my ascetic life; I have practised the height of scrupulousness. Solitude have I sought in my practice of asceticism; the utmost extreme of solitude."

Unlike our age of backsliding degeneration, when all non-pleasurable efforts to improve one's character are labelled as the worst disease of "masochism", while its opposite, "sadism", is considered as the safest and preventive "panaceas" against all suffering, the age in which the Buddha was born is sketched also by R. Abeyasekera as an age of intense intellectual and spiritual activity. A time of religious unrest, ..., of bold investigation and high achievement in the realm of man's thought. Materially too it was no backward age. But it was essentially a time when the things of the spirit ... ranked higher than the seen, the material and the gross.... It was in fact the sight of an ascetic in yellow garb that showed the Master the way to solve life's misery and urged his renunciation.... His courage in these experiments (as described in theMahā-sacca-sutta, M 36) was marvellous... Then followed the supreme expression of strength in that last act of his struggle for light", when he realised to have attained the utmost limits of asceticism and "courageously abandoned them in the face of ridicule of his erstwhile admirers" (an allusion to the Dhamma-cakkavatattana-sutta, S V xii 11). And then "he took his seat of grass under the Bodhi tree at Gaya and boldly resolved: 'Let my flesh, bones and skin shrivel and whiten and my blood dry up, yet I shall not lose strength in my endeavour. Never from this seat will I stir until I have attained full Enlightenment' ."

Obviously the result of his attainment was strictly proportioned, up
to the last moment of his struggle, to the climax of extreme efforts in ascetic self-mortification of the Bodhisatta "who had to perfect himself through severe ordeals of suffering in his innumerable past lives" - and not simply realising of his worst "mistake" at the last moment. This was explicitly admitted and underscored as the essential prerequisite in the Buddha's discourse on braving "the fears and terrors" of the forest-life (Bhayabherava-suttam, M 4):

"Suppose some monk or brahman is unpurified in bodily, verbal or mental conduct,... is subject to fright and horror,... unconcentrated and confused in mind, devoid of understanding,... - when such a monk or brahman resorts to a remote jungle-thicket abode in the forest, then owing to those faults he evokes unwholesome fear and dread. But... I have none of those defects. I resort to a remote jungle-thicket in the forest as one of the Noble Ones, who are free from these defects. Seeing in myself this freedom from such defects, I find great solace in living in the forest... I thought: But there are the specially holy nights... suppose I spent those nights in such awe-inspiring abodes... which make the hair stand up - perhaps I should encounter that fear and dread. And later... I thought: Why do I dwell in constant expectation of the fear and dread? Why not subdue that fear and dread while maintaining the posture I am in when it comes to me? And while I walked... sat... lay down..., the fear and dread came upon me; but neither I stood nor sat... till I had subdued that fear and dread." 7

In the archaically deepest and most beautiful (and therefore most neglected) poem ascribed to the Buddha, on the symbol of "The Rhinoceros", the first, middle (21) and last (41) stanzas form the essential knots on which the whole texture is harmoniously knitted and woven. The climax is reached on the central point in the statement:

Escaped from the exhibitions of views,
arrived to the clearing, take the straight way:
"I have attained the wisdom not guided by others".
- Go alone as the rhinoceros.

(Sn 55)

Without having reached this point of clear orientation at the end of the thorny and tortuous pathless passage through the "jungle of views" and of misleading opinions, one will necessarily still remain with the lost orientation within the vicious circle of eternal reproduction and renewal of interdependent causes and intricate relations of paticcassamuppaḍa; torn by all the currents of the stream of saṃsāra, unable to swim across and ultimately stranded "pine away like old cranes in a lake without fish" (Dhp 155). Even a casual
visit to a buddha and a talk with him will remain useless and annoying - as in the classic case of Nalukkayāputta (M 63), or recently in the most famous and romantically most attractive model skilfully shaped for the taste of our hippie youth by Hermann Hesse in the bodhisattva ideal of his Siddhartha.

