**The University of Hong Kong**

**Dissertation**

**Methods of spiritual praxis in the Sarvāstivāda:**

**A Study Primarily Based on the**

**Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā**

by

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# Abstract

This thesis is based on the hypothesis that Abhidharma is intrinsically concerned with spiritual praxis realization, and that the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā*, the supreme authority for the orthodox Sarvāstivādins, provides details of all the fundamental methods of Buddhist meditation, together with their doctrinal basis.

The introductory chapter defines the purpose, scope and sources for this study, and examines the origin and nature of Abhidharma, emphasizing it as being essentially a soteriology. Chapter 2 offers a survey of the topics discussed sequentially in the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā*, and lists the sections which deal specifically with meditative praxis. Chapter 3 introduces the community of meditation masters within the Sarvāstivāda school, known as the *yogācāra*-s, and outlines the different stages on the path of spiritual progresses taught in the school. Chapter 4 begins the first topic specifically concerned with meditation, *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, showing their distinctive nature and contribution to meditative praxis as well as their complimentarity. Chapter 5 deals with *samādhi*, a key doctrine of meditative praxis, and focuses particularly on the set of three *samādhi* — *śūnyatā*, *apraṇihita* and *ānimitta*. Chapter 6 discusses the five hindrances which constitute obstruction to progress in meditative praxis. Chapters 7 and 8 discuss the Sarvāstivāda analysis of the meditative practices considered as antidotes for specific personality problems, and in this context introduce the two most fundamental Buddhist meditations — "mindfulness of breathing" (chapter 7) and "contemplation on the impure" (chapter 8) — known in the tradition as the

"two gateways to immortality". Chapter 9 turns to the meditative praxis on the refinement and sublimation of emotional energies, and discusses in details the four "immeasurables". Chapter 10 discusses another fundamental teaching of meditative praxis, "the fourfold application of mindfulness", emphasized as "the direct way" to the purification and emancipation of sentient beings in the Sūtra as well as the Abhidharma. Chapter 11 introduces the doctrine of the nine sequential meditative attainment — the four *dhyāna*-s, followed by the four attainments in the sphere of immateriality, ending with the cessation meditation. Chapter 12 is specifically devoted to the discussion on the four *dhyāna*-s as constituting the main content of what may be termed the genuine Buddhist meditations. Chapter 13 puts together two major topics of meditative praxis that remain to be discussed. Chapter 14 is a statement of the conclusion of this thesis, in the light of the analysis and discussion in the preceding chapters, that Abhidharma is intrinsically concerned with meditative praxis. It also confirms that the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā* is a valuable source book for the study of meditative praxis in the Sarvāstivāda tradition.

# Declaration

I declare that this thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

………………………………

Stephen Suen

# Acknowledgements

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Venerable Professor K. L. Dhammajoti, Chairman, Departmental Research Postgraduate Committee, HKU, was my research supervisor. Without his teaching, mentoring, encouragement and advice, this thesis would not have been completed. I would like here to specifically acknowledge that a considerable part of my understanding of the Sarvāstivāda system expressed in this thesis was based on the Professor's published works as well as his lecture notes distributed in his lecture courses on Abhidharma (particularly those delivered in 2008) conducted at The University of Hong Kong. Whatever shortcomings and errors which may be found in my thesis are, of course, entirely my own responsibility.

Through the learning process of writing this thesis, I have had the precious opportunity to experience the profundity of Buddhism, the strong feeling of compassion and the deeper meaning of life. Most important of all, the awareness of my responsibility to sentient beings has become an honorable obligation.

Stephen Suen,
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May, 2009.

# List of Abbreviations

Note:

(i)     All references of Chinese *Tripiṭaka* texts are to the *Taishō* edition, unless otherwise stated.

(ii)    All references of *Pāli* texts are to the PTS edition, unless otherwise stated.

(iii)   All references of *Pāli ṭīkā* and *anuṭīkā* are those of the *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana* edition of the *Tipiṭaka* published electronically by the *Vipassanā* Research Institute, Dhammajiri, Maharastra, India.

| | |
|---|---|
| A | Aṅguttara Nikāya |
| AKB | *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 阿毗達磨俱舍論 |
| AKB(C) | Chinese tr. of the AKB by Xuan Zang, T no. 1558. |
| ASC | The *Arthaviniścaya Sūtra* and its commentary Nibandhana, translated with an introduction and notes by N.H. Samtani, Dharma Publishing (Berkely, CA, USA 2002). |
| Asm | *Abhidharmasamuccaya of Asaṅga* = Bib. no. 8. |
| AVN | *Arthaviniścaya-sūtra-nibandhana*. Ed. N. H. Samtani (Patna, 1975). |
| BHSD | Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary by F. Edgerton. (New Haven, 1953). |
| BM | Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice. Paravahera *Vajirañāṇa Mahāthera* Buddhist Missionary Society Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Second Edition 1975. |
| BoBh | Bodhisattva Bhūmi |
| D | *Digha Nikāya* |
| DhsA | *Dhammasaṅgani Aṭṭhakathā (=Atthasālinī)* |
| DDS | *\*Dharmatrāta-dhyāna-sūtra*, T15, no. 618. |
| DSŚ | *\*Dharma-skandha-śāstra,* 阿毗達磨法蘊足論 T no. 1537. |
| DZDL | *\*Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*, T15, no. 614. |
| EĀ | Ekottarāgama 增一阿含經 (T no. 125). |

| | |
|---|---|
| EnB | *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Ed., Malalasekera, GP (Colombo, 1961). |
| *Entrance* | *Entrance into the Supreme Dharma* = Bib. no. 84. |
| IAKB | *Index to the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* = Bib. Nos. 133, 134, 135. |
| JPŚ | *Abhidharma-Jñānaprasthāna-sāstra* 阿毗達磨發智論 T no. 1544. |
| M | *Majjhima Nikāya.* |
| MDB | *Vajirañāna, Paravahera* (1975). Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.   Reprint Kuala Lumpur. |
| MVŚ | *Abhidharma-mahā-vibhāṣa-śāstra*, 阿毗達磨大毗婆沙論, T no. 1545. |
| Nishi | Nishi, K (1975). 阿毗達磨俱舍論  Tokyo. |
| Ny | *\*Abhidharma-nyāyānusāra* 阿毗達磨順正理論, T no. 1562. |
| SA | *Sarvāstivāda* Abhidharma, by KL Dhammajoti (Third Revised Edition: Hong Kong, 2007). |
| Satipat | Satipaṭṭhāna, the Director Path to Realization. Birmingham. |
| *\*Śāri* | *Śāriputrābhidharma*, T28, no. 1548. |
| *Sarv* | *Sarvāstivāda* textual tradition: MVŚ, *Ny* and *SarvV*. |
| *SarvV* | *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya*, T23, no. 1435. |
| Study | Bib. no. 161. |
| S.v. | Saṁyutta-nikāya |
| *Thera* | *Theravāda* [textual tradition.] |
| Vy | Sphuṭārthā Abhidharmakośa-vyākhyā of Yaśinutra (=Vyākhyā) Bib. no. 9. |

# CONTENTS

# Chapter 1 — Introduction

## 1.1  Purpose, scope and sources of the present thesis

Buddhism is essentially a path of spiritual growth, a path that systematically helps man to unfold his potential to the fullest. Doctrinal expositions developed in the Buddhist tradition are intrinsically bound up with this central concern, and become truly meaningful only from this perspective. Accordingly, a systematic investigation into the historical and doctrinal development of any school necessarily presupposes a clear understanding of its spiritual practices — primarily meditational practices — that underlie them.

The Abhidharma period in Buddhism is the period that had initiated or sparked off the development of some of the most important doctrines in Buddhist history.   Among the schools that flourished in this period, the most important and influential one is the Sarvāstivāda.   Based on the premise stated above, the present research seeks to contribute to practices and the doctrinal structures that are interwoven with them.   It seeks further to demonstrate that, contrary to popular understanding, the Sarvāstivāda is not an Abhidharma school that is almost exclusively preoccupied with the so-called metaphysical doctrines and scholasticism.   A large amount of its doctrines is

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in fact concerned with meditational practices, an understanding of which is a prerequisite for a proper appreciation of its doctrinal propositions.

In ancient India, China and Japan, Abhidharma studies was an important part of Buddhist studies. The scholarly monks in those countries belonging to the various sects and schools of thought were well-versed in at least the fundamental doctrines. If we examine the earliest scriptures of the Mahāyāna such as the *Maulī bhūmi* of the *Yogācārabhūmi*, we can see that the earliest *Yogācāras* had essentially inherited the whole system of Abhidharma analysis form the Sarvāstivāda Ābhidharmika-s. Even in the later stages as represented by the *Cheng Wei Shi Lun* (成唯識論), the whole Sarvāstivāda system of the five categories of *dharma*-s still abounds. In the development of a central concept of the *Yogācāra,* the *ālayavijñāna*, the influence from the *Abhidharmic* requirement is unmistakable: *ālayavijñāna* came to be made a "full-fletched" *vijñāna* with the articulation of its specific — conforming to the Abhidhrama system — *āśraya*, *ālambana* and conjoined *caitta*-s. All these mean that for a proper understanding of the doctrinal development of the Mahāyāna *Yogācāra,* a sound knowledge of the basic doctrines and historical background of the Abhidharma tradition is indispensable.

It is for this reason that great ancient Chinese masters like *Xuan Zang* and his disciples were all well-versed in the Abhidharma texts and doctrines. *Xuan Zang*, a devout *Mahāyānist* himself, in fact devoted a great amount of his time

and effort to the translation of some of the most important Abhidharma works such as the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and the set of canonical Abhidharma texts of the Sarvāstivāda. In contrast, with the exception of the Japanese Buddhist scholars, most other modern Buddhist scholars, Western or Eastern alike, tend to neglect Abhidharma studies to the extent that, of all fields of modern Buddhist studies, Abhidharma receives the least attention. Against this background, it is hoped that the present research can make a small contribution to a better understanding of the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma tradition.

I have selected the Sarvāstivāda school for the obvious reason that it was this school that had exerted the greatest influence on the development of not only the Abhidharma schools as a whole, but also on the Mahāyāna tradition. In spite of the historical importance of the Sarvāstivāda school, to date only a comparatively very small number of full-scale research on its doctrines and history have appeared in Western languages. The reason is twofold: (1) Most of the school's canonical as well as commentarial texts are now extant only in Classical Chinese and are therefore inaccessible to most Western scholars. (2) Most Buddhist scholars are unaware of or simply overlook the fact that these texts contain a huge amount of material on meditational practices.

Out of these limited researches, the first significant contribution is Th. Stcherbatsky's *Central Conception of Buddhism and the meaning of the word*

'Dharma' (Leningrad, 1923).   It has since become a Classic on the Sarvāstivāda doctrines.   However, it is a slim volume whose information is necessarily limited.   Besides, it does not consult any of the Chinese sources. Around the same period was De La Valle Poussin's monumental French translation of the *Abhidarma-kośabhāṣya* in 5 volumes.   This authoritative translation, based on Xuan Zang's version, consults *Yaśomitra's Sphuṭārtha-vyākhyā*, *Paramārtha's* translation, the Tibetan version, the Chinese commentaries by Xuan Zang's disciples (particularly Pu Guang), and the modern annotated Japanese translation.   Its huge amount of annotation also contains translation of many important passages from the *Mahāvibhāṣā* and *Nyāyānusāra*.   Its English translation by Leo Pruden, appeared some 65 years later (Berkeley, 1988).

Since this publication, there had been almost a vacuum in the West for the many years to follow, with only occasional papers published on the subject, mainly in French.   Wogihara U finally published his edition of *Yaśomitra's Abhidarmakośa-vyākhyā* (Tokyo, 1932-36), the only Sanskrit commentary on the *Abhidarmakośa-bhāṣya.*   Again, many years later, Jaini, P.S., edited and published an important orthodox *Vaibhāṣika* work, *Abhidarmadīpa* with *Vibhāṣā-prabhāvṛtti* (Patna, 1959).   This has provided some important information on the subject; but it was unfortunately based on a rather incomplete manuscript.   In more recent years, Cox C published an excellent study, along with a partial translation of chapter two of the *Nyāyānusāra,*

*entitled Disputed Dharma* ⸺ *Early Buddhist Theories on Existence* ⸺ *An Annotated Translation of the Section on Factors Dissociated from Thought from Saṃghabhadra's Nyāyānusāra* (Tokyo, 1995). But, as its title suggests, it is concerned primarily with only a single doctrinal category of the Sarvāstivāda. The same author has also published an article on the Sarvāstivāda path, entitled, "Attainment through Abandonment: The Sarvāstvādin Path of Removing Defilements", included in Bushwell, *et. al.*, *Path to Liberation* ⸺ *The Mārga and its Transformation in Buddhist Thought* (Honolulu, 1992). Although the discussion seems to be too preoccupied with the notion of abandonment of defilement in spirtitual attainment, it is nonetheless an important contribution.

A more comprehensive work on the Sarvāstivāda school by Charles Willemen *et. al.* appeared in 1998. Entitled Sarvāstivāda Scholassticism, it however, disappointingly contains only a very scanty doctrinal discussion. Charles Willemen also recently published an edition of his annotated translation of the *Abhidharmahṛdaya* (T1550), entitled *The Essence of Scholasticism*. This is an important text of the Sarvāstivāda, extant only in Chinese, which inspired several commentaries and effectively sparked off a new line of development of Abhidharma manuals that culminated in the famous *Abhidharmakośa* of Vasubandhu in the early 5th century A.D.

Three significant recent contributions in this field by Dhammajoti KL deserve

to be mentioned: *Entrance Into the Supreme Doctrine* (Colombo, 1998), Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Hong Kong 2007) and *Abhidarma Doctrine and Controversy on Perception* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Hong Kong 2007). The first is a study and annotated translation of Skandhila's *Abhidarmāvatāra*, anther important orthodox Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma doctrines within a single volume. Its numerous translation of important passages from the *Mahāvibhāṣā* and *\*Nyāyānsāra* are particularly valuable. The third adds significantly to our understanding of the epistemological doctrines of both the *Sarvāstivāda* and *Sautrāntika* schools.

