

Enlightenment through Celibacy or Celibacy through Enlightenment?

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I. Introduction

Twenty One out of the Two Hundred and Twenty Seven disciplinary rules for a bhikkhu concern sexual behavior. The four Parajika rules laid down for the bhikkhus have been increased to eight parajika rules in the disciplinary rules applicable to the bhikkhunis. Three out of these additional four rules applicable to the bhikkhunis pertain to sex life and can be considered as secondary rules deriving from the first parajika rule. Hence half the number of the parajika rules laid down for bhikkhunis deal with sex in one way or another.¹⁾ Similarly amongst the many additional

1) Jothiya Dheeraseskara, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline*, Colombo, 1992, 149.

disciplinary rules introduced for Bhikkhunis in the category of Sanghadisesa and Pacittiya rules too, a substantial number deal with sexual behavior and impairment to the life of brahmacariya.

There is a tendency to interpret the essence of the brahmacari life as celibacy. However Mohan Wijeratne in *Buddhist Nuns* writes *No where in the Buddhist doctrine or its discipline do we find any praise of perpetual virginity, or any notion such (as) physical saintliness or ecclesiastical celibacy. Moreover the Buddha does not attach any importance whatsoever to sacred ritual nor does it search for any ritual purity through abstaining from sexual relations*²⁾

In the light of the heavy stress on celibacy in the Disciplinary Code for monks and nuns in Theravada Buddhism and the general understanding of the philosophy as expressed by Mohan Wijeratne above, it is necessary to investigate in to the role of celibacy on the Path of Enlightenment. Hence this paper investigates in to the role of celibacy on the Path of Enlightenment; ‘Is it celibacy through Enlightenment or Enlightenment through Celibacy?’ with special focus on the recorded practice of Buddhist female disciples. In doing so we will first examine the place of celibacy in the Disciplinary Code for bhikkhunis in the Theravada Tradition. Secondly the Buddhist text refer to female disciples of the Buddha who have attained mental development or attained fruits of the Path as very young girls, entered marriage thereafter, produced children and continued to lead a perfectly normal married life. Hence we will examine the role of celibacy in the lives of the lay female disciples who

2) Mohan Wijeratne, *Buddhist Nuns*, Colombo, Wisdom, 2001, p. 116.

are reported to have attained significant mental development as recorded in the Theravada Texts.

In the recent field research done by the writer addressing certain controversies surrounding 'Enlightenment' in the Theravada Tradition i.e. interviews with contemporary meditators of the Theravada tradition, both monks, nuns and laymen and lay women who are believed to be with specific religious experiences, it has been found that whilst some have attained the fruit of Stream-entry (first stage of Enlightenment) whilst leading a 'spotlessly clean' celibate life, some laymen observed the prescribed sila, i.e. indulging in permitted sexual activity, whilst some others claim that before their experience which lead them to the 'entry in to the Path', as a layman they lived a life breaking all possible norms including the third precept which is an undertaking to abstain from sexual misconduct. Therefore thirdly this paper will investigate the results of field research done with contemporary meditators in the Theravada tradition.

II. The place for celibacy in the Disciplinary Code for bhikkhunis

The process of the evolution of the Universe and man kind according to Buddhism is set out in Agganna Sutta (A Book of Genesis). The first reference itself to sexual intercourse between man and woman as set out in this sutta portrays it as an act of immorality and vulgarity. Accordingly in the process of evolution, with the physical appearance of 'sex distinction' in the beings who up to such time had no such distinction, the newly

evolved male and female, being overcome by lust, indulged in sexual intercourse with each other which lead to the on-lookers in the rest of the community throwing sand, ash and cow - dung at them saying ‘perish you foul (impure) one, how can a being treat a being so?’³⁾

Nibbana the ultimate goal of Buddhism being the complete destruction without remainder, of lust, aversion and ignorance (raga dosa moha) , the emphasis on restraining or abstaining from sensual pleasures including sexual relations in the practice towards this goal is understandable. More over the Buddha says *Monks I know of no other single form by which a man’s heart is so enslaved as it is by that of a woman, Monks a woman’s form obsesses a man’s heart . I know of no other single sound by which a man’s heart is so enslaved as it is by the voice of a woman, Monks a woman’s voice obsesses a man’s heart … scent … savour … touch …*. The explained that the same holds true for the heart of a woman,⁴⁾ Hence the Disciplinary Code for monks and nuns who have dedicated their lives to the Practice commences with a heavy emphasis on celibacy.

