

## Theme 1C Buddhist texts as sources of wisdom and authority – their use and treatment in daily life

### Key concepts

- During the lifetime of the Buddha and for some 300 years after his death, the generally accepted evidence is that none of his teaching was written down. Buddhist scholars focus on oral transmission through memorisation and chanting of the dhamma.
- During the Buddha's lifetime, as he travelled with his closest followers, it can be assumed that rules were established for them as a community – particularly during the three-month monsoon season (origin of Vassa).
- One explanation of the development of the first Buddhist texts suggests that the closest followers of the Buddha (bhikkus/bhikkunis) met to discuss rules of living and preservation of the dhamma at: the First Council (three months after the death of the Buddha); the Second Council (one hundred years later) where divisions in the monastic sangha were raised; and the Third Council (seventeen years later) during the reign of Ashoka, at which the Theravada school of Buddhism was fully established.

- One of the first texts was the Vinaya (code of discipline), which when written down was called the Vinaya Pitaka (basket of discipline). This consists of three parts: Sutta Vibhanga (containing the Patimokkha), Khandhaka (dealing with the organisation of the sangha) and the Parivara (analysis of the rules which is designed for chanting and for testing).

- The Patimokkha, which is considered the most ancient part of the Vinaya, consists of 227 rules of conduct for bhikkus and 331 for bhikkunis. Each rule has an "origin" story.
- The rules were given (according to Ajahn Chah) for: (1) the excellence and well-being of the Community, (2) the control of ill-behaved monks and the comfort of well-behaved monks; (3) the restraint of bad habits in this life and the prevention of bad habits in the next; (4) the arousing of faith in the faithless and the increase of faith in the faithful; (5) the establishment of the dhamma and support of Vinaya.
- The Patimokkha are chanted – sometimes by memory – by the monastic sangha of ordained bhikkus/bhikkunis twice a week – on all full moon and new moon days.
- The overall aim of the continued recitation is to create a community where meditation can best take place and detachment can be achieved.

- The Sutta Vibhanga also provides rules for how breaking the Patimokkha should be dealt with by the monastic sangha – breaking some rules requires confession of fault.
- The Four Parajikas (defeats) are rules that, if broken, lead to expulsion from the monastic sangha and to the end of that person following the life of a bhikku/bhikkuni.

- The Four Parajikas are: (1) engaging in any form of sexual intercourse; (2) stealing in taking that which is not given; (3) intentionally bringing about someone's death whether directly or indirectly; (4) claiming to have attained a superior spiritual status than others.
- The Four Parajikas are a reminder of the importance of detachment and control of the mind and the body.

### Key quotes

'The continuity of the monastic organisation has been the only constant factor in Buddhist history. Monastic life was regulated by the rules of the Vinaya.' (Conze)

'Chanting is still maintained in monasteries today, despite the many books available, and chanting is a significant part of most Buddhist rituals.' (www.buddhamind.info)

'Maintaining the purity of the Sangha was clearly linked to survival.' (Lekshe Tsomo)

'The historicity of the First Council is debated by modern scholars, and will probably remain in doubt forever.' (Reat)

### Key words

bhikkus	bhikkunis	Ashoka	Vinaya	Parivara
Pitaka	Parajika	Vibhanga	Vassa	

### Issues for analysis and evaluation

#### Key arguments/debates

Some focus on the Vinaya/Patimokkha/Parijikas as fundamental given that they are part of the earliest codified Buddhist teaching.

Others focus on their relevance outside of the Theravadin monastic sangha.

#### Key questions

Should specific rules as to moral behaviour change with the times or be fixed?

How much authority should be given texts whose origins can be questioned?