That is about all the secondary references relevant to my present research that are available to me. I am, however, aware of several modern works in Japanese related to Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma. But they unfortunately remain inaccessible for us who are not versed in Japanese.

Meditation is chosen as the topic of this thesis because the goal of Buddhism is spiritual liberation. Edward Conze even thinks that all doctrines of Buddhism must be considered in reference to is spiritual intention and as a formulation of meditational experience. Abhidharma studies in true sense is not scholactiasṁ but one with true spiritual commitment to Buddhist practice as one of the most important definitions of Abhidharma is "face to face, directly (Abhi) into dharma whereas dharma implies true characteristic of dharmas or *Nirvāṇa*. In other words, Abhidharma is that which leads to the direct

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realization of reality or liberation. It is a Buddhist system for true spiritual attainment.

The *Abhidarma-mahāvibhāṣā* is the main reference of this thesis because it is one of those texts preserved only in Chinese. As a matter of fact, it may even be claimed to be the most important text in connection, being encyclopedic in scope. It consists of 200 fascicles (卷) in Xuan Zang's translation, and discusses the doctrines of all the Buddhist schools and masters known to its compilers. Its value is all the more enhanced by the fact that it is the earliest extant record (completed around mid second century A.D.) of the orthodox Sarvāstivādins. The present study will primarily be based on this text, and is believed to yield significant information pertaining to the system of meditational practices as preserved and transmitted by the orthodox Sarvāstivādin-s. With these information systematically analyzed and understood, we shall then be ready for a better understanding or many of its doctrinal expositions hitherto remaining oblique on account of their intrinsic connection with these practices.

The scope of my research, based primarily on the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, is as follows:

(i)  A detailed expositions of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*,

(ii)  A descriptive structures of *dhyāna* and other *samāpatti*-s.

(iii) The preparatory path that pertains to meditation.

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(iv) Illustration of the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharmization of spiritual practices.

(v) Some of the important abhidharma controversies concerning the meditation system as recorded in this text will also be discussed.

In analyzing the data in the *Mahāvibhāṣā,* the study will utilize two other important texts on a comparative basis: the *Abhidarma-kośabhāṣya and Nyāyānusāra* (also extant only in Chinese). The former is a masterpiece of Abhidarma doctrines by one of the most brilliant ancient Buddhist masters, Vasubandhu, and its importance therefore cannot be overlooked by any Buddhist research dealing with Abhidarma. However, it is known to be biased towards the *Sautrāntika* the main opponent of the Sarvāstivāda, and its expositions on the Sarvāstivāda system must therefore be carefully checked using the *Nyāyānusāra*, whose equally brilliant author, Saṃghabhadra, is a staunch Sarvāstivādin. As Saṃghabhadra belongs to the Vaibhāṣika school which takes the *Mahāvibhāṣā* as its supreme authority, we shall, through a comparative analysis, be enabled to check the orthodoxy and accuracy of his Sarvāstivādin expositions, as well as to detect the important doctrinal development of the Sarvāstivāda orthodoxy since the compilation of the *Mahāvibhāṣā*.

It is hereby gratefully acknowledged that I have in numerous places based my undertanding of the Sarvāstivāda doctrines and interpretations of doctrinal categories on the above-mentioned three books authored by Professor KL

Dhammajoti, as well as the contents of various lectures given by him during 2004—2008 in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The bulk of my thesis and all impeffecions contained in the following pages are, of course, my own responsibilities.

## 1.2 The Origin and the nature of Abhidharma

Early Buddhist scriptures are traditionally classified into three collections (*tripiṭaka-s*) namely *sūtra*, *vinaya* and *abhidharma*. According to Buddhaghosa[1], the vinaya is the discourse on injunctions, the *sūtra* is the popular discourse, and the *abhidharma* is the discourse on ultimate truths.

*Sūtra* comprises canonical scriptures that are records of the oral teachings of Gautama Buddha. *Vinaya* is the regulatory framework for the sangha (Buddhist monastic community), based on canonical texts called *Vinaya Pitaka*. Abhidharma comprises of Buddhist scriptures that attempts to provide a systematic description and scholastic analysis of the teachings of Buddha.

## 1.2.1 The Origin of Abhidharma

Most of the early Buddhist schools may have their own sets of Abhidharma texts, but only two sets, i.e. seven texts of the Theravāda in *Pāli* and seven texts of the Sarvāstivāda in Chinese translation, have been handed down. Though Abhidharma was developed gradually and, to a certain extent, systematically throughout a period of time, both Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda schools regarded the texts as originated from Buddha himself. The *Attanasālini* of the Theravāda regards Buddha as the first Ābhidarmmika. In the Sarvāstivāda, the introduction of *Abhidharma-mahā-vibhāṣa-śāstra* (the MVŚ)[2] also says that Buddha is the one who taught *Abhidharma–Jñānaprasthāna-śāstra* (*JPS*) because what the texts reveal are *dharmas* with profound intrinsic nature which can only be discoursed ultimately by Buddha who possesses profound/ultimate wisdom.[3]

KL Dhammajoti points out that Abhidharma has its origin probably in the *sūtra*-s,[4] particularly the following categories of *sūtra*-s which contributed to its development aiming at revealing the profound teachings of Buddha:[5]

a) Those featuring *abhidharma-kathā* — a solemn dialogue between two *bhikṣu*-s concerning the spiritual path; others listening are not permitted to interrupt.

b) Those featuring *vedalla* (Skt. *Vaidalya*): derived from √*dal*

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meaning to 'crack'/'open', this feature signifies the extensive unraveling of the profound doctrinal meanings that have been hidden.

c) Those featuring the *vibhaṅga* ('analysis/exposition') style — a brief, summarized teaching is elaborated by the Buddha or a competent disciple.

d) Those featuring *mātṛkā/mātikā* — originally meaning a matrix or list of headings purporting to systematically summarize the Buddha's teaching.

e) Those featuring *upadeśa* — an expository or exegetical discourse.

## 1.2.2 Definition, nature and functions of Abhidharma

The MVŚ[6] records the opinions of various masters concerning the definition of Abhidharma. These definitions in fact also indicate the specific functions of Abhidharma:

i) it can properly and ultimately determine the characteristics of all *dharma-s*;
(於諸法相，能善抉擇能極抉擇)

ii) it can properly examine and penetrate the intrinsic nature of

all *dharma*-s ;

(於諸法性能善覺察能善通達)

iii)　it can directly realize (*abhi-sam-√i;*) and realize (*sākṣāt-√kṛ*) of all *dharma*-s;

(能於諸法現觀作證)

iv)　it can enter fully to the very bottom of the profound nature of *dharma*-s;

(法性甚深,能盡原底)

v)　the wisdom-eyes of the noble ones can be purified through it;

(諸聖慧眼，由此清淨)

vi)　it can skillfully reveal the subtle nature of *dharma*-s;

(能善顯發幽隱法性)

What it discourses does not contradicts with the nature of *dharma*-s;

(所說法性，無有乖違)

vii)　it can refute the different sayings of all outside schools;

(能伏一切外道他論)

viii)　*Venerable Vasumitra*: "it can always ascertain the nature and characteristics nature of all *dharma*-s given in the *sūtra*-s;

(常能抉擇契經等中諸法性相)

Furthermore, it skillfully discourses the practice of the eightfold noble path *dharma*-s;

(善說修習八聖道法)

Furthermore, it can realize *Nirvāṇa*

(能證沮槃)

Furthermore, it can repeatedly analyze all *dharma*-s from immeasurable perspectives;

(能於諸法以無量門數數分別)

Furthermore, it can skillfully realize and understand the nature of twelve-link conditioned co-arising *dharma*-s;

(於十二支緣起法性善覺了)

Furthermore, it can directly realize the *dharma*-s of the four noble truths;

(能現觀四聖諦法)

ix)    Bhadanta (Dharmatrāta),

"it systematically complies, organizes and analyses, with phrases, sentences and paragraphs, the *dharma*-s pertaining to defilement, purification, bondage, liberation, *samsara*, arising and cessation."

(於雜染清淨繫縛解脫流轉還滅法)

x)    Venerable Parśva, "it is the ultimate, determined, superior and non-erroneous wisdom"

(此是究竟慧，此是決斷慧，此是勝義慧，此是不謬慧)

xi)    Venerable Ghosaka, "it can analyse to the seeker of liberation engaging in proper practice what has not been understood: this

is *duhkha* (suffering) (苦), this is the cause of *duhkha* (苦因), this the cessation of *duhkha* (苦滅), this is the path leading to the cessation（趣滅道）, this is the preparatory path (*prayoga-mārga*)（加行道）, this is the unhindered path (*ānantarya-mārga*)（無間道）, this is the path of liberation (*vimokṣa-mārga*)（解脫道）, this is the path of superior advancement (*viśeṣa-mārga*) (勝進道), this is the path of the candidate (*pratipannaka* 向道), this is the acquisition of the spiritual fruit (得果).  It can properly analyze the complete and real truth (能正分別如是等義)."

xii)   *Dharmagupta*-s, "this dharma is predominant (此法增上)."

xiii)  As the verses said,

"Wisdom is supreme in the world (慧於世間尊)

It can analyse and determine (能抉擇趣向)

Because it has properly understood (以正丁知故)

And thus the definite end of ageing and death (老死盡無除)"

xiv)  *Mahīśāsaka*-s, "it's wisdom can illuminate *dharma*-s" (慧能照法)

xv)   *Darstāntika*-s, "*Nirvana* is the most supreme among all *dharma*-s, it is the second."

(於諸法中涅槃最上，此法次)

xvi)  Grammarians, "「*a*」means abandon, 「*bhi*」means ascertain

(阿謂除棄，毘謂抉擇) Because it can abandon and ascertain, it is called Abhidharma (此法能除棄抉擇故，名阿毘達磨) ."

"it abandons fetters, bondages, proclivities, secondary defilements and envelopments, it ascertains aggregates (*skandha;* 蘊), abodes (*aystana;* 處), elements (*dhat;* 界), conditioned co-arising (*pratitya-sumutpada;* 緣起) truths (*satya;* 締), foods (*ahara*; 食) and spiritual fruits (*sramanya phala;* 沙門果) factors conducive to enlightment (*bodhipaksa-dharma;* 菩提分) etc.

xvii) Buddhapalita, "*abhi* is a prefix which means "face to face" (阿毗者，是助言顯現前義) this dharma can induce all the skillful *dharma*-s, that is, all those *bodhi-pakṣya-dharma*-s appear in a face to face manner (此法能引一切善法，謂諸覺分皆現在前)."

xviii) Venbuddhadeva, "*abhi* is a prefix which means predominant. (阿毗者是助言顯增上義)" Because this dharma is predominant, it is call Abhidharmma (此法增上故，名阿毗達磨)."

xix) Venerable Vāmalabdha, "*adhi* is a prefix which means honorable (阿毗助言顯恭敬義)" "this *dharma* is respectful and honorable" (此法尊重可恭敬)."

According to the MVŚ, the intrinsic nature of Abhidhamma[7] is outflow-free ('pure') faculty (「無漏慧根」) of understanding (*prajñā-indriya*). This clearly indicates that Abhidharma in its true sense is not scholasticism or intellectual studies. At the highest level, it is none other than the attainment of perfect Wisdom (understanding) that liberates us from the bondage in *samsāra*. So far as this ultimate goal is concerned, Abhidharma Buddhism does not deviate the slightest from other the highest or absolute standpoint (*paramārtha;* 勝義).

The *Abhidharma kośabhāṣya* (the AKB) explains "Abhidharma" as follows[8]:

> Abhidarma in the highest, real sense is none other than the pure *prajñā* defined as the examination of *dharma*-s (*dharma-pravicaya*). Secondarily or conventionally, it also refers to the with-outflow (*sāsrava*) *prajñā*-derived from listening, reflection and cultivation (*śruta-cintaā-bhāvanā-mayī prajñā*) — innate or acquired, which helps to bring about the pure (i.e. outflow-free) *prajñā*. The abhidharma *śūtra*-s, too, inasmuch as they serve as a means or as requisites (*saṃbhāra*) to its acquisition, are also to be considered as abhidharma. Saṃghabhadra states:

> All the best discourses associated with *ṭadhiśīla* are called *abhivinaya*, as they are capable of being face to face with the vinaya. All the profound discourses associated with the characteristics of

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*dharma*-s are called abhidharma, as they are capable of being face to face with the nature and characteristics of *dharma*-s.

The characteristics of the abhidharma are distinguished from those of the other two *piṭaka*-s as follows:

The *sūtra- piṭaka*-s is the emanation (*niṣyanda*) of the Buddha's power (*bala*), for none can refute the doctrines therein.

The *vinaya-piṭaka* is the emanation of great compassion (*mahā-karuṇā*), for it advocates morality (*śīla*) for the salvation of those in the unfortunate planes of existence (*durgati*).

The abhidharma is the emanation of fearlessness, for it properly establishes the true characteristics of *dharma*-s questions and ascertaining fearlessly.

But the absolute level cannot be reached without going through the relative level. This brings us to the definition of Abhidharma in the conventional sense. In brief, it is that which can serve as the means to finally attain the outflow-free *prajñā* that is Abhidharma per excellence. More concretely, this comprises the with-outflow understanding derived from birth (*upapattikā*

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*prajña;* 生得慧), understanding derived from listening (*śruta-mayī prajñā;* 聞 所成慧), understanding derived from reflection (*cimtāmayī prajñā;* 思所成慧) and understanding derived from cultivation (*bhāvanā-mayi prajñā;* 修所成慧). It also includes all Abhidharma treaties that can assist us in this direction; it is in this sense that treatises like the *Mahāvibhāṣā,* the *Abhidharmakośa,* etc. are properly called Abhidharma.