The disciplinary rules of the Pali Vinaya for a monk or a nun who has received Higher Ordination fall in to eight categories i.e. 1) Parajika 2) Sanghadhisesa 3) Aniyata 4) Nissaggiya Pacittiyas 5) Pacittiya 6) Patidesaniya 7) Sekhiya 8) Adhikarana Samatha.

The Parajika offences being the most serious of all result in the expulsion from the Order of monks or nuns. The ‘parajika’ means ‘defeat’ and by transgressing these the monk or the nun gets ‘defeated’

3) T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys David, *Dialogue of the Buddha* Vol III, PTS, 2002, 85

4) *Anguttara Nikaya* Vol,1, PTS, 2000, 1.

meaning he or she has not being able to resist temptation and has been being defeated by defilements (kelesa).⁵⁾ Once defeated, such a person is unworthy of belonging to the Community. All offences other than Parajika are remediable by subjecting himself or herself to the stipulated punishment and/or the procedures and thereafter conducting according to the Code of Discipline.

Sanghadisesas are the most serious remediable offences. A Sanghadisesa offence by a bhikkhuni reduces her to a probationary period called 'manatta' of 15 days . The bhikkhuni's period of manatta was equal to the 'parivasa period' , the probationary period a bhikkhu is subject to for this category of offences. During the probationary period the offender's status in the community is reduced by depriving him or her of certain rights and privileges he is entitled to and also by making it known to the rest of the community thereby making it a deterrent for wrong doing. Nissaggiya Pacittiya do not involve any punishment, the object improperly acquired is given up. The Pacittiya rules are less severe involving only a confession.

The four Parajika rules laid down for the bhikkhus have been increased to eight Parajika rules in the disciplinary rules applicable to the bhikkhunis. Three out of these additional four rules applicable to the Bhikkhunis pertain to sex life and can be considered as secondary rules deriving from the first parajika rule. Hence half the number of the parajika rules laid down for Bhikkhunis deal with sex in one way or another.⁶⁾ Out

5) Mohan Wijeratne , *Buddhist Nuns*, p. 74.

6) Jothiya Dheerasekara , *Buddhist Monastic Discipline*, Colombo, 1992, p. 149.

of these, Parajika rule No. 1 which is held in common with the bhikkhus and rules 5 and 8 of the additional four rules applicable to the bhikkhunis are direct references to sexual acts.

Parajika rule 1- Whatever bhikkhuni should deliberately indulge in sexual intercourse, even with an animal, she becomes one who is defeated. She cannot live any more with the other bhikkhunis.⁷⁾

The equivalent of the above rule for the bhikkhus is as follows; ‘If a monk who has accepted the discipline , without rejecting it, without pronouncing his ability to continue (monastic life), has sexual intercourse, even with a female animal, he commits an offence entailing defeat…….’ In the bhikkhuni’s rule the words ‘without rejecting it, without pronouncing his ability to continue (monastic life)’ has not being included. Accordingly a monk had to make known his intention to abandon the discipline before the assembly of the Community or before a group of monks or before an individual monk who has obtained Higher Ordination or at least before a layman who can understand what he says.

However a bhikkhuni could leave the order without such declaration.⁸⁾

As applicable to the bhikkhus the above rule extends to restraining from sexual activities with not only animals, but also with non-humans such as demons and celestial beings, with dead bodies, hermaphrodites (ubhatobyanjanako) , eunuchs (pandakas) , with a person asleep etc.

7) Mohan Wijeratne , *Buddhist Nuns*, p. 182.

8) - do - Note 6, 116.

Whilst the Parajika rule 1 deals with active participation in sexual activity, the following Parajika rules preclude a bhikkhuni from even being a passive sex partner.

Parajika rule 5- Whatever bhikkhuni filled with desire, should consent to rubbing, or rubbing up against, or taking hold of or touching or pressing against a male person who is filled with desire, below the collar bone and above the circle of the knees, she becomes one who is defeated…….