III

(1) In the Buddha's discourses on the subject of ahimsā with Jain niganthā (followers of his opponent Mahāvīra) the most conspicuous topic of discussions was the question of "the modes of action in doing evil deeds, namely: action of body, of word and of mind" (analysed most extensively in the Upāli-sutta, M 56).

Dīgha-Tapassi, the naked ascetic, a follower of Nigantha Nātaputta, the Mahāvīra, on one occasion visited the Buddha in Nālandā, and the latter asked him:

- Well, Tapassi, how many modes of action does Nigantha Nātaputta declare there are in evil acting and behaving?

- No, friend Gotama; the performed action is not declared by Nigantha Nātaputta to be an action, it is declared to be an offence.

- Well, Tapassi, how many modes of offence does he declare there are in evil acting and behaving?

- ... offence of body, of word and of mind... Of these three offences... bodily offence is the most blamable. Verbal offence and mental offence are not so blamable.

On the contrary, according to the Buddha,

- Of these three actions (kammāni), thus analysed and differentiated, mental action, I declare, is the most blamable. Bodily action and verbal action are not so blamable...

When, on a later occasion, another follower of Mahāvīra, Upāli, insisted again on the same standpoint as Tapassi, the Buddha asked him:

- What do you think, householder? Suppose there were a naked ascetic with the four kinds of restraint; restrained as regards all evil... He, while walking up and down, inflicts destruction upon many tiny creatures. Now, what does Nigantha Nātaputta declare is the result of this?

- He declares that what is unintentional is not blamable...

- And in which offence does Nātaputta recognise intention?

- In mental offence.

- Householder, householder, think carefully before you reply. This latter does not agree with your former statement that bodily offence is the most blamable, and not so the mental and the verbal offences....
In my attempts to verify this statement on the gradation of evil deeds in Jaina scriptures or oral tradition I have never come across any confirmation of the sequence insisted upon by Dīgha-Tapassī in the quoted text and repeated in other Buddhist references. The sequence confirmed in the subsequent Jaina tradition is always just the same as the Buddhist mind-word-body, and there is no mention of its debatability at any time. As this was the time of deep religious reforms in several Jaina communities (among whom that of Pārśvah, preceding Mahāvīra only about two centuries was the most authentic), we should not exclude the possibility that such discussions with the Buddha and his followers might have influenced the contemporary Jaina reformers - a problem that still might be worthy of further investigation in comparative studies of these two closely related and therefore historically antagonistic religions of ahimsā.

In the Jain Āyāranga-sūyam (Sk. Ācāranga-sūtram)\(^8\), in the first book, Bambha-cerām (3,4,3), dealing with the training in ascetic discipline (brahma-ceryā), the concluding statement - "There are degrees in injurious act, but there are no degrees in non-violence" - indicates, in its context, a deeper approach to the whole problem discussed in our context from the standpoint of the vicious circle of morally reprehensible effects.

(2) The Dhammapadā is the most popular collection of aphoristic verses attributed to the Buddha, occasionally taken out of his more extensive discourses. Like the Jātaka tales, some of these verses convey the archetypal symbols and their meaning from ancient Indian wisdom applied to Buddhist contexts. In Jainism, the Uttarajjhayana-suyan (Sk. Uttarādhyayana-sūtra) in its 36 chapters comes closest to the genre of both the 26 chapters of the Dhammapadā and the more extensive collection of 1149 stanzas, interwoven with tales and dialogues, in the Sutta-nipāta. Some of these verses, contained sometimes in chapters under analogous headings in both the Dhammapadā and Uttarajjhayana-suyan, correspond to each other not only in analogous but also in homologous sequences of several stanzas. In the following selection of Dhammapadā verses we shall begin with a few examples confirming this analogy.

The title of the eighth chapter of the Dhammapadā is "The Thousands" (Sahassa-vagga). The following stanzas correspond closely to the same style and contents of utterances ascribed to King Nemi, a pattiya-buddha (Pāli paceka-buddha) of Jaina tradition, after his pāravijjā (Pāli pabbajjā, 'escape' from the world) at the beginning of chapter IX of Uttarajjhayana-suyan:

**Dhammapadā**

If a man were to conquer in battle a thousand times a thousand men, and another conquer one, himself,

**Uttarajjhayana-suyan**

Though a man were to conquer thousands and thousands enemies, greater will be his victory.
be indeed is the greatest of conquerors.