> From this perspective, one must give rise to worldly understanding through cultivation because Heat, Summits, Patience and the Supreme Worldly *Dharma*-s can individually contemplate the four noble truths, it can also give rise to superior wisdom through contemplation including mindfulness of impure（不淨觀）and mindfulness of breathing (持息念) etc.; it can give rise to superior wisdom through listening including differentiation and development of unique characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa;* 自相) and common characteristic (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa;* 共相) of dharmas; and it also give rise to the superior wisdom through birth because with *tripiṭaka*-s and twelvefold division of the Buddha's teachings (十二分教), one can receive, sustain, think and observe in an undefault manner. [9]

According to the MVŚ[10], three *piṭaka*-s are regarded as either the same or different from each other. Some say that they are the same because all Buddha's teachings are originated from the same source of wisdom and

enlightenment, and equally sustained by the Buddha's power and fearlessness (等力無畏), originated (等起; *samutthāna*) from the same great compassion (*Mahā-karunā*). Some say that they are different in the following respects:

| | *Sūtra* | *Vinaya* | Abhidharma |
|---|---|---|---|
| Name 名 | *Sūtra* 經 | *Vinaya* 律 | Abhidharma 論 |
| Predominance with respect to supporting basis 依處增勝 | *Adhicitta* 增上心 | *Adhiśīla* 增上戒 | *Adhi-prajñā* 增上慧 |
| Elucidation 所顯 | Order 次第 | *Nidāna* introduction 緣起 | Native and characteristic 性相 |
| Emanation 等流 | *Sakti* power 力 | *Mahakaruna* 大悲 | *Abhayatra* 無畏 |
| Content of exposition 所說 | Various miscellaneous discourses 種種雜說 | Training factors *siksa-padani* 諸學處 | Examination of the *svalaksana* at *samanya-laksana* of *dharma*-s 分別諸法 自相共相 |

| Effect<br>所爲 | Planting of<br>skillful roots<br>種善根 | Maturation of<br>serial continuity<br>相續成熟 | True liberation<br>正解脫 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Stages<br>分位 | Beginner<br>stage<br>始業位 | Experienced stage<br>串習位 | Stage beyond<br>mental application<br>起作意位 |
| Progress<br>進趣 | Entering into<br>True Dharma<br>入正法 | Observing the<br>training factors<br>持學處 | Mastering the true<br>nature of dharmas<br>通達諸法真實相 |

## 1.3 Abhidharma as soteriology

It is a common misconception among most modern scholars that Abhidharma is metaphysics or philosophy or "scholasticism". It is theoretical, and not concerned with praxis and realization. The following is a typical example of such a misconception.:

> From the middle period onward, Abhidhamma were studied in the
> abstract and objectively, and the study for the sake of practice which
> had been traditional since original Buddhism became the study for

the sake of theory, detached from practice.[11]

As we have shown in the previous chapters, such comments are in contrast to statements from the MVŚ (completed around 150 A.D.) which strongly suggest that Abhidharma is also having a practical objective for the development of insight and is primarily concerned with the path to the attainment of ultimate realization through various practices.

A well-known professed practising Buddhist scholar Edward Conze remarks: —

> Buddhism … is essentially a doctrine of salvation, and that all its philosophical statements are subordinate to its soteriological purpose … each and every proposition must be considered in reference to its spiritual intention and as a formulation of meditational experiences acquired in the course of the process of winning salvation. [12]

Conze's comment highlights the importance of spiritual liberation in the so-called "Buddhist philosophy."  This is particularly true for Abhidharma where the nature and functions of various paths of spiritual progress form an integral part of the study.  This fact is evidenced by the following two definitions of Abhidharma.

The AKB defines Abhidharma as follows: ——

> A dharma is so called because it sustains its own characteristic.
> This *dharma* faces (*abhi*) toward the *dharma i*n the highest sense,
> i.e., *nirvāna*, or toward the characteristics of *dharma*-s, thus it is
> abhidharma.

According to this definition, Abhidharma is that which leads us face to face
with —— i.e. direct realization of —— ultimate reality. Even Abhidharma studies
as a primarily intellectual discipline lead us to a true understanding of the
nature, i.e. *svalakṣana* and *svabhāva*, of *dharma*-s.

As another illustration, the great Sarvāstivāda master, Ghoṣaka defines
Abhidharma as follows:

> For the seekers for liberation engaged in the proper practice,
> [abhidharma] can analyze what has not been understood: this is
> *duḥkha*; this the cause of *duḥkha;* this is the cessation of *duḥkha*;
> this is the path leading to the cessation; this is the preparatory path
> (*prayoga-mārga*); this is the unhindered path (*ānantarya-mārga*),
> this is the path of liberation (*vimuktimārga*); this is the path of
> advance (*viśeṣa-mārga*); this is the path of the candidate
> (*pratipannaka-mārga*); this is the acquisition of fruit.   Abhidharma

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is so called because it can correctly analyze such meanings.

That is to say: Abhidharma is meant for the "seekers for liberation". Its ultimate concern is none other than the direct insight into the four Noble Truths — and as far as this is concerned, it is in perfect alignment with the purpose of the Buddha's *Dharma* as taught in the *Sūtra*.

From the above definitions of Abhidharma in the AKB, we see that "dharma" in "abhi-dharma" has two senses, namely, (i) true characteristics of existents and (ii) Nirvana. In other words, Abhidharma leads us to the development of a direct realization of the absolute reality or the state of *Nirvāna*.

Furthermore, in the absolute sense, the intrinsic nature of Abhidharma is in fact none other than the pure faculty of understanding (*prajñā*) itself. The mundane understanding and the Abhidharma treatises, in as much as they also lead us to Perfect Wisdom, can also be regarded as Abhidharma in the conventional sense. This is declared in the AKB:

> ko'yam abhidharmo nāma /
>> prajñāmalā sānucarābhidharmaḥ/
> … eṣa tāvat pāramārthiko 'bhidharmaḥ.//sāMketikas tu
>> tatprāptaye yāpi ca yac ca śāstram /
> What is this so-called Abhidharma?

It is the tainless (i.e. pure) prajñā together with its retinue.

This is firstly, Abhidharma in the Highest Sense. In the conventional sense, however, it [includes] that which leads to the attainment [of this pure prajñā] as well as the [Abhidharma] treatises.

In summary: Abhidharma originated with a spiritual motivation: It developed in the process of the disciples desiring to properly, fully, and systematically understand the profound teachings of the Buddha. In the AKB and *abhidharma* works subsequent to it, we can still clearly discern the firm conviction in the soteriological function of *abhidharma*. Thus, in the AKB the Ābhidharmika declares that *abhidharma* has been taught by the Buddha because it is the only excellent means for the appeasement of defilements enabling worldings to get out of *saṃsāra*:

Since apart from the examination of *dharma*-s ( = *prajña* = *abhidarma*), there is no excellent means for the appeasement of defilements; And it is on account of the defilements that beings wander in the existence-ocean. For this reason, therefore, it is said, the [*abhidharma*] is taught by the Master. [13]

Intellectual studies and Ābhidharmika analysis must serve the sole purpose of spiritual realization. This soteriological function is also brought out in the following explanation in the MVŚ regarding the practitioners of insight

meditation (*vipaśyanā-bhāvanā*):

> Those who mostly cultivate the requisites (*saṃbhāra*) of insight are those who, at the stage of preparatory effort, always delight in studying and reflecting on the *tripiṭaka*. They repeatedly examine the specific and general characteristics of all *dharma*-s, [—topics of fundamental importance for *abhidharma*].  When they enter into the noble path, they are called the vipaśyanā-type of practitioners (*vipaśyanā-carita*). [14]

The same text further explains the ultimate purpose of abhidharmic analysis which is to proceed from our deluded state and reach absolute quiescence through a gradual progression from intellectual to spiritual insight:

> One wishing to examine all *dharma*-s should first examine their subsumption (*saṃgraha*) in terms of intrinsic nature.

> What are the benefits and merits to be derived from the examination of the subsumption in terms of the intrinsic nature of *dharma*-s?

> It removes the notions of Self and unity and trains in the notion of *dharma*-s … which intensify defilements….  When the notions of Self and unity are removed, one is then able to gain the insight that

material *dharma*-s … will soon be dispersed and immaterial *dharma*-s… will soon perish…

In this way, one will come acquire the seeds similar to the gateway of liberation of emptiness (*śūnyatā*).

Examining that conditioned *dharma*-s are empty and not-Self, one will come to be deeply averse to *saṃsāra*, thus further acquiring the seeds similar to the gateway of liberation of the signless (*animitta*).

Not delighting in *saṃsāra*, one then comes to take deep delight in *nirvāṇa*, thus further acquiring the seeds similar to the gateway of liberation of non-aspiring (*apraṇihita*).

With regard to these three *samādhi*-s [of liberation], one generates the medium with the support of the lower, and the higher with the support of the medium, bringing forth *prajñā*, becoming detached from the triple spheres, attaining perfect enlightenment and realizing absolute quiescence.[15]

Saṃhghabhadra, being a prominent Ābhidharmika, emphasizes the importance of insight because out-flow free understanding is not intellectual but a true direct perception: —

… How can they, on the basis of language, give rise to all kinds of assertions to disturb the Noble Teachings and confuse sentient beings?  Thus, the principle of the direct insight into the Truths, explained by the *yogācāras* with the knowledge based on the true direct perception and passed down successively like the great royal pathway, has been split into various sectarian views.  However, we should find the means to distinguish the true from the false.  We must not make arbitrary propositions of our own.[16]

In the process of spiritual practice leading to ultimate liberation, it has a very high requirement with regard to meditational practice and also a high degree of *Abhidharma* understanding: — One is said to have accomplished the practice of mindfulness on the four-bases only when one becomes capable of analyzing the cognitive objects in terms of the atoms (極微) of a single moment, or in terms of a single moments (for sensation, etc.)[17]

Another example can further elaborate how spiritual practice can be Abhidharmatized.  A full integration of Abhidharma studies and spiritual practice is mentioned in the following extract from the MVŚ which discusses the preparatory practices for "Warmed-up": —

This involves the 3 *prajñā*:

First, prajñā from listening — Practitioner either through a teacher or from his own study of the *Sūtra-*, *Vinaya-* and *Abhidharma-piṭaka* comes to be wearied of the extensivers of the *Tripiṭaka,* and realizes that the gist of it pertains to the 18 *dhātu*-s, 12 *āyatana*-s and 5 *skandha*-s.  He then first examines the 18 dhātu-s in terms of their terminologies, specific and common characteristics, developing his knowledge and concentration.

He then realizes that the 18 *dhātu*-s are none other than the 12 *āyatana*, and does the same with them as he has done with the *dhātu*-s.  He then realizes these are none other than the 5 *skandha*-s, and does otherwise.

He further realizes these *skandha*-s together with the unconditioned constitute the 4 Bases of Mindfulness to which his practice must not focus: matter-aggregate is the midfulness-base of the body; sensation-aggregate, of sensation; consciousness-aggregate, of thought; ideation- and conditioning-aggregate together with the unconditioned dharma.  He then develops knowledge and concentration with regard to them.

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He further realizes these 4 mindfulness bases, with the exception of Space and *apratisaṃkhyā-nirohda* in fact constitute the 4 Noble Truths: the effect-aspect of the with-outflow *dharma*-s is *duḥkha-satya*; their cause-aspect, *samudaya-satya; pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha, nirodha-satya;* the antidote (leading to cessation), *mārga-satya.*

He then contemplates on the 4 Truths pertaining the sensuality-sphere and the 2 upper spheres sequentially, "as if observing material images through a veil". It is up to this point that he has accomplished the development of the *prajñā* from listening. On this basis, he develops the *prajñā* from reflection; and then, cultivation which is Warmed-up. …[18]

# NOTES

1 DhsA, 21

2 T27, 1a1-3

3 問誰造此論。答佛世尊。所以者何。以一切種所知法性甚深微妙。非佛世尊一切智者。誰能究竟等覺開示。

4 SA, 3: "It is generally accepted that the Abhidharma originated and developed out of the Sutra." And "The detailed exposition and explanation actually took the form of a commentary and the beginnings of the Abhidharma can be partly traced to it."

5 SA, 4 ff

6 T27,4a12-29, b1-13

7 T27, 2c23-24 (問阿毗達磨。自性云何。答無漏慧根。以爲自性)

8 SA, 12-13

9 T27, 3b5-16

10 T27, 1b25-29, c1-29, 2a1-11

11 EnB, 46

12 *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies by Edward Conze,* 213

13 AKB, 2

14 MVŚ,148b

15 MVŚ, 307a

16 NY, 686a

17 MVŚ, 940b28-c3

18  MVŚ, 34a-c

# Chapter 2 — The *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā* (MVŚ)

As stated in Chapter 1, this study is based primarily on the translation of the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāsā* (MVŚ; 大毘婆沙論) by Xuan Zang. There are two earlier Chinese versions of this text (T no. 1546 and T no. 1547), neither of which is a complete translation. I will briefly discuss Xuan Zang's version and outline those parts related to spiritual praxis. It is reiterated, however, that spiritual praxis is interwoven throughout the Abhidharma, and thus any attempt to demarcate it in the MVŚ must be seen as provisional.

The MVŚ, compiled by orthodox Sarvāstivādin-s based in Kaśmīra, purports to be a comprehensive commentary on the *Jñānaprasthāna* (JPŚ), one of the seven canonical Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma texts. The other six are the *Dharmaskandha*, *Samgītiparyāya*, *Prajñapti*, *Vijñānakāya*, *Prakaraṇa* and *Dhātukāya*. Of the seven, the *Jñānaprasthāna* is regarded as the most important because of its definitive doctrinal position and comprehensiveness. Traditionally, it is called the "body" (身) and the other six texts the "legs" (足).

This gigantic compilation, which was assembled over a century or more and completed around mid-second century BCE, is in effect an encyclopedia of the Buddhist doctrines of all of the Buddhist and heretical schools up to that time.

In addition to discussing doctrinal matters, it includes a large amount of valuable information pertaining to geography, social conventions and history.