Parajika rule 8- Whatever bhikkhuni, filled with desire, for the sake of following this unsuitable thing, should consent to a male person who is filled with desire, taking her hand, or should consent to his taking hold of even by the edge of her outer cloak (sanghati), or should stand or should talk or should go to rendezvous, or should consent to a man coming towards her, or should enter a covered place or should dispose her body for such a purpose, she becomes one who is defeated…….

In both above rules though it appears as a passive role physically, the words ‘filled with desire’ and ‘consent to’ (sadiyeyya) indicates the role of the mind.

Psychologically ‘to consent’ does not mean simply ‘to give in’ or ‘to let things go’ or ‘to give way to’. It means ‘to agree with’, ‘to approve’, and particularly in the case of Parajika 5, to accept and actively indulge in the pleasures that are felt, that have been felt, and that are going to be felt.⁹⁾ It is for the same reason that the victim of rape in the event the

victim being an Arahant or emission of semen in a dream do not fall within the definition of this offence. The Arahant theri, Uppalavanna who was raped by a young man in the woods was declared by the Buddha not guilty of Parajika 1 as, an Arahant is one who has eradicated lust and therefore can not be guilty of consenting to the act .

The following Sanghadisesa rules¹⁰⁾ applicable to bhikkhunis are noteworthy.

Sanghadisesa 3 - No bhikkhuni shall, alone leave the village , cross the river and go beyond, shall stay a night out, or be out of the company of the group. Whoever does so shall be guilty of an Sanghadisesaoffence.

Sanghadisesa 5 - No bhikkhuni shall with lustful intentions receive and partake of any food from a lustful man with similar intentions.

Sanghadisesa 6 - No bhikkhuni shall tell another ‘whatever will this man do to you, whether he is lustful or otherwise, as long as you entertain no such thoughts. Therefore you accept and partake of whatever he offers you’

The above rules seem to be with the objective of not only to curtail the opportunities to entertain lustful thoughts and conduct but also to safeguard the bhikkhunis from being victims of rape, molestation and

9) - do - , 118.

10) Jothiya Dheerasekara, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline*, 149.

other physical dangers and also to safeguard the community of bhikkhunis as an Institution from disrepute and unwarranted accusations from the public, supporters of the community and other interested parties. Some of these have been considered so grave that it warrants the guilty bhikkhuni to be reduced to a probationary period.

The following Pacittiya rules¹¹⁾ are also for the same objective.

Pacittiya rule 11 - No bhikkhuni shall in the darkness of the night, at a place there is no lamp, stay alone in the company of a man or converse with him. Whoever does so will be guilty of a Pacittiya offence.

Pacittiya rule 12 - No bhikkhuni shall stay alone in the company of a man or converse with him in a secluded place.

Pacittiya rule 13 - No bhikkhuni shall stay alone in the company of a man or converse with him in an open place.

Pacittiya rule 14 - No bhikkhuni shall, in the street, in a blind alley or at the cross roads, stay alone in the company of a man, converse with him, whisper in his ear, or send away the bhikkhuni who is her only companion.

It is noteworthy that the above conduct is considered an offence whatever the state of mind of the bhikkhuni may be, whether she acts with or

11) - do - 150.

without lust. The following rules serve the same purpose.¹²⁾

Pacittiya rule 51 - Whatever bhikkhuni who knowingly enter a monastic residence where a bhikkhu lives, without asking for permission, she is guilty of a fault of Pacittiya category.

Pacittiya rule 102 - Whatever bhikkhuni should lie down in the lodging where a male person lives …….

Pacittiya rule 103 - Whatever bhikkhuni who teaches Dhamma to a man in more than five or six sentences , unless a knowledgeable woman is present …….

Pacittiya rule 125 - Whatever bhikkhuni should sit down and wait in private in a secluded seat with a man …….

Pacittiya rule 126- Whatever bhikkhuni should sit down and wait together with a man …….