Conquest of self is indeed better than the conquest of other persons; of one who has disciplined himself, who always practises self-control. (103-4)

If a man month after month for a hundred years should sacrifice a thousand offerings, and if he only for one moment would honour a man with a developed self, that honour is, indeed, better than a century of sacrifice. (106)

Let a fool month after month eat his food with a kusa-grass blade; nevertheless he is not worth the sixteenth part of those who have well understood the Truth (dhamma). (70)

The last, XXVI, chapter of the Dhammapadam (Brâhmaṇa-vagga) contains a sequence of stanzas ending with the refrain: "Him I call a brâhmaṇa" (taṁ aham brâmi brâhmaṇan). In the XXV chapter of the Uttarajjhayana-sūtra a sequence of 16 stanzas (17-34) end with the refrain: "Him we call a brâhmaṇa". The following few samples are characteristic for our analogy:

Him I call a brâhmaṇa who does not hurt by body, speech or mind, who is controlled in these three things. (391)

Him I call a brâhmaṇa who has laid aside the rod with regard to beings, whether weak or strong, who neither kills nor lets others kill. (405)

Independently of such implications the word ahimsā occurs in the following aphorisms of the Dhammapadam:

The silent sages abstaining from violence (ahimsâkâ), always restrained in body, go to the state from which they never relapse, whether gone they never grieve. (225)
Some Jātaka tales were also motivated by the same virtue and intention to illustrate the application of ahimsā in daily life.

NOTES


3 Max Weber Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie II. Hinduismus und Buddhismus. Tübingen 1921, pp. 170-250. (Cf. a recent English translation.)


5 My main Yugoslav work on "the medians of Asian philosophies" (Razmeda azijskikh filosofija I, Part 2 on "Jainism and Buddhism", chapter 5 a-c, pp. 173-95. Ed. "Liber", Zagreb 1978) contains a survey of Pāli texts on the Buddha's discussions with Jains and some texts characteristic of his attitude to brāhmans. Suttas most characteristic of the sharpness of their controversy are: M 56 Upālī, M 58 Abhayasājakumāra, and M 104 Sāmagāna (on the occasion of Mahāvīra's death). Discussions and critiques of the Jaina doctrines of unlimited and always present absolute knowledge of a tirthakara (kevala-rājñam) and the extreme limits of ascetic restraint (saṃvara) are described in M 71 Tevijja-vacchagotta, M 76 Sandaka, M 101 Devadaha and some minor texts in Aṅguttara and Samyutta-nikāyas. Characteristic of the Buddha's ironic rebuke of brāhmans are, amongst others: M 51 Kandaraka - on the four types of men (the first, "torturer of himself" is the Jain ascetic, the third, "torturer of himself and others" is the brāhman performing sacrifices for a king and the king himself); D 31 Sigālovāda (the stupidity of literal understanding of ritualistic texts), and D 4 Sonadanda (the self-conceit of a mighty brāhman).

6 Most of the specific penances practised by the Buddha immediately before his spiritual awakening at Uruvelā were specifically and peculiarly according to the Jain tradition. They are described in M 12 Mahā-sīhanāda-suttaṃ and other texts from the same period of his struggle for awakening. The similarities of both teachings, Jain and Buddhist, are most strikingly presented in two beautiful poems included in the Sutta-nipāta: "The Rhinoceros" (Khaggavisāna) and Muni suttas - describing the ascetic attitude of a Jain muni (silent sage) as opposed to the traditional and institutionalised Buddhist "priest".

7 This and some of the preceding quotations are from Bhikkhu Nānakomoli's *The Life of the Buddha* (BPS, Kandy 1972). Underlinings are mine.

8 The texts in the sequel are taken from H. Jacobi *Jaina Sutras*, SBE 22 and 45, 2nd ed., Delhi 1964. Discrepancies between translations from Prākārit and Pāli in analogous texts are partly due to my impossibility of consulting original Prākārit editions.