The title, *Mahā-vibhāṣā*, literally means "Great Commentary." One of Xuan Zang's chief disciples, Pu Guang, explained the term as follows:

> [The prefix,] *vi*, means "extensively", or "excellently", or "differently". *bhāṣā* means "exposition/explanation" (說). That is: It is an extensive exposition because this treatise contains extensive expositions of meaning; it is an excellent exposition because it expounds the meanings excellently; it is an exposition of different [views] because 500 *arhat*-s offer different explanations on the JPŚ. The Sanskrit transliteration is preserved because it possesses all these three senses.[1]

According to Xuan Zang,[2] the MVŚ was compiled at the Third Council, which was attended by 500 *arhat*-s (those who have attained enlightenment) and organized by King Kaniṣka of Gāndhāra and Parśva. Modern scholars, however, have noted that King Kaniṣka is mentioned in the MVŚ as an historical king. Ven. Yin Shun argues that the MVŚ was compiled by various private assemblies of Kāśmīrian Sarvāstivādin masters and eventually put together as a large manual and linked with the King's name for the sake of elevating the position of the text. He concludes that the completion of the

compendium that was entitled the "Great Commentary" took place around first to second century CE, about six hundred years after the Buddha's demise.

This commentary on the JPŚ had a profound impact on the subsequent doctrinal development of Buddhism and broadly promoted the position of the Sarvāstivādin-s, especially the orthodox Kāśmīrian Sarvāstivādin-s, who henceforth relied on the MVŚ alone as the authority on the JPŚ. This orthodox group, based primarily in Kaśmīra, came to be called the Vaibhāṣika-s, a name that is derived from *vibhāṣā* (supreme power) (*vibhāṣā* + *ika* = *vaibhāṣika*). In addition to orthodox Sarvāstivādin doctrines, the MVŚ contains analyses and discussions of the teachings of other schools of thought to refute them and demonstrate the truth of those of the Sarvāstivāda. This appears, in fact, to be the primary motive of the compilation. It is very common to see the following statement at the beginning of a discussion:

> Question: Why is this treatise compiled?
> (問: 何故作此論？)
>
> Answer: It is in order to refute the other doctrinal positions and reveal the truth (what conforms to logical reasoning).
> (答: 爲止他宗，顯正理故.)

To elucidate Sarvāstivādin tenets and refute those of others, the views of the "four great *ācāryas* of the Sarvāstivāda" (有部四大論師) — Vasumitra, Dharmatrāta, Buddhadeva and Ghoṣaka — are frequently quoted, with those of Vasumitra generally regarded as having the greatest weight. The perspectives of many other masters are also mentioned in the MVŚ, including those of Pārśva, Pūrṇayaśas, Aśvaghoṣa, Śamadatta, Saṃghavasu, Dharmanandi and Vamalabdha, among others. In the discussion of the various doctrinal interpretations, the view of the compilers themselves is generally preceded by the term "評曰" ("comment"). These two Chinese charcters could have been inserted by Xuan Zang to mark the final judgement of the compilers, whose position is also indicated by the clause "如是所說者" ("*evaṃ varnayanti*").

In its commentary on the doctrinal controversies recorded in the JPŚ, the MVŚ shows advancement in respect of disputation techniques. For example, it employs logical tools in its argumentation. K. L. Dhammajoti remarks:

> Besides new doctrinal categories and developed arguments, we can also see in the MVŚ the employment of articulate logical tools and format. Even a brief survey indicates a definite logical methodology emerging on the part of the Ābhidharmikas during the 1st and 2nd century C.E. The conscious logical analysis of a debate made by the compilers may be said to represent more evolved and formalized

techniques and procedures of debate than what is disccrnible in the earlier abhidarma texts such as the VKŚ.[3]

However, while it is undoubtedly an invaluable Abhidharma commentary, the MVŚ, as a gigantic compilation, is not without serious defects as a manual, especially for nonspecialists:

But the JPŚ and the MVŚ, magnificent as they are, lack sufficient unity and systematization as a whole. Besides, the MVŚ contains frequent digressions from the main point under discussion and thus adds to the complication and confusion for beginners.[4]

The original Sanskrit version of the MVŚ is not extant. Fortunately, the text is preserved in three Chinese translations. The earliest translation was made by Saṃghabhūti of Kaśmīra in the nineteenth year of the Chien-yuan（建元）period (383 CE) during the Fu Chín (苻秦) reign, 14 fascicles (卷) of which have survived. According to its preface, the text was recited by Saṃghabhūti and written down in Sanskrit by Dharmanandi. It was first translated orally into Chinese by Buddharaksa, then written down in Chinese by Min-chih (敏智) and edited by Tao-an (道安).

The second translation, comprising 100 fascicles of which 60 remain, was translated from 425 to 427 CE by Buddhavarman and Tao-tái (道泰) from the original Sanskrit text of 100,000 *śloka*-s. It was brought into the Chinese kingdom of Liang from the West by Tao-tai.

The last and the most complete version is the translation by Xuan Zang, entitled *The Great Vibhāṣā* (大毘婆沙論). Xuan Zang brought the Sanskrit text from India. The translation, comprising 200 fascicles, took several years, from 656 to 659 CE, and was completed at Xi-ming monastery (西明寺).

These three Chinese translations are used by modern scholars for the comparative study and analysis of the MVŚ. The well-known modern Chinese Tibetologist and Buddhist scholar Venerable Fa-zun (法尊) translated Xuan Zang's version into Tibetan from 1944 to 1948 CE. This work remains unpublished.

## 2.1 Contents of the *Mahāvibhāṣā*[5]

The MVŚ comprises eight chapters called *skandhaka*s (蘊; aggregates): 1) Aggregate of Miscellaneous Topics (雜蘊), 2) Aggregate of Fetters (結蘊), 3) Aggregate of Knowledge (智蘊), 4) Aggregate of Karma (業蘊), 5) Aggregate

of the Great Elements (大種蘊), 6) Aggregate of the Faculties (根蘊), 7) Aggregate of Concentration (定蘊) and 8) Aggregate of Views (見蘊). Each chapter is subdivided into several sections called *āśvāsas*（納息）. This structural organization follows that of the JPŚ. Because the MVŚ is a huge text comprising 200 fascicles, even an outline of each topic discussed is far beyond the scope of this thesis. Hence, in the following survey of its contents, I provide details of the first two skandhakas in the hope that this will serve to illustrate the types of discussion and methodology contained in the text. The remaining chapters and their subsections are described very briefly.

## Miscellaneous Topics (Chapter 1)
## Supreme worldly factors (世第一法納息) (Section 1)

The first chapter includes discussions of the meaning of the Abhidharma by various Abhidharma masters. The view of orthodox *Sarvāstivādins* is explicitly stated: *Abhidharma* is the investigation (*pravicaya*) of *dharma*-s, and is pure wisdom (*anāsravā prajñā*). A justification is given as to why the very first discusion in the text is about the supreme worldly *dharma*-s, even though the stage known as the *nirvedha-bhāgīya* of the preparatory path (*prayoga*), which immediately precedes the path of vision (*darśana-mārga*), begins with "warmed-up" and ends with the "supreme worldly *dharma*-s." The three

intoxicants — greed, hatred and delusion — are discussed. Various theories are cited of the nature of the supreme worldly *dharma*-s (*laukikāgra-dharma*), receptivities (*kṣānti*), summits (*mūrdhan*) and warmed-up (*uṣmagata/ūṣmagata*),[6] and each of these terms is defined. What is included in and excluded from "wrong views" about "self" is addressed.

## Knowledge (智納息) (Section 2)

This is a relatively lengthy subsection, and the organization of the various doctrinal discussions is rather loose. The views of various masters are given concerning the nature of knowledge (*jñāna*) and consciousness (*vijñāna*), and the nature of each of these doctrinal categories is clearly distinguished. This subsection begins with a discussion about whether there is a knowledge that can know all *dharma*-s (i.e., omniscience). The answer is "yes," but it takes two moments (*kṣaṇa*) to achieve such knowledge because in each moment, knowledge itself cannot know itself, nor can it know the *dharma*-s, which are conjoined (*saṃprayukta*) and coexist (*sahabhū*) with it. These latter two types of *dharma*-s come to be known only in the second moment. The discussions in the JPŚ are commented on and taken to be a disputation between "Distinctionists" (Vibhajyvādin; 分別論者) and "Conformers to Logical Reasoning" (Yuktavādin; 應理論者). Vasumitra's view on memory is

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presented with regard to how memory and loss of memory occur. An Abhidharma principle is asserted: no two thoughts (*cittas*) can occur in a given moment, as two thoughts occuring simultaneously is tantamount to the simultaneous existence of two distinct individuals. Issues discussed in question and answer form include: Can two thoughts mutually be caused (*hetu*) or are they conditional (*pratyaya*) upon each other? Answer: they are mutually conditional, not caused. Does there exist the "equal-immediate condition" (*samantara-pratyaya*) in a future period of time? Answer: no. Other topics include why matter (*rūpa*) and the disjoint forces (*viprayukta-saṃskāra*) are not equal-immediate conditions; the nature of the three types of mental application (*manaskāra*), intrinsic/personal characteristics, common characteristics and resolve (*adhimukti*); why hungry ghosts (*pretas*) but not other types of beings can come to the spot where a ritual is being performed for their sake; whether the visibles are seen with one or two eyes; the nature of words, phrases and syllabuses; the Sarvāstivādin doctrine of the six causes; the various views on the conditions for conjunction (*saṃpryoga*) of thought and thought-concomitants; the nature of *karma* and retribution; and proclivities (*anuśaya*), among others.

## Persons (補特伽羅納息) (Section 3)

Dependent origination is examined in relation to the existence of a given person (*pudgala*). The intrinsic nature of dependent origination is then analyzed. Four kinds of conditions of dependent origination are discussed. *Karma* is distinguished as that which is done (*kṛta*) and that which is accumulated (*upacita*). The breathing at various stages of the meditation on mindfulness of breathing is described. The intrinsic nature of this meditation is stated to be the thought-concomitant called *prajñā* (understanding). This meditation in both its forms — the sixteen modes found in the sūtras and the six-stage exposition found in the commentaries and Abhidharma texts — are explained in detail. The three elements (*dhātu*-s), abandonment, calm and cessation, are thoroughly examined. The issue of the basis of support for beings in the formless sphere is examined, and it is explained that they depend for their continued existence on the vital faculty (*jīvitendriya*), group homogeneity and other disjoint forces.

## Affection and reverence (愛敬納息) (Section 4)

Different kinds of affection and ways of showing reverence are explained. Power (力) and confidence (無畏) are discussed, and ten kinds of power and

four categories of confidence are distinguished. The three kinds of cessation, cessation through deliberation (*pratisaṃkhyuā-mirodha*; 擇滅), cessation independent of deliberation (*apratisaṃkhyā-mirodha*; 非擇滅) and cessation of impermance (*anityatā- nirodha*; 無常滅), are explained. The nature and synonyms of nirvāna are elucidated, and theories about the different types of liberation are elaborated. Discussed are: aggregates, including the different qualities of aggregates; two types of complete knowledge (*parijñā*; 遍知) —— complete knowledge qua knowledge and complete knowledge qua abandonment (of defilements) and refuge in the Triple Gem.

## Shamelessness and moral immodesty (無慚愧納息) (Section 5)

Shamelessness (*āhrīkya*) and moral immodesty (*anapatrāpya*) are analyzed in detail. The two faculties, skillful roots (善根) and unskillful roots (不善根), are examined. Various theories of the reality of things in the past and those in the future are reviewed. Stolidity and sleepiness are discussed in terms of awareness. The function and nature of dreams are discussed. The compilers assert the Ābhidharmika Sarvāstivādin standpoint that dreams are true existents, and the opposite position taken by the Dārṣṭāntikas is refuted. The five hindrances（五蓋）—— sensual desire（貪欲）, malice（瞋恚）, torpor-drowsiness (惛沈睡眠), restlessness-remorse (掉舉惡作) and doubt (疑)

— are discussed. Ignorance is mentioned as the sixth hindrance and said to be the basis of the others.


## Characteristics (相納息) (Section 6)


Different categorizations of characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*-s) are given. Four characteristics of the conditioned (*saṃskṛta*) *dharma*-s — arising (生), duration (住), decay (異) and cessation (滅) — are explained, and death (死) and impermanence (無常) are differentiated. It is explained that although all four characteristics operate in the same moment, this does not contradict the doctrine that all conditioned *dharma*-s are momentary, for the four do not function all at once: arising functions at a *dharma*'s arising, and decay and cessation function at its ceasing. One moment is defined as the completion of a *dharma*'s arising and ceasing (一法生滅究竟名一剎那). In this context, an important question is raised: is there change (*pariṇāma*; 轉變) in the intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) of a conditioning force (*dharma*)? If so, then how does a *dharma* not lose its intrinsic characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa*)? If there is no change, then how can it be said to have duration and decay? The answer is that there is no change. A *dharma*, constantly abiding in its intrinsic nature and characteristic, arises when it gains strength and ceases when it loses strength; in this sense alone it is said to change. Or rather: we can speak of two types of

change, change in intrinsic nature (自體轉變) and in function (作用轉變). In terms of the former, a conditioning force does not change; in terms of the latter, it does.

## Unprofitable things (無義納息)(Section 7)

Good and bad meditation practices are explained. This subsection begins with an examination of the meaning of "face-to-face mindfulness" (*pratimukhā smṛti*), which is said to be established in meditation. There is a discussion of the crossed-legged posture. Contemplation of the impure is explained in respect of the different stages of the practice — beginner, mastery and expert. A discussion of the meaning of "having much desire" and discontentment concludes this subsection.

## Volition (思納息) (Section 8)

The nature and meaning of volition (*cetanā*) as a thought-concomitant is explained. All mental karmas are volitional in nature, which is (karmic) creativity. The three *prajñā*-s — derived from listening (*śruta-mayī*), reflection (*cintā-mayī*) and cultivation (*bhāvanā-mayī*) — are discussed.