In the bhikkhuni Vinaya there seem to be several rules to safeguard against sexual practicessuch as masturbation, homosexuality etc. The restrictions in the Vinaya againstsharing the same bed, couch, sharing the same blanket, from rubbing each others bodies, applying oils etc on another could be multi purpose including to safeguard against possible

12) - do - 197, 201, 203.

sexual activity. Some of these are as follows ;

Pacittiya rule 3 - In slapping with the palms of the hands (on the private parts of the body), a bhikkhuni is guilty of a Pacittiya offence

Pacittiya rule 4 - In penetrating some thing e.g. some thing made out of wax (in the private part of the body) a bhikkhuni is guilty of an offence

There is a reference in the Pali text to a bhikkhuni inserting a 'jatumuttaka' inside her genitals. The term jattumuthaka is translated in to English as a 'decking with lac' (Pali English Dictionary - PTS London), a device used by women in society at that time to prevent conception. It is something made of wood, flour or clay. Subsequent to this incident the Buddha laid down a rule which not only forbids them from using jattumuttaka but also touching their genitals even with a blade of grass.¹³⁾

Pacittiya rule 5 - states that when bhikkhunis wash their genitals, their fingers should not be inserted for more than two inches inside the vaginas.¹⁴⁾

Pacittiya rule 31 - Whatever two bhikkhunis who should share one couch , they are guilty of a fault.....

13) Chamindaji Gamage, *Buddhism and Sensuality*, Colombo, 1998, 63.

14) - do - , 64.

Pacittiya rule 32 - whatever two bhikkhunis should share one blanket or one bed sheet, they are guilty of an offence.....

Pacittiya rule 90 - Whatever bhikkhuni should cause herself to be rubbed with ointment massaged by a nun, she is guilty of a fault of pacittiya

Pacittiya rule 91 - Whatever Bhikkhuni should cause herself to be rubbed with ointment or massaged by a postulant , she is guilty.....

Pacittiya rule 92 - Whatever bhikkhuni should cause herself to be rubbed with ointment or massaged by a female novice, she is guilty

Pacittiya rule 93 - Whatever bhikkhuni should cause herself to be rubbed with ointment or massaged by a woman householder, she is guilty

The Vinaya rules also safeguards against the bhikkhunis conducting themselves in such a manner that would arouse lustful feelings in men i.e. wearing ornaments, scents, bathing naked in public places etc.

Pacittiya rule 96 - Whatever bhikhuni who should enter the village without her vest , she is guilty

Pacittiya rule 86 - What ever bhikkhuni should wear a sanghani, she is guilty of(a sanghani is a decorated cloth or an ornamental chain to wear

around the hip).¹⁵⁾

Pacittiya rule 87 - Whatever bhikkhuni would wear women's ornaments, she is guilty of …….

Pacittiya rule 88 - Whatever bhikkhuni should bath with scent and skin lotions , she is guilty of …….

Pacittiya rule 21 - Whatever bhikkhunishould bathe naked, she is guilty of …….

Sexual intercourse has been commonly referred to in the text as *not true dhamma, it is a village dhamma, low-caste dhamma, wickedness, the final abluion, secrecy, having obtained in couples*. The extent of the sexual taboo on the Path to Enlightenment of a monk or a nun who has renounced the household life can be determined by the Buddha's advice to Sudinna at the time of promulgation of the first parajika rule as follows;

It were better for you, foolish man that your male organ should enter the mouth of a terrible and a poisonous snake , than it should enter a woman. It were better for you, foolish man , that your male organ should enter the mouth of a black snake……. charcoal pit …… burning ablaze, a fire than enter a woman.¹⁶⁾

15) Mohan Wijeratne, *Buddhist Nuns*, note 4, 200.

16) I,B,Homer, *The book of Discipline, Vinaya Pitaka*, Vol,1, London, Oxford University Press, 1938, 36-37.

Based on these statements there is a tendency to interpret the essence of the brahmacari life as celibacy. However in Methuna Sutta of Anguttara Nikaya, replying to brahmin Janussoni the Buddha declared a *bhikkhu* or *Brahmin who declares himself to be a person of perfect brahmacariya, may not enjoy sexual intercourse with a woman, but this is not enough to warrant such a declaration.*¹⁷⁾ *It is further said that if he allows a woman to rub his body with oil or perfume, to give him a bath and shampoo him and enjoys or longs for it, if he laughs sports or enjoys with a woman, if he looks in to, watches with expectation, the eyes of a woman who does the same in return, if he listens through a wall or a fence to the noise of a woman who is laughing, reciting, singing, or weeping , if he remembers that he has formally laughed, talked , and sported together with a woman, if he sees a householder or a householder's son, in possession of five sorts of pleasure and being attended by a woman or if he practices brahmacariya desiring to join a class of celestial beings, such brahmacariya cannot be called unbroken, uninterrupted, unvaried, unadulterated, perfect and pure brahmacariya.*¹⁸⁾

The above clearly shows that abstinence from sexual activity is not the essence of the practice towards Enlightenment even in the case of a monk or a nun . Mohan Wijeratne in *Buddhist Nuns* writes;

17) *Anguttaranikaya*, Buddha Jayanthi Tipitaka Series, Colombo, 1960-77, Vol. 21, Pt. 4, 362 / Chamindaji Gamage, *Buddhism and Sensuality*, Colombo, 1998, 83.

18) - do- 362-364.

No where in the Buddhist doctrine or its discipline do we find any praise of perpetual virginity, or any notion such (as) physical saintliness or ecclesiastical celibacy. Moreover the Buddha does not attach any importance whatsoever to sacred ritual nor does it search for any ritual purity through abstaining from sexual relations. Attaching a sense of spiritual value to the human body was foreign to Buddhism. we should also note that with regard to abstinence, Buddhist nuns never had a notion such as 'giving one's life completely to a divine spouse', nor were they tied to a spiritual marriage.¹⁹⁾

A married woman is permitted to enter the order of nuns at the age of twelve years provided there is permission from her husband or the parents to do so (Pacittiya rule 65 and 80). However in the case of a unmarried woman she is not permitted to enter the Order until 20 yrs (Pacittiya rule 71). These rules seem to be giving sufficient time for a unmarried woman to make a decision about entering in to wedlock and in the case of married women this also serves to protect the Institution of marriage. Hence it can be concluded that despite the heavy emphasis on celibacy there is no sacrosanct value attached to celibacy within the Buddhist philosophy except that these rules have been enacted both for molding a mind conducive for treading the Path and for safeguarding and supporting the Community of monks and nuns.

19) Mohan Wijeratne, *Buddhist Nuns*, 116.

III. The role of celibacy in the practice of lay female Buddhist disciples who have attained fruits of the Path

Once a lay disciple, Migasala questioned Ven. Ananda as to how to understand the dhamma thought by the Tathagata, as it seems that both, one who lives brahmachari life (celibate life) and one who doesn't, after death takes a similar birth.

She said 'my father, sir, Purana, lived the godly life (brahmachari life), dwelling apart, abstaining from common carnal things ; and when he died the Exalted One explained : He is a once-returner, dwelling in Tusita. My uncle, sir Isidatta, did not live the godly life but rejoiced with a wife; and of him also, when dead, the Exalted One said : He is a once-returner, dwelling in Tusita. Reverend Ananda how ought one to understand this Dhamma?

This incident was reported to the Buddha by Ven. Ananda seeking an explanation.

In this sutta , the Buddha comes out very strongly against the attempt of Migasala to pass judgment about the attainments of others.²⁰⁾

The Buddhist Path to Nibbana, its ultimate goal is marked by four land marks , the four fruits of the Path. They are (a) Fruit of Stream- entry (Sotapatti-Phala) (b) Once Returner (Sakadagami-phala) (c) Non Returner (Anagami-Phala) and (d) Arahatta-Phala (Nibbana). These are progressive stages of development of the mind. This sutta highlights that celibacy by

20) *Anguttara Nikaya* Vol,III, PTS Edition, 246.

itself is not a factor for the attainment of mental development expected on this Path nor a pre-condition for enlightenment at least up to the third fruit of the Path, as both, the one who 'rejoiced with a wife' and the one who practiced celibacy have progressed up to the same fruit. At this point it is important to note that at the third fruit of the Path, a Non-returner (Anagami) eradicates all sensual pleasures, naturally reverting to a celibate life whether he or she has renounced lay life or not.