Discernment of intrinsic and common characteristics is explained. Three types of discrimnation (*vikalpa*) — intrinsic (*svabhāva*), judgemental (*abhirūpaṇā*) and recollective (*anusmaraṇa*) — are defined and their nature explained. The ten universal thought-concomitants (*mahābhūmika*) are explicated. *Samādhi* is analyzed as being twofold, defiled and undefiled. The modes of activity (*ākāra*) and cognitive objects (*ālambana*) of samādhi are discussed. Other topics include: Knowledge and consciousness — which is greater? Conditioned and unconditioned *dharma*-s — which are greater? What is the nature of an ordinary worldling (*pṛthagjanatva*)?

## Fetters (結蘊) (Chapter 2)

## The unskillful (不善納息) (Section 1)

The three and five fetters and the ninety-eight proclivities (*anuśaya*) are discussed. The fetters and proclivities in various realms and at different levels of meditation are mentioned. The nature and meaning of a fetter are examined, and the three fetters analyzed. The nature and meaning of stream entry (*srotaāpatti*) and enlightenment (*bodhi*) are explained. The three unskillful roots — greed, hatred and ignorance — and their origination and consequences are discussed. Doctrinal categories related to proclivities, such as defilement (*kleśa*), outflow (*āsrava*) and flood (*ogha*), among others, are

discussed. The meaning of proclivity and the set of seven proclivities are analyzed in considerable detail. The abandonment of defilement and the two types of abandonabilty — through insight and through cultivation — are discussed. The five types of persons with spiritual attainment are distinguished: the follower in faith (*śraddhānusārin*), the follower in doctrine (*dharmānusārin*), one liberated through faith (*śraddhādhimukta*), one who has acquired insight (*dṛṣṭi-prāpta*) and the body-witness (*kāya-sākṣin*).

## Single round (一行納息) (Section 2)

"Single round" is a technical term referring to a way to analyze the interrelationships among several categories of *dharma*-s. For example, among the four types of *dharma*-s A, B, C and D, the analysis of the relationship between A and B, then A and C and then A and D is a "single-round" analysis. This method is applied to the set of nine fetters — lust (*anunaya*), hostility, conceit, ignorance, views, irrational adherence, doubt, jealousy and avarice. For example, if there is lust with regard to an object, then is there also hostility? (and so on). The analysis becomes increasingly complex, as these interrelationships are next analyzed through the consideration of temporal periods, and then using both methods. For example, if there is a past lust with regard to an object, then is there a future one, too? And, if there is a past lust

with regard to an object, then is there also past and future hostility? (and so on).

Five kinds of bases (*vastus*; 事) are listed and discussed. Combinations of fetters and their interrelationship are examined. The four kinds of existence and five kinds of the life continuum are explained in detail. The termination of defilements and their retrogression are discussed. A circumstantially liberated (*samaya-vimukta*) *arhat* can retrogress for five reasons: preoccupation with administrative matters, delighting in conceptual proliferation (*prapañca*), fondness for disputes, fondness for travelling and being constantly ill. Nine types of complete knowlege and their obtainment at different levels of spiritual practice and relinquishment are examined.

## Sentient beings (有情納息) (Section 3)

Fetters in each of the three realms of existence can be abandoned through the paths of vision and practice. The abandonment of defilement by an ordinary worldling through the worldly path of cultivation is discussed. Sudden and gradual abandonment are examined. In abandoning a defilement, the necessary sequence of the arising of the uninterrupted path (*ānatarya-mārga*; 無間道) followed by the path to liberation (*vimukti-mārga*; 解脫道) is explained. The

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various modes of activity (*ākāra*; 行相) and cognitive objects of the nine uninterrupted paths and eight-fold path to liberation are discussed in detail. The four fruits of spiritual attainment (四沙門果) are described. Intermediate existence is examined, and a controversy between the Sarvāstivādin Ābhidharmika-s and the Dārṣṭāntika-s is explained: the latter assert that an intermediate existent can be transformed as all karmas are transformable, whereas the former maintain that an intermediate existent cannot be transformed in respect of the realm, plane or abode of existence, as its karma is a very forceful one.

## Ten doctrinal perspectives (十門納息) (Section 4)

The twenty-two faculties (*indriya*), five aggregates, twelve bases and eighteen elements are defined and analyzed. Six kinds of consciousness are examined. The relations among the faculties and their corresponding objects and consciousnesses are discussed in detail. The four great elements (*mahābhūta*-s; 大種) are examined, and a distinction is made between conditioned space elements (*ākāśa-dhātu*-s; 空界) and unconditioned space (*ākāśa*; 虛空). The *dharma*-s are classified based on various doctrinal perspectives as material (*rūpa*; 色法) and nonmaterial (*arūpa*), resistant (*sapratigha*) and nonresistant (*apratigha*), with-outflow (*sāsrava*) and outflow-free (*anāsrava*) and

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conditioned and unconditioned.

One of the most important expositions in this subsection is on the Sarvāstivāda thesis of the tritemporal existence of *dharma*-s. Proofs for the thesis are given and the four famous theories proposed by the four great Sarvāstivadin masters — Dharmatrāta, Ghoṣaka, Vasumitra and Buddhadeva — are introduced.

The Four Noble Truths, their contemplation, known as direct realization (*abhisamaya*), their 16 modes of activities (four each) and their sequential order are explained. Other topics include: the four *dhyāna*-s (四靜慮), four immeasurables (*apramāṇas*), four *ārūpya*-s (四無色) and abandonment of the proclivities.

## Knowledge (智蘊) (Chapter 3)

Various notions and analyses of the Noble Eightfold Path are presented, and the 37 kinds of enlightenment (三十七覺支) are reviewed. Five kinds of views are analyzed. Knowledge of the mind of others (他心智), knowledge of previous lives（宿住隨念智）and knowledge gained through meditation practice are examined.

## Karma (業蘊) (Chapter 4)

## Bad conduct (惡行納息) (Section 1)

Good and bad conduct are discussed. The three kinds of karma (三業), bodily, vocal and mental, are examined, as well as karmic retribution. The five deadly sins, their retribution and the different types of hell are detailed.

## Bad speech (邪語納息) (Section 2)

This subsection includes the topics of bad livelihood and speech, how attachment, hatred and delusion can arise and homicide. A detailed review of intermediate existence is made. The five uninterrupted *karma*-s (五無間業) and four kinds of births are examined. Manifest and unmanifest karma are differentiated, and personal karma and the results are discussed.

## The Great Elements (大種蘊) (Chapter 5)

## [Matter] derived from the great elements (大造納息)

## (Section 1)

The visibility and nonvisibility of things made of the great elements are analyzed, and the spheres and termination of the great elements discussed.

## The conditions (緣納息) (Section 2)

How the great elements are conditions and their function as conditions are explained. Whether atoms touch each other is discussed, and the four stages of the universe — evolution, maintenance, decay and emptiness — are described.

## Views and insights (具見納息) (Section 3)

Great elements between *kalpa*-s (aeons) and those between lives are examined. The duration of a moment is discussed. Applications of mindfulness for the stream entrant and those for the once-returner are described. The fifteen gates to meditation practice and the number of faculties are examined, as well as the defilements that are destroyed by vision and those by practice. Supernatural vision and aging, and the attainment of cessation (滅盡定) are discussed. Acquisition (得) and endowment (成就) are analyzed. Meditative attainment and the relationships among concentration, meditation, the attainment of cessation and liberation are reviewed in detail.

Issues related to the five kinds of life cycles and the characteristics of a *bodhisattva* (an enlightened being who, out of compassion, forgoes *nirvana* in order to save others) are examined. Descriptions and comparisons are given of three types of concentration — emptiness, signlessness and dispositionlessness.

## The Faculties (根蘊) (Chapter 6)

## Faculty (根納息) (Section 1)

Twenty-two types of faculties are listed, and their nature, nomenclature, function and interrelationship are explained in detail and analyzed.

## Existence (有納息) (Section 2)

Existence is said to refer to the serial continuity of group homogeity and the five aggregates of sentient beings. Different types of the life continuum are discussed, and their relationship to different faculties and aggregates are explicated based on the Abhidharmic view. Where and how these continuums fall into different realms are explained. The cessation of different faculties at different levels of meditation attainment is discussed.

## Contact (觸納息) (Section 3)

The sixteen types of contact in the different realms are described in detail and analyzed. The cessation and transformation of various faculties are also discussed.

## Equality in *citta* [for all beings] (等心納息) (Section 4)

It is asserted that although the physical composition of different sentient beings varies — having different quantities of the great elements and derived matter — there is equality in respect of their *citta* (here, "mind"): for example, in a single entity, it arises equally and ceases momentarily. The various forms of *citta* of different sentient beings are described and their arising and cessation analyzed. The intrinsic nature, classification and various issues related to the cessation meditation *nirodha-samāpatti* (the cessation of perception and feeling; 滅盡定) are discussed in detail.

# Single *citta* (一心納息) (Section 5)

The following question raised in the JPŚ is taken up: are those *dharma*-s that arise, stay and cease together with the citta conjoined with it? It is explained that this topic is addressed in the JPŚ to refute those who deny this conjunction (*saṃprayoga*). Another question raised in the JPŚ — do those *dharma*-s that arise, stay and cease together with the *citta* take the same cognitive objects as the *citta* — is explained as being addressed to refute those who deny the reality of the conditions (*pratyaya*-s). The 10 meanings of thought-accompaniments (*citta-anuvartin*) are described: these are *dharma*-s, which, together with the *citta*, 1) arise, 2) stay, 3) cease, 4) have the same fruit, 5) have the same emanation (*niṣyanda*), 6) have retribution, 7) are equally skillful, 8) unskillful or 9) neutral types and 10) belong to the same temporal period.

Proper view (正見) and proper thought (正思惟) at the various meditation levels are analyzed.

*Samādhi* (定蘊) (Chapter 7)

## Acquisition (得納息) (Section 1)

The existence of past, present and future *dharma*-s is asserted to refute those who deny the existence of past and future *dharma*-s and affirm that the unconditioned *dharma*-s constitute the present. Acquisition and nonacquisition (endowment and nonendowment) of the tritemporal *dharma*-s are differentiated and explained. The Dāṣṭāntika denial of endowment as a real *dharma* is also refuted. The arising and cessation of different *dharma*-s in various realms are described.

## Cognitive objects (緣納息)(Section 2)

Eight *samāpatti* (八等至) are enumerated: the four *rūpa dhyāna*-s and four *ārūpya* meditations. Each is discussed in detail.

## Subsumption (攝納息) (Section 3)

Ten types of ideation (十想) are listed and explained. The subsumption of

various meditational levels and ideations under certain ideations, such as the ideation of impermance, is examined. The different attainments at various levels of meditation are discussed. The different levels of meditation attainments, especially the four *dhyāna*-s, are discussed. The five aggregates of grasping (*upādāna-skandha*), the five planes of existence (*gati*) and the five strands of subtle sensual desire (*kāma-guṇa*) are discussed in detail. Other topics include the seven abodes of consciousness (*vijñāna-sthiti*), the eight worldly *dharma*-s and the nine abodes of sentient beings.

## Non-returners (不還納息) (Section 4)

Five types of non-returners (*anāgāmin*) are enumerated: *antarā-parinivāyin*, *upapadya-parinirvāyin*, *sābhisaṃskāra-parinirvāyin*, *anabhisaṃskāra -parinirvāyin* and *ūrdhvasrotas*. Each type is explicated based on various *sūtra*-s. It is stated that if we analyze each in detail, we shall arrive at innumerable types of non-returners.

## Single round (一行納息) (Section 5)

The three types of *samādhi* – *śūnyatā*, *apraṇihita* and *ānimitta* — are

enumerated. The relationship between them and the four fruits is discussed using the single-round methodology described above: for example, is one who is endowed (*samanvāgata*) with *śūnyatā samādhi* also endowed with *apraṇihita samādhi*?

## Views (見蘊) (Chapter 8)

## The application of mindfulness (念住納息) (Section 1)

The intrinsic nature, nomenclature and sequential order of the fourfold application of mindfulness are discussed. Three types of the application of mindfulness are discussed, and their cultivation and function are discussed with reference to various sūtras.

## The three realms of existence (三有納息) (Section 2)

The various types of aggregates in the three different realms are explained, and issues related to these realms are discussed.

## Ideation (想納息) (Section 3)

The abandonment of *anuśaya* through insight or through cultivation is discussed. How defilements can be abandoned is explained in detail.

## Knowledge (智納息) (Section 4)

Ignorance and the abandonment of ignorance are discussed. The subsumption of the various *dharma*-s with respect to the Four Noble Truths is explained.

## Views (見納息) (Section 5)

Different wrong views are listed and explained, and their abandonment through insight is discussed. The disadvantages and destruction of wrong views are described and explained. Various similes are used in the above discussions.

## 2.2 The *Mahāvibhāsā* on spiritual practice

As noted in Chapter One, spiritual praxis, and not scholasticism, is the central concern of the Ābhidharmikas. Although they emphasize the study of Abhidharmic doctrines, this cannot be carried out without considering also spiritual practice. The ultimate goal of the Abhidharma is spiritual realization, that is, the attainment of pure *prajñā* to escape from samsara. The MVŚ mentions different types of spiritual practitioners, including *āranyaka*-s, meditators and *Yogācāra*-s. Throughout the text, discussion of topics related to spiritual praxis is interwoven with doctrinal exposition. The following represent the main references in the MVŚ to specific discussions of the various aspects of spiritual praxis.