In the light of the above sutta it is important to examine the recorded lives of disciples of the Buddha to determine the role of celibacy on their Path to Enlightenment. Most of the recorded cases of the disciples who attained fruits of the Path are of monks and nuns who are expected to lead celibate lives. Celibacy is a pre-condition for them. Therefore the extent of the impact of celibacy on their practice or its success can not be assessed externally. Hence the extent of the role of celibacy for the purposes of Enlightenment can be examined only by dwelling into the recorded lives of lay disciples who had the freedom to lead a non-celibate life. Following are some accounts of such disciples-

1) It is said of Visakha (the chief female lay disciple of the Buddha) who attained sotappatti phala at the age of seven years; Visakha got married at the age of fifteen or sixteen years In the course of time she gave birth to ten sons and ten daughters and all of them had the same number of descendants down to the fourth generation, Visakha herself lived up to the remarkable age of 120..... She was strong as an elephant and worked untiringly throughout the day looking after her large family. She found time to feed the monks every day, to visit monasteries, and to ensure that

non of the monks lacked food, clothing, shelter, bedding and medicine. Above all she still found time to listen to the dhamma again and again…… she wore her valuable bridal jewellery even when she went to listen to the dhamma……. She was declared by the Buddha as the foremost among women lay supporters who serve as supporters of the Order.²¹⁾

Accordingly having attained the first fruit of the Path as a seven year old she entered marriage and continued to have ten children and enjoy sensual pleasures. She was obviously not leading a celibate life. With the first fruit of the Path one is assured of completing the Path to Nibbana, at the latest within seven more lives and is assured of not falling back from the Path . He or she is said to have firmly entered the ‘Stream’ to Nibbana. Further from this point onwards he or she is said to continue to progress towards the final goal and only the time taken to reach the final goal differs from one another depending on each one’s commitment to the Practice. Hence Visakha having attained first fruit of the Path and whilst continuing towards her final goal and associating the Buddha so closely as his chief lay female disciple, yet celibacy had no real role in her practice.

ii) Nakulapita and Nakulamata (Father Nakula and Mother Nakula) are mentioned by the Buddha amongst his foremost lay disciples, and their unflinching faithfulness to each other has been highlighted in the Text. The Pali Canon depicts their relationship with each other as exemplary and a

21) Nyanaponika Thera and Hellmut Hecker, *The Great Disciples of the Buddha*, Chapter 7 (Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 1997, 247-255.)

conjugal love of divine stature accompanied by absolute trust based upon their common faith in the Blessed One. An old couple by the time they met the Buddha, the wife and husband declared to the Buddha that though married to each other very young they had not even once broken the faith with each other throughout the years, not even in thought leave alone in deed. They had not deviated for a moment from their mutual fidelity. In their devotion to each other, both of them expressed to Buddha their longing to be together in the future births and asked for advice from the Buddha to achieve it and they were advised by the Buddha accordingly.²²⁾

Once when Nakulapita, the husband fell gravely ill and Nakulamata addressed him was as follows;

Do not harbor distress at the thought of my being left behind. To die like that is agonizing, so our Master has advised against it. I am skilled in spinning and so shall be able to support the children, after having lived the home life chastely with you for sixteen years I shall never consider taking another husband; I shall never cease seeing the Master and his bhikkhus, but rather visit them even more frequently than before; I am firmly established in virtue and have attained to peace of mind; and lastly I have found firm footing in the Dhamma and I am bound for final deliverance.²³⁾

22) - do-, 375.

23) - do -, 377.

The above words of Nakulamata shows that the couple though been flawless in their conjugal love toward each other and having had children from this marriage still have lived a celibate life for sixteen years (gahatthakan brahmacariyan samacinnam). Further the words *I am firmly established in virtue and have attained to peace of mind; and lastly I have found firm footing in the Dhamma and I am bound for final deliverance* is an indication that Nakulamata had attained the first fruit of the Path, Sotapatti-phala.²⁴⁾

This gives us an indication that though very much in love and attached to each other to the extent of wanting to meet in the future births, the spiritual attainment of the couple had lead them to a celibate life.

iii) Khema was the beautiful chief consort of king Bimbisara who was himself a Stream-enterer. Though the King was a great benefactor of the Buddha and she had heard so much about the Buddha from the King, she never wanted to visit the Buddha as she had heard that the Buddha preaches about the vanity of beauty and sensual pleasures. However once the King managed to get her to visit the monastery where the Buddha was residing and she went with her royal splendor with silk and sandalwood and gradually got drawn in to the hall where the Buddha was preaching. The Buddha having read her mind, through his psychic powers created a beautiful woman, more beautiful than her, standing behind him and fanning him while he was preaching. She was enthralled by the beauty of the woman. Gradually the Buddha created the ‘woman’ to change from