### The path of spiritual practice

(T27, no. 1545, 3b)

(T27, no. 1545, 4a-c)

(T27, no. 1545, 6b26-29)

(T27, no. 1545, 11b-12a)

(T27, no. 1545, 16a10-18)

(T27, no. 1545, 21c-d)

(T27, no. 1546, 22a-d)

(T27, no. 1545, 24a15-19)

(T27, no. 1545, 25b6-9, c1-8)

(T27, no. 1545, 28a1-4, a11-15)

(T27, no. 1545, 29c)

(T27, no. 1546, 30a, b8-13, b28-29, c1-2)

(T27, no. 1545, 34c20-26)

(T27, no. 1545, 35a-b)

(T27, no. 1545, 38b-c)

(T27, no. 1545, 140b)

(T27, no. 1545, 205a-c)

(T27, no. 1545, 223c5-7)

(T27, no. 1545, 231c)

(T27, no. 1545, 232a-b)

(T27, no. 1545, 240aff)

(T27, no. 1545, 265aff)

(T27, no. 1545, 267a-b)

(T27, no. 1545, 276a-c)

(T27, no. 1545, 312b)

(T27, no. 1545, 315b)

(T27, no. 1545, 327c)

(T27, no. 1545, 341a)

(T27, no. 1545, 352a12-13)

(T27, no. 1545, 407a)

(T27, no. 1545, 410a)

(T27, no. 1545, 417c)

(T27, no. 1545, 906cff)

(T27, no. 1545, 926a1)

(T27, no. 1545, 933c)

(T27, no. 1545, 939a-b)


## 2.2.1 *Samatha* and *vipasyana*

(T27, no. 1545, 78b)

(T27, no.1545, 147c-148a)

(T28, no. 1546, 148b)

(T28, no. 1546, 149a-c)

(T27, no.1545, 279c-280a)

(T27, no.1545, 485c-486a)

(T27, no.1545, 527a-b)

(T27, no.1545, 905c)

(T27, no.1545, 919a)

## 2.2.2  The five hindrances

(T27, no. 1545, 194c-195a)

(T27, no. 1545, 249b15-29)

(T27, no. 1545, 249c)

(T27, no. 1545, 250a20-29, b1, b6-12, c19-24)

## 2.2.3  Mindfulness of breathing

(T27, no.1545, 132a3-6, a12ff)

(T27, no.1545, 134c27ff)

(T27, no.1545, 135a 5-b18)

(T27, no.1545, 136a1-16, a17ff, a22-b1, b1ff, b29ff, c26)

(T27, no. 1545, 662c8-10)

(T27, no.1545, 944a)

(T27, no.1545, 993c17-18)

## 2.2.4  Contemplation of the impure

(T27, no.1545, 2a)

(T27, no.1545, 3b)

(T27, no.1545, 53a-b)

(T27, no.1545, 58b)

(T27, no.1545, 204a-c)

(T27, no.1545, 205a-c)

(T27, no.1545, 206a-c)

(T27, no.1545, 207b-c)

(T27, no.1545, 208a5-19)

(T27, no.1545, 250b-c)

## 2.2.5  The fourfold application of mindfulness

(T27, no.1545, 724a1-15)

(T29, no.1558, 936c)

(T29, no.1562, 937a4, a25cf, b12-24, c5-15, c18-21)

(T27, no.1545, 938b5-20)

(T27, no.1545, 938cff)

(T27, no. 1545, 939a3-b6, 939b14-940a18)

(T27, no. 1545, 940b2-c17)

## 2.2.6 The nine sequential meditations

(T27, no. 1545, 412a)

(T27, no. 1545, 417c-418a)

(T27, no. 1545, 539a)

## 2.2.8 The four *dhyāna*-s

(T27, no. 1545, 416b)

(T27, no. 1545, 417c-418a)

(T27, no. 1545, 419c-420a)

(T27, no. 1545, 881b)

## 2.2.9 The eight liberations

(T27, no. 1545, 434b)

(T27, no. 1545, 727a)

(T27, no. 1545, 773b-c)

(T27, no. 1545, 776a)

1 《俱舍論記》卷 1：毘名爲廣。或名爲勝。或名爲異。婆沙名說。謂彼論中分別義廣故名廣說。說義勝故名爲勝說。五百阿羅漢。各以異義解釋發智。名爲異說。具此三義故存梵音 」(T41, no. 1821, 11a15-20).

2 MVŚ, 660b. See Yin Shun, 原始佛教聖典之集成 (*Compilation of the Canon of Primitive Buddhism*), (Taipei, 1971), 617ff.

3 SA, 128, 129, 132.

4 SA, 128, 129, 132.

5 In the following account, I have also consulted the *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, Vol. VII (1996), ed. Karl H. Potter.

6 I follow the English tranlation of K. L. Dhammajoti in his SA (Chapter Six).

# Chapter 3 – The Sarvāstivāda practitioners and the Path of progress

In chapter one, I argued that the whole tradition of Abhidharma has spiritual praxis as its central emphasis. Abhdharma doctrines in this tradition, such as those recorded in the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā*, were in fact doctrinal formualation of and conceptual development on the mediative experiences and doctrines of their meditators. In this chapter, I shall first discuss the community of meditators known as the *yogācāra*-s within the Sarvāstivāda. This will be followed by an outline of the different stages of their path of spiritual praxis.

## 3.1 *Yogācāra*s: The community of practitioners in the *Sarvāstivāda*

Concerning the relationship between doctrines and praxis in the Buddhist tradition as a whole, Edward Conze argues that each doctrinal propostion of Buddhism must be considered as a formulation of meditational experiences.[1] In a similar manner, Lambert Schmithausen, on the basis of the oldest materials of Mahāyāna Yogācāra, states that "Yogācāra idealism primarily

resulted from a generalization of a fact observed in the case of meditation-objects". [2] This conclusion, though stated with respect to Yogācāra, is in fact directly relevant to the Abhidharma tradition since the early Mahāyāna Yogācāra is believed by many scholars — and I, for one, cannot agree more — to have been evolved from within the broad Sarvāstivāda tradition in which the *yogācāra*s were a group specifically devoted to spiritual praxis.[3]

Indeed, a comprehensive study of the community of practitioners, called the *yogācāra*-s, within the Sarvāstivāda school, should throw important light on the evolution of not only the Sarvāstivāda, but also the Mahāyāna, particularly the Yogācāra school. In this context, it has been pointed out by several distingushed scholars, including Yin Shun, Lambert Schmithausen and KL Dhammajoti, that in the heterogeneous compilation of the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* (translated into Chinese by Xuan Zang in 100 fascicles), the first section called the *maulī bhūmi* (本地分) is essentially Śrāvakayāna in nature, taking external reality for granted. The relatively newly developed doctrines of "cognition-only" (*vijñapimātratā*; 唯識) and "store-consciousness" (*ālaya-vjñāna*) are conspicusly absent. These doctrines are in fact to be seen only in the *Viniścaya-saṃgrahaṇī* (攝事分), etc.[4] Among these scholars some believe that the Mahāyāna evolved from the Śrāvaka *yogācāra*-s from within the Sarvāstivāda lineage. Venerable Yin Shun is one of the chief exponents of this view. He has in fact demonstarted this evolution

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with regard to meditative praxis; more precisely with regard to the doctrine of "cognitive objects" (*ālambana*) for meditation. Comparing two passages in the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* expounding on the "purification of cognitive objects" (*ālambana-pariśuddhi*; 所緣清淨), he arrives at the conclusion that the Mahāyāna Yogācāra doctribe of the four types of "cognitive object as object-base" (\**ālambana-vastu*; 所緣境事) was directly developed from the doctrines of the three types of cognitive objects of the *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* practices of Śrāvakayāna *yogācāra*-s in the Sarvāstivāda tradition.[5]

Jonathan Silk draws our attention to the fact that the *yogacāra*-s figuring in the early Mahāyāna *sūtra*-s were highly respected by their monastic colleagues, including the seniors, as dedicated spiritual practitioners. The following is an example he has translated from a passage in the *Ratnarāśi-sūtra*:

> Monks, … for that (intent monk) *yogācāra*, who practices what I have taught, having enjoyed the robes, begging bowl … [obtained] from donors …, who sees the faults of *saṃsāra*, sees the impermanence in all conditioned things, understands that all conditioned things are suffering, zealously applies himself to the [fact that] all *dharmas* lack a self, and comprehends that *nirvāṇa* is calm, even though he consumes mouthfuls [of food] as great as Mount *Sumeru* [given as] a gift of faith, those offerings of that [gift of faith] are still completely and totally pure.   When [that monk]

enjoys a gift of faith … the maturation of merits from that [gift] for those donors … has great power … (tr. in J Silk, 2000)

Some modern scholars go so far as to suggest an "ascetic centrality" theory of the emegence of the Mahāyāna. They assert that the Mahāyāna movement was derived from among the ascetic meditators dwelling in hermitages. For example, Paul Harison (1995, 65) argues as follows:

Far from being the products of an urban, lay, devotional movement, many *Mahāyāna sūtras* give evidence of a hard core ascetic attempt to return to the original inspiration of Buddhism, the search for Buddhahood or awakened cognition.

From the above discussion, we may surmise that the meditators within the broad general Sarvāstivāda tradition must have contributed very importanatly to both the emergence and development of early Mahayāna. Moreover, since the earliest Mahāyāna Yogācāra doctrines can be traced to the Sarvāstivādin/Śrāvakayāna doctrines of the earlier (non-Mahāyāna) *yogācāra*-s, it seems quite probable that the latter must also have contributed importantly to the whole Sarvāstivāda path of spiritual praxis and progress which, as we all know well, were inherited and developed upon in the Yogācāra.

Etymologically, the term *yogācāra* is derived from *yoga* + *ācāra*.   *Yoga* comes from the root *yuj* which means 'yoke', 'correspond' or 'join', etc. *Ācāra* means practice. So *yogācāra* means one whose praxis is *yoga*, or more simply a practitioner of *yoga*.[6] This is supported by what we have seen in the above discussion.

Within the Sarvāstivāda, the term, used in this sense as an adjective describing a spiritual practitioner, occurs very frequently in the MVŚ. Nishi (1939, 1974:361) investigated the place of the *yogācāra* in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, and concludes that the *yogācāra* in India was a meditator and was the precursor of the *Chan* masters of China. As we have seen, it also occurs in some very early Mahāyāna *sūtras* like *Kāśyapa-parivarta* (大迦葉問經) and *Ratnarāśi-sūtra* (寶集經).

As a matter of fact, as pointed out by KL Dhammajoti, "*yoga*" used in the sense of spiritual praxis is already attested in one of the earliest Sarvāstivāda canonical texts, the *Saṅgīti-paryāya* (集異門足論). In a passage expounding on eight types of giving (*dāna*; 布施), it describes the highest type in the following words:

> for the sake of adorning the *citta*, for the sake of nourishing the *citta*, for the sake of nourishing *yoga*, for the sake of acquiring supernormal power (*adhijñā*), for the supreme goal of *bodhi*,

*Nirvāna*

(爲莊嚴心, 爲資助心, 爲資瑜伽, 爲得通慧, 菩提涅槃上義故施)

We find the mention of these same eight types of giving in the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* and *Abhidharma-nyāyānusāra.* On "nourishing *yoga*" Saṃghabhadra explains thus:

> "Nourishing *yoga*" – One practices giving for the sake of the successive causes for the bliss of *samādhi*.   That is: as a result of giving, there is no remorse, progressively up to [the attainment of one-pointed-ness].[7]

Concerning the   "*yogācāra*" described in the Abhidharma texts, KL Dhammajoti summarizes as follows:[8]

1)  *yogācāra* means spiritual practitioner in general; more specifically, it refers to a practitioner of contemplation or meditations i.e. those who are devoted to practice and actual realization, in contrast to the theoreticians.

The following example in the MVŚ[9] reflects this meaning in the context of a discussion on how the *yogācāra-s* practise the four *smṛtyupasthāna*-s (四念住):

> Upto this point, the *yogācāra-s* have ceased the ideations of the Self and of a Whole (*piṇḍa-saṃjñá*), and perfected the practice of the

ideations of *dharma-s* and difference. This is therefore said to *dharma-smṛtyupasthāna.* That is to say: A *yogācāra*, having analysed the body, comes to think of the sensation (*vedanā)* as the Self. Having analysed the sensations, he comes to think of the *citta* as the Self. Having analysed the *citta*, he comes to think of the *dharma-s* as the Self. Having realized the *dharma-s*, he comes to realize that all are without a Self; a sentient being is a mre conglomeration of empty conditions. Thus, up to this point, he has perfected the ideation of *dharma-s*, and it is called *dharma-smṛtyupasthāna.*

2) The appellation, *yogācāra*, is applicable to the three *yāna-s*; namely Buddha, *pratyekabuddha* and *śrāvaka*. This can be seen from the following passage in the MVŚ:

> Relying on the fouth *dhyāna*, the three *yogācāra*-s are able to enter into the Certitude of Perfection (*niyāmāvakrānti, samyaktvāvakrānti*)[10] and attained the outflow-free *phala* — namely, Buddha, *pratyekkabuddha* and *śrāvaka.* [11]

3) The *yogācāra*-s refer to a very broad spectrum of spiritual practitioners, and include those who are not yet an *ārya*, i.e., even a *pṛthagjana*.[12]

4) The MVŚ suggests at least when one is a beginner (初業者; *ādikarmika*) in the practice of the "contemplation on the impure" (不淨觀) — i.e., at the stage of *mokṣabhāgīya* (順解脫分) — one is already qualified as a *yogācāra*:

> There are three stages in a *yogācārā's* meditation on the impure: 1. the stage of a beginner; 2. the stage of an experienced meditator; 3. the stage of one who has transcended mental application. [13]

It is noteworthy that this stage of a beginner is stated to be at the stage of *mokṣabhāgīya*, and one is here qualified as a *yogācāra*. This is probably because this contemplation is emphasized, together with the "mindfulness of breathing", to constitute the two Gateways to Immortality (二甘露門), i.e. *Nirvāṇa*. According to the MVŚ:

> Those who practice contemplation (i.e. *yogācāras*) mostly rely on the gateway of the contemplation on the impure to proceed into the Noble Path (i.e. become an *ārya*) (修觀者多分依止不淨觀門，趣入聖道) [14]

In brief, a *yogācāra* can range from such a worlding up to the fully enlightened Buddha.

5) In the MVŚ, we see *yogācāra-s* living in the same hermitage, and sometimes discuss the *Dharma* which can help them in their spiritual insight, as in the account of *Dravya Bhikṣu*.(實法師)[15]

There are examples that the spiritual insight of *yogācāra-s* are highly respected by the *Abhidharmika*-s. Yin Shun[16] cites an example as follows:

> Comment (by the compilers): Whether there is scriptural support or not, there is definitely the *ākāra* (行相) having the *nairātmya* of all dharma-s as object.   That is, the *Yogācāra* masters give rise to this *ākāra* at the stage of practicing contemplation.

As another example illustrating the Ābhidharmikas' high esteem of the *yogācāra-*s, we may cite Saṃghabhadra's refutation of the Sautrāntikas on the authority of the *yogācāra-*s:

> Herein, the Sthavira Śrīlāta contradicts what have been said by hundreds of thousands of *yogācāra* masters on the basis of their realization through true direction perception.[17]

### 3.1.1 Summary

The term, *yogācāra*, occurs very frequently in the early Abhidharma texts, referring to a spiritual practitioner. From the above discussion on the community of *yogācāra*-s within the mainstream Sarvāstivāda, we can understand that there has always been a tradition within the school which emphasizes spiritual praxis and realization. The *yogācā*ra-s exemplify this. These *yogācāra*-s were highly respected by the Abhidharma masters through the ages, and in fact significantly contributed to the doctrinal development of the *Sarvāstivādin* Ābhidharmikas. It is in consideration of this fact that we are led to the conviction that *Sarvāstivāda* Abhidharma is inextricably based on spiritual praxis and its soteriological goal. It is therefore no wonder that expositions on methods of meditation abound in its Abhidharma texts.

Moreover, it is very likely that the early Mahāyāna Yogācāra evolved from a certain sector within the Sarvāstivādin community of *yogācāra*-s. It is even possible to see a link — as suggested by the "ascetic-centrality" theory propoded by some modern scholrs — between the emergence of Mahāyāna and these early *yogācāra*-s.

## 3.2 Path of Spiritual Practice[18]

As we have highlighted in the preceding chapters, material related to spiritual praxis abounds in the MVŚ. The Sarvātivāda school had developed a very comprehensive system of spiritual praxis consisting of articulate stages of progress. At each of these stages, very concrete methods of practice are described. This fact constitutes an important evidence in support of our thesis that the Sarvāstivāda Ābhidharmikas were no mere scholiasts, to say the least. Their ultimate concern was spiritual praxis that would lead to emancipation from samsaric existence.

The Sarvāstivāda path system is in keeping with the school's standpoint that spiritual enlightenment cannot be acquired abruptly, but involves gradual cultivation over a very long period of time.[19]

### 3.2.1 The stages of path of spiritual liberation

The complete path is usually explained as comprising the following five major components: 1. the stage of provision/requisites (*saṃbhāra*), 2. the stage of preparatory effort (*prayoga*), 3. the stage of the path of insight (*darśana-mārga*), 4. the stage of the path of cultivation (*bhāvanā-mārga*), 5. the

stage of the non-trainee (*aśaikṣa-mārga*).

Succinctly, the practitioner first embarks on this path as an ordinary worldly. Through systematic practice, he progressively eliminates — in Abhidharma technical terms, "abandons" (*pra-√hā*) — accumulatively more and more defilements. Eventually, at a critical point known as "direct realization" (*abhisamaya*; 現觀), he becomes transformed into an *ārya*, a Buddhist saint. But a saint as he is, he still has to further overcome the subtler and more obstinate defilements that still remain after the transformation. Finally, through repeated practice, when all his defilements are overcome, he attains the highest stage of sainthood, arhatship. This is also desribed as *Nirvāṇa*, a state of absolute peace and transcendence from all forms of unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkha*). It is only then that the whole course of spiritual training is completed, and he accordingly comes to be called a "non-trainee" (*aśaikṣa*).

### 3.2.1.1 Stage of Requisites[20]

There are important preliminary preparations which the practitioner must fulfill before he can even enter into the preparatory stage proper which comprises meditational practices. This is because in Buddhist tradition, meditational practices are inseparable from the total context of spiritual

commitment and ethical alignment. For Sarvāstivāda, the spiritual path is an integrated system of *śīla* (ethical observance; 戒 ), *samādhi* (concentration/equipoise; 定) and *prajñā* (understanding/wisdom; 慧). These preliminary practcices are traditionally summarized as constituting the requisites of meritorious actions (*puṇya*; 福) and knowledge (*jñāna*; 慧). They form a necessary part of what is called a "firm foundation" (*pāda-sthāna*; 安足處) for subsequent attainment. Thus, the MVŚ stipulates:

> These are preliminary preparations for one [aiming at] the fruit of stream entry: Firstly, because of his aspiration for the fruit of liberation, he diligently practices: [i] generosity (*dāna*) and the pure precepts (*śīla*); [ii] the contemplation of the impure, mindfulness of breathing and the foundation of mindfulness (*smrtyupasthāna*) ... [21]

It is not only in Mahāyāna that the practice of *puṇya* and *jñāna* is underscored. The Abhidharma tradition too, specificaly highlights its spiritual significance. In the MVŚ, it is explained that the *bodhisattva* (i.e., the Buddha-to-be), can enter the womb without any topsy-turviness on account of his being excellently equipped with *puṇya* and *jñāna*:

> According to some masters (presumably some Sarvāstivāda masters), on account of the very great predominance of *puṇya* and *jñāna* in the *bodhisattva*, when he is about to enter the womb,

he does not have any topsy-turvy ideation and does not give rise to any sensual craving. Although a Universal Monarch (*cakravartin*; 輪王) a privately Enlightened One (*pratyeka-buddha*; 獨覺) also possess *puṇya* and *jñāna*, they are not greatly predominance in their case; for this reason, when they enter the womb, they also give rise to sensual craving even though there is no topsy-turvy ideation.[22]

This Sarvāstivādin emphasis is consistently maintained in later time. Thus, the staunch Samghabhdra of the 5th century A.C. states likewise that a Universal Monarch, a Privately Enlightened One and a Perfectly Enlightene One (= Buddha) enter the womb differently. The first has proper awareness (without topsy-turviness, and hence sensual craving) in entering, but not in staying inside it and exiting from it. The second can maintain proper awareness in both entering and staying, but not in exiting. The third can maintain proper awareness throughout he three stages of entring, stayng and exiting. The difference is accounted for as follows:

The first excels in *karma*, in as much as he has cultivated extensive *puṇya*. The second excels in knowledge, in as much as he has practiced learning (lit., 'listening much': *bahuśruta*; 多聞) and excellent discernment for a long time. The third excels in both, in as much as he has cultivated excellent *puṇya* and *jñāna*

for many aoens (曠劫修行勝福慧故).[23]

It must be noted that meritorious actions do not consist in mere ethical behaviour in the manner of charitability, etc., but includes such practice as contentment and abstenance in sensual desire. Likewise, knowledge includes but goes far beyond mere intellectual learning; it includes those derived from meditation and spiritual realization. The following description on the Path of Requisites in the AKB brings out this point succinctly:

He who desires to see the Truths first protects the precepts (*śīla*). He then proceeds to receive learning which is in conformity with insight into the Truths, or listens to the meaning. Having listened, he reflects. Having reflected non-erroneously (lit., 'without being topsy-turvy), he applies effort to cultivation. In meditation (*samādhi*), basing on the [wisdom] derived from listening, the [wisdom] derived from reflection arises in him. Basing on the [wisdom] derived from reflection, the [wisdom] derived from cultivation arises.[24]

### 3.2.1.2 Stage of Preparatory Efforts (*prayoga*)

From the decription at the end of the preceding section, it should be clear that "preparation" in the broader sense should include the Path/Satge of the Requisites described above. In the more specific sense, however, the Stage of Preparatory Effort comprises seven components, devisible into two portions: (1) *Mokṣa-bhāgīya* — that which conduces to final liberation (*mokṣa*), i.e., *nirvāna*; (2) *Nirvedha-bhāgīya* — that which conduces to decisive distinction (*nirvedha*), i.e., the arising of the outflow-free knowledge. In the MVŚ, both portions are termed "skilful roots" (*kuśala-mūla*) in the sense that they both constitute the foundation (roots) for the insight into the Truths, transforming the practitioner from the state of being an ordinary worldling to the state of being an *ārya*. In the AKB, only the four subdivisions ('warmed-up', etc) of the *nirvedha-bhāgīya* are called the "four skilful roots".

### 3.2.1.2.1 *Mokṣa-bhāgīya*

The main practices in this first portion of the Stage of preparation, *Mokṣa-bhāgīya*, may be said to essentially comprise the two major components of meditation praxis, i.e. tranquility (*śamatha*; 止) and insight (*vipaśyanā*; 觀). For tranquility, the practitioner starts with the so called "two gateways to

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immortality" (*amṛta-dvāra;* 甘露門), i.e., *nirvāṇa*, comprising the contemplation on the impure (*aśubhā-bhāvanā;* 不淨觀) and mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasmṛti;* 數息觀). For insight development, he practises the fourfold application of mindfulness (*smṛty-upasthāna;* 念住). These practices will be introduced in details in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

It is very important to note that for Sarvāstivāda, *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* are not mutually exclusive. In fact, from the perspective of the Abhidharma doctrine of thought and thought-concomitants (*citta-caitta*), within the same moment of thought, there exist both *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*. (See *infra*, chapter four).

It may at first sight seem odd that this first portion, rather than the second, of the Stage of Preparatory Effort, is termed "that which conduces to liberation". The MVŚ explains that it is because when this portion is practised, one is decisively destined to arrive eventually at final liberation. This is comparable to the example of a traveler bound for a particular destination — once he has decisively chosen the destination, set foot on the right path, in the right, he is destined to finally arrive at the destination (provided of course that there is no abortive elements in the journey):

> The skilful roots of the *mokṣa-bhāgīya* — [the practitioner] plants the seeds that are decisive for liberation. On account

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of this decisiveness, he can [definitely] attain *parinirvāṇa.*[25]

The skilful roots of the *nirvedha-bhāgīya* are warmed-up (*uṣmagata),* Summits (*mūrdhan*), Receptivities (*kṣānti*) and Supreme Worldly *Dharma*-s (*laukikāgra-dharma*).[26]

The MVŚ[27] provides a considerable amount of details pertaining to the *mokṣa-bhāgīya*. One relatively more noteworthy information is that they are derived from *śruta-mayī* and *cintā-mayī,* not *bhāvanā-mayī prajñā.* This means that they result from studying the *Dharma* and reflection — which, as we have seen above, includes meditation practices — and do not yet constitute actual spiritual realization. It is also stated that these seeds of liberation can be planted only by those who have been disgusted with *saṃsāra* and are strongly inclined towards *nirvāṇa*. They may result from the practice of charity, or ethical observance, or receiving instruction in the *Buddha-Dharma*. In this connection, it is said that the mere giving of one lump (*piṇḍa*) of food or the mere observance of the eight precepts (*upavasthā-śīla*), etc., would suffice, if the practitioner is genuinely and deeply motivated for liberation in the act. Once these seeds have been planted, it takes at least three lives to attain the final liberation: in the first life the seeds are planted; in the second, they are matured; in the third, liberation is attained.

### 3.2.1.2.2 *Nirvedhabhāgīya* (4 *kuśalamūla*; 四善根)

The second portion of the Stage of Preparatory Effort is called "that which is conducive to penetration (*nirvedha*). Succinctly speaking, it is that part of the preaparation which leads to penetration — i.e., insight — into the the Four Truths. That is, it leads to the entry into the next stage, the Path of Insight. The term, *nirvedha*, is defined in the AKB as follows:

> *vidha* means distinction/discrimination (*vibhāga*). *Nir-vedhaḥ* means decisive distinction which is the noble path (*ārya-mārga*). [This term] intends that the abandonment of doubt and the distinction of the truths occur through it: 'This is *duḥkha*'; up to 'This is the path'. Its portion (*bhāga*) refers to one portion of the *darśana-mārga.* They are conducive to *nirvedha* (*nirvedha-bhāgīyāni*) because they are favorable to it on account of being its inducer.[28]

This portion comprises specifically the four "skilful roots": Warmed-up (*uṣmagata*), the Summits (*mūrdhan*), the Receptivities (*kṣānti*), and the Supreme Worldly *Dharma*-s (*laukikāgra-dharma*). These four represent four progessive stages, one leading to the other. In Abhidharma terminlogy, each is

the immediately preceding condition (*samanantara-pratyaya*) for the next. The first has mindulness as its immediately preceding condition, which means that it arises with mindfulness — that is, mindfulness developed in the practice of the fourfold application of mindfulness in the preceding stage of *mokṣa-bhāgīya* — as its necessary precondition. This is stated thus in the MVŚ[29]:

> Mindfulness is the *samanantara-pratyaya* of Warmed-up,
>
> warmed-up is the *samanantara-pratyaya* of Summits.
>
> Summits are the *samanantara-pratyaya* of Receptivities,
>
> Receptivities are the *samanantara-pratyaya* of the Supreme Worldly *Dharma*-s.

In contrast to the *mokṣa-bhāgīya*-s which come under the wisdom derived from reflection (*cintā-mayī prajñā*), the *nirvedha-bhāgīya*-s come under the wisdom derived from cultivation (*bhāvanā-mayī prajñā*).[30] This is to be understood thus: the *mokṣa-bhāgīya*-s result from studying the *Dharma*, particularly Abhidharma, and from reflection including various forms of various meditations — but falling short of what may be regarded as spiritual realization. In contrast, The four *nirvedha-bhāgīya*-s constitute quite tangible experiences, amounting to spiritual realization, albeit not with the type of thorough penetration or clarity into the Truths (see below, under Warmed-up)

acquired in the next Stage called the Path of Insight.

### 3.2.1.2. 2.1 Warmed-up (*uṣmagata*)

The term *uṣmagata* literally means 'gone warm' or 'become warm'. It can therefore be taken as an adjective. But it also refers to the state of warth itself. In fact, in the AKB, both *uṣmagata* and the noun form *ūṣman* occur in reference to this stage of progress. This is the first sign in the long course of the practitioner's spiritual praxis that the pure (i.e., outflow-free; *anāsrava*) knowledge is about to arise. The MVŚ explains that this is like the stage when, after rubbing two pieces of wood, one begins to feel tangily the warmth signifying that fire is about to come out of them.[31]

Warmed-up is a very lengthy process of practice which involves the practice of the four *smṛtyupasthāna*-s and ending with repeated contemplation of the sixteen aspects or mode (*ākāra*) of the four Noble Truths. The contemplation is carried out first with respect to the sphere of sensuality and then to the two upper spheres together.