24) - do -, Note 7, 392.

youth to middle age, and then to old age, with broken teeth grey hair and wrinkled skin until it finally fell to the ground lifeless. Having made her realize the vanity of beauty the Buddha preached her a stanza at the conclusion of which she was established in the first fruit of the Path. The Buddha continued to preach and at the conclusion of the sermon she attained Arahant hood dressed in her royal clothes itself. She obtained permission from the King and entered the order of nuns.²⁵⁾ Later she was declared by the Buddha as one of the two foremost bhikkhunis in the Bhikkhuni Sangha.

The above account shows that at the time of this incident, both the King who himself was a Stream-enterer and Khema who was his chief consort were very much enjoying sense pleasures. At the time of attaining Arahant hood she was not leading a celibate life as a part of her practice to Enlightenment. However upon full Enlightenment naturally she renounces lay life. Hence in this case celibacy had no real role in her Practice towards Enlightenment.

When we consider the above reports and many other accounts of enlightened disciples of the Buddha as recorded in the Pali text, it is difficult to conclude conclusively to what extent celibacy plays a role in Enlightenment.

25) - do -, 263-264.

IV. Findings of field research

In the recent field research done by the writer addressing certain controversies surrounding 'Enlightenment' in the Theravada Tradition i.e. interviews with contemporary meditators of the Theravada tradition, both monks, nuns and layman and lay women who are believed to be with specific spiritual experiences, it has been found that whilst some have attained the fruit of Stream-entry (first stage of Enlightenment) whilst leading a 'spotlessly clean' celibate life, some laymen observed the prescribed sila (indulging in permitted sexual activity), whilst some others claim that before their experience which lead them to the 'entry in to the Path', as a layman they lived a life breaking all possible norms including the third precept which is an undertaking to abstain from sexual misconduct.

- A 54yrs monk who is 27yrs in robes, the chief preceptor of a well established forest hermitage in Sri Lanka related the impact of his first significant religious experience on this Path as an irreversible change in his morality. He who was ridiculing virtue (sila) and laughing at those abiding in sila realized the power of sila, became virtuous, began to worship the virtuous, preach to others about the power of sila.

…… I first realized the power of sila. That is, the sila that I ridiculed all this time or that I considered as being restricted to a jail, became the sole purpose of my life .

…… I who was poking fun at or ridiculing sila began to worship the virtuous and also to preach to others about the importance of sila. That is, there occurred an irreversible change in morality …… Later for years I

examined myself, can I kill, can I steal, can I engage in sexual misconduct etc and shame, fear, disgust arise towards these……. Before this experience I had the desire to investigate in to lust, therefore I had distorted ideas about it, that I need to experience everything about it. Similarly with hatred , to chop a creature alive knowing well that its alive and struggling, to steal from the most heavily guarded place, to taste all the possible intoxicating drugs in the world , in cheating, to cheat even my mother and father etc. Having done all this I have been fairly successful. But there has been nothing achieved. Then when I came on to this side the opposite happened. I wanted to stay away from even thinking of lust and hatred. ….

He began to feel enormously indebted to the Buddha and to Buddha Sasana, in return wanted to serve unreservedly for Dhamma, felt a need for a teacher and entered monkhood.²⁶⁾ This is the impact of his first fruit of the Path, Stream-entry. Here is a case where Enlightenment has led to celibacy to say the least.

In the above recent field research out of the three married female disciples interviewed by the writer on their significant religious experiences on the Path, it was found that at the time of their first fruit of the Path, two were leading a normal lay life with their spouse and family and were abiding in the five precepts which is the minimum level of sila

26) Yuki Sirimane, Religious experience in a Buddhist perspective with specific focus on Sotapatti -phala, 2006 (Unpublished) Interview No. 4. (This research has been done for the purposes of her Doctoral Thesis).

expected of a lay disciple. However all these three disciples being in practice for over 10-20yrs, eventually, a few years down the line from this experience, have shifted to a higher mode of virtue including a celibate life whilst continuing in lay life. Except for abstinence from sexual relations, in all other aspects they continued to lead a 'normal' and a complete lay life. The following is a brief account of the relevant field research.

Case study -1

A 66yr old married lady , a house wife, with two children had her first significant religious experience (Fruit of Stream-entry) 30yrs ago during a meditation retreat at a meditation Center. During the time of this experience she was observing the eight precepts as she was on a formal meditation retreat. However during this time she was leading a perfectly normal married life fulfilling the responsibilities of a mother and of a wife and was observing the five precepts as her regular sila. Though she continued to fulfill her responsibilities as a mother and as a wife in all other aspects, after a period of 'four to five' years from this experience she started leading a celibate life, observing a 'higher sila'. Although she was not observing all eight precepts (i.e. abstaining from perfumes, jewellery etc and abstaining from solid foods after the noon meal which are included in the eight precepts) she was inclined to abstain from sexual relations. Though initially her relationship with the husband was strained due to this reason, with time it was accepted by him. As of today she continues to lead a harmonious married life whilst striving for higher fruits of the Path.

Case Study -2

A 56yr old married lady, a mother of two children, who is a teacher by profession had her first significant religious experience 19yrs ago. She had her first religious experience (which she describes as the Fruit of Stream-entry) at home. During this time she was managing a home and was discharging her duties as a mother and as a wife, however was observing a 'higher sila than the five precepts'. Today several years after this experience though she is leading a normal lay life in all other aspects, she is observing the eight precepts abstaining from not only sexual relations but from many other sensual pleasures including not having solid foods after the noon meal. At the time of this experience her relationship with her husband was already strained and with time it became worse and ended up with separation. However as of today she maintains a harmonious relationship with her husband though not 'living together' but living under the same roof.

Case Study -3

- A married lady in her early forties, who is a senior executive in the mercantile sector, had her first significant religious experience (Fruit of Stream-entry) 11yrs ago. She had her experience at home whilst observing the five precepts and leading a perfectly normal lay life. However around 4yrs from this experience she found herself naturally inclining towards abstaining from sexual relations with her husband and today she is leading a celibate life though not observing all eight precepts. The celibate life has

not affected the harmonious relationship between her and her husband who is appreciative of the Dhamma. She continues to lead a perfectly normal lay life in all other aspects including perusing her career as she continues her quest for Nibbana.

In all above cases it is noteworthy that the practioners concerned have opted for a celibate life whilst being young enough to be sexually active. In the case of males interviewed by the writer who attained the fruits of the Path as lay disciples, few years after their first experience, both males ended up entering the Order of monks leading a completely celibate life.

Conclusion

Having examined the lives of disciples above it is difficult to conclude that celibacy is a pre-condition for Enlightenment. Nor can we determine the extent of the contribution of a celibate life towards one's Enlightenment. However given the extreme sexual taboos enforced on the Community of monks and nuns in the form of disciplinary rules, the role of celibacy on the path to Enlightenment can not be under-estimated. The disciplinary rules have been laid down by the Buddha for the following reasons;

- a) Well-being of the Sangha
- b) Convenience of the Sangha
- c) Restraint of evil minded persons
- d) Ease of well behaved monks

- e) Restraint amongst the defilements of this life
- f) Eradication of the defilements of the life after
- g) Conversion of new adherents
- h) Enhancement of the faith of those already converted
- i) Stability and continuance of the Dhamma
- j) Furtherance of the good discipline²⁷⁾

Hence Disciplinary rules are not merely for Enlightenment. It is also meant to serve multiple purposes vital for the sustenance of the Community of Sangha as an Institution.

Therefore the rule of celibacy imposed on the monks and nuns too is not merely for Enlightenment. With progress on the Path, realizing the true nature of sensual pleasures and the mind and body one progresses through to a celibate life naturally. Some reach such a state of mind earlier than others. In any event at the latest, with the attainment of third fruit of the Path, Anagami-phala one switches over to complete celibacy. Ajahn Brahmavamso writes; ... since sensual desire has been totally transcended, there is no spark left to ignite the passion for sex. All Arahants are 'potently impotent'.²⁸⁾ ■

27) Jothiya Dheerasekara, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline*, 51.

28) Ajahn Brahmavamso, *Dhamma Journal*, Vol.5, Perth, Western Australia, Buddhist Society, 2004, 55'.