The sixteen *ākāra*-s, four for each Truth, are as follows:

The seeing of unsatisfactoriness (first Truth) as 1) impermanent (*anitya*; 無常), 2) unsatisfactory (*duḥka*; 苦), 3) empty (*śūnya*; 空) and not-self (*anātman;* 無我); seeing of the cause of unsatisfactoriness (second Truth) as 5) cause (*hetu*; 因), origin (*samudaya;*集), successive causation (*prabhava;* 生), and condition (*pratyaya*; 緣), seeing of the cessation of unsatisfactoriness (third Truth) as 9) cessation (*nirodha;*滅), calm (*śānta;* 靜), excellent (*praṇīta*) and the escape (*nihsaraṇa*; 離); seeing the path leading to the cessation of unsatisfactoriness (fourth Truth) as the path (*mārga*; 道), the right method (*nyāya*; 如), the course of practice (*pratipatti*; 行) and what conduces to exit (*nairyāṇika*).

The contemplation of the four Noble Truths does not quite produce direct and perfect spiritual insight. It is a kind of veiled insight, like seeing pictures behind a veil.[32]

Warmed-up develops from the weak grade(下品), through the medium grade (中品), then the strong grade (上品) until it reaches perfection when the next skillful root, "Summits" arises.[33] It is liable to be lost temporarily. But once it has been acquired, the practioner is destined for *Nirvāṇa* finally.[34]

### 3.2.1.2.2.2 Summits (*mūrdhan*)

The four skilful roots are divisible into those which are not firm or fixed — i.e., susceptible to be lost, and those which are firm or fixed — i.e., not susceptible to be lost. Warmed-up and the next, Summits, belong to the former category, while the last two roots belong to the latter category. Because the stage of Summits is the highest of the fallible stage, it is called "Summits"/"Peaks"; the practitioner here either falls back or proceeds to the third skilful root.[35] It should be mentioned here that "Summits" is given in the plural because it is the thought and thought-concomitants that are being referred to.

The practice at this stage, as at the Warmed-up stage, consists of the repeated contemplation of the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths. But it represents a distinctly higher achievement, hence named differently from the first root.[36] Although the practitioner may fall back from the attainment of the Summits. But once they have been acquired, the practitioner will never fall to the extent of having the skillful roots being completely cut off.

### 3.2.1.2.2.3 Receptivities (*kṣānti*)

The Sanskrit word, *kṣānti* (< *kṣam*), should not be understood in the negative sense of painful or uncomfortable tolerance, but in the sense of being peacful acceptance. It is called Receptivity because it has the greatest receptivity to the Truths, being non-susceptible to retrogression (*parihāṇi*); and on this account, it is specifically said to be "truth-accordant"[37]

In the Sarvāstivāda scheme of the acquisition of the outflow-free knowledge (*jñāna*) in direct realization (see *infra*), the knowledge proper is always preceded by *kṣānti* which represents a very high degree of understanding bordering on actual knowledge. In such a context, both *kṣānti* and *jñāna* have the same intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) which is *prajñā*. That is to say, they represent two modes of understanding — knowledge is an understanding that is decisive, and receptivity still involves an element of inquiry.

Yaśomitra explains why this stage is so called:

> At the stage of Warmed-up, the truth is acceptable to one and pleases (*kṣamate rocate*) one weakly; at the stager of the Summits, to a medium degree. Immediately after that, receptivity now arises because of the greatest receptivity to the truths. … This is because Receptivity does not retrogress, whereas there is the possibility of retrogression from the Summits.[38]

Like Warmed-up and Summits, Receptivities can be attained or lost. Attainment is because of preparatory efforts. Loss is because transcendence of sphere or stage, or loss of the *nikāya-sabhāga*, but not through retrogression. It is superior and sharp because one who has attained Receptivities can never retrogress from it, non can he commit the *ānantarya-karma-s* or fall into the bad planes of existence[39].

Different from the previous two *nirvedha-bhagiya-s*, Receptivities have the application of mindfulness of *dharmas* as its objects both at the stage of imprint and the stage of increase. Like the previous skilful roots, Receptivities are also divisible into three grades: weak, medium and strong. In this Stage of Receptivity, the contemplation goes through a process of successive reduction in the aspects and spheres (減行減緣) to be contemplated, until in the two final moments, the practitioner contemplates only two aspects — impermanence and unsatisfactoriness — of the sphere of sensuality[40]. In the very moment next to the medium receptivities, the strong receptivities operate and the practitioner contemplates only the unsatisfactoriness pertaining to the sphere of sensuality, and he is now able to suppress (though not abandon) defilements to be abandoned through insight.[41]

In contrast to Warmed-up and Summits, One does not retrogress from Receptivities and the Worldly Supreme *Dharma*-s after they have been attained. Therefore, the former are said to be weak *nirvedhabhāgīya*-s, while Receptivities and the Worldly Supreme Dharma-s are regarded as medium and strong *nirvedhabhāgīya*-s respectively.

The *nirvedhabhāgīya*-s are also said to be of three types, depending on whether they are cultivated by the *śrāvaka*-s, *pratyekabuddha-s* or Buddha-s. If a *śrāvaka* attains first the two *nirvedhabhāgīyas*, one can become a Buddha. However, once one has attained Receptivities, one cannot become a Buddha because one's "family" (*gotra*) — i.e., as a type of spiritual practitioner — cannot be modified, after the attainment of Receptivities. The reason given for this in the AKB[42] is doctrinally very interesting:

> It is possible for one belonging to the *śrāvaka* family to attain in this family the Warmed-up and the Summits, and to become a Buddha. However, once the Receptivities have been attained, this becomes no more possible.[43] The Vaibhāṣikas explain thus: It is because the future unfortunate planes of existence are destroyed by the possession of the Receptivities. Now the *Bodhisattva*-s, with the intention of being useful to their fellow creatures, go to the unfortunate planes of existence.

This is explanation is of particular philosophical significance as many Mahāyānists claim that *Bodhisattva* and Compassion are confined to the later development of Buddhism into Mahāyāna. The MVŚ[44] clearly states that the *Bodhisattva*, for the sake of benefiting all sentient beings, vows to go to the unfortunate planes of existence. Interestingly, then, this so-called Mahāyāna philosophy is attested in the early Abhidharma Buddhist texts such as the MVŚ.

## 3.2.1.2.2.4 Supreme Worldly *dharma-s* (*laukikāgra-dharma*)

This stage is so called because the thought and thought-concomitants at this moment are the highest among the worldly *dharma*-s. Immediately after this moment, the practitioner sails into the Path of Insight (*darśana-mārga*) in which he will acquire for the first time a new series of pure (outflow-free) thought and thought-concomitants, discontinuous with the previously worldly and impure series. In the Abhidharma terminology, the thought and thought-concomitants called Worldly supreme *dharma-s* serve as the immediately preceding conditions (*samanantara-pratyaya*; 等無間緣) for the entry into Path of Insight.[45] In other words, the Supreme Worldly Dharma-s are the very last — and the most superior — moments of thought and thought-concomitants of the practitioner in the state of an ordinary worldling.[46]

The AKB explains the term as follows:

> They are worldly and are supreme *dharma*-s, because of being the
> best of all the worldly, they are thus Supreme Worldly *Dharma*-s,
> because of their bringing out the [Noble] Path through their [own]
> efficacy, in the absence of any homogeneous cause
> (*sabhāga-hetu*).[47]

## 3.2.1.3 Path of Insight (*darśana-mārga*)

The doctrine of the Path of Insight seems to be an innovative doctrine of the
Sarvāstivāda. It comprises 15 moments of contemplation on the four Truths by
menas of the pure — outflowfree insight. This is a very critical stage in the
whole spiritual journey of the practititioner. For, immediately exiting from this
path, he is transformed from being an ordinary worldling into an *ārya* — a
Buddhist saint. The contemplation receives a special name, such as
*abhisamaya* which may be translated as "direct realization. *Abhisamaya* is
derived from *abhi* + *sam* + √ *i*. The Sanskrit root, *i* means, here, 'to understand',
The two prefixes are significant: *abhi* signifies 'direct', 'face to face'; *sam*
signifies 'complete', 'perfect'. So, the whole term, *abhisamaya*, signifies an
understanding or insight that is 'direct'/ 'personal' and 'perfect'/thorough. That
is, it signifies a thorough insight into the four Truths that is directly realized by

the practitioner through spiritual praxis, not from the instruction of others or a mere intellectual understanding through reflection. This term has henceforth become a very important doctrinal term, not only within the Sarvāstivāda, but also the Mahāyāna.

Direct realization is the direct spiritual insight into the truths (*satyābhisamaya*) which, we may justifiably state, constitutes the very essence of Abhidharma. This is explicitly underscored in the following definitions, among various other, of Abhidharma given in the MVŚ:

> Abhidharma is so called because it realizes (*sākṣāt-√kṛ*) [the true nature of] *dharma*-s through direct realization (*abhisamaya*). ... According to Venerable Vasumitra, ... Abhidharma is so called because it directly realizes the four Noble Truths.[48]

In the Sarvāstivāda tradition, the doctrine of Path of Insight or *abhisamaya* becomes doctrinally indispensable in the explanation of spiritual progress. The Sarvāstivāda teaches that both an ordinary worldling and an *ārya* can abandon defilements; the former through the mundane, the latter, supramundane path. In this connection, the doctrine of *abhisamaya* becomes a *sine qua non* for the distinction between spiritual attainment through the mundane path in the case of an ordinary worldling on the one hand, and that of an *ārya* through the supra-mundane path. It is explained that whatever abandonment of defilement

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achieved by an ordinary worldling can truly take effect only when he enters into the process of abhisamaya. Stated differently: irrespective of the amount of defilements abandoned by an ordinary worldling, he can only become an *ārya* after having entered *abhisamaya*. Such is the obvious important of this doctrine of *abhsamaya* that Eric Frauwallner decided to coin a new term for it: "*abhisamayavāda*".[49]

Entry into the Path of insight is also called "stream-entry". [50] It is further decribed as entry into the "certitude of Perfection", *samyaktva-niyama-avakrānti*. Xuan zang renders this as 正性決定. Perfection here refers to *Nirvāṇa*. This refers to the fact that from now on, the practitioner is destined for final *Nirvāṇa*, and he is said to be able to achieve this final goal in at most seven existences.[51] This is because, now, with the outflowfree insight arising for the first time, he can abandon the defilements in the absolute sense — i.e., without them being capable of re-arising. This is in contrast to the abandonment as an ordinary worldling in whose case, the defilements being counteracted by means of impure or with-outflow (*sāsrava*) knowledge, can still arise. The MVŚ also gives an additional term from the perspective of the abandonment of defilements: *samyaktva-nyāma-avakrānti*. In this term, *āma* means "raw" — referring to defilements, *nyāma* (< *ni* + *āma*) means "separation from the raw".[52] Xuan Zang rendes this alterantive term as 正性離生.

This entry occurs immediately after the moment of the Supreme Worldly *Dharma-s*. In this Path of Insight, the direct realization (*abhisamaya*) of the four Truths take place within a sequence of 15 moments. For the fisrt time in his whole samsaric faring, the practitioner sees into the true nature of the dharma-s. The outflow-free knowledges (*anāsrava-jñāna*) that arise for the first time are therefore called "dharma-knowledge" (*dharma-jñāna*).[53] With this knowledge, he comtemplates the 16 *ākāra-s* of the Four Noble Truths (see descriptions of these 16 aspects explained under "Warmed-up" above) pertaining to the sphere of sensuality. Immediately after, he proceeds to contemplate the 16 aspects of the four Truths pertaining to the two upper spheres. The pure knowledges for this are now called "subsequent-knowledge" (*anvaya-jñāna*) because they arise subsequent to the contemplation in the sensuality sphere. But the orthodox Sarvāstivādins[54] insist that, like the dharma-knowledges, these subsequent knowledges are also direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) in their nature, rather than being inferential (*anumāna*).[55]

The MVŚ explains the sequence of the direct realization as follows:[56]

> Question : At the stage of *darśana-marga*, why does the practitioner realize directly the unsatisfactoriness of the sphere of sensuality first, and then the suffering of the two upper spheres?

Answer :    It is because of the difference in fineness. Unsatisfactoriness of the sphere of sensuality is gross and easier to be realized, therefore the practitioner realizes it first. Unsatisfactoriness of the two upper spheres is fine and difficult to be realized, therefore the practitioner realizes it later. It is like the practice of shooting, one shoots a big object first then a small object like the tip of a feather.

Question :    If this is the case, why does the practitioner contemplate simultaneously the unsatisfactoriness of the two upper spheres despite the fact that unsatisfactoriness of the *rūpa* sphere is gross and unsatisfactoriness of the *ārūpya* sphere is fine?

Answer :    This is because of the difference between the concentrated stage and non-concentrated stage. Unsatisfactoriness of the sphere of sensuality is categorized under te non-concentrated stage which is contemplated separately. Unsatisfactoriness of the two upper spheres is categorized under the concentrated stage which is then contemplated collectively.

Complete insight into each of the Four Noble Truths is achieved in two moments. a moment of the unhindered path (*ānantarya-mārga*) followed by a moment of the path of liberation (*vimukti-mārga*). In the unhindered path, the outflow-free understanding called "receptivity (*kṣānti*) to knowledge" arises to abandon the defilements which are called "defilements abandonable by insight" (*darśana-heya-kleśa*) — i.e., into the particular Truth. In the next moment of the path of liberation, "knowledge (*jñāna*)" arises inducing the acquisition (*prāpti*) of the cessation through deliberation (*pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*) of the defilement that has just been abandoned. For the Sarvāstivāda, this cessation is a true existent, a positive force which serves the necessary function of ensuring that the abondoned defilement absolutely does not arise any more in future.

The 15-moment process of the direct insight into the four truths is as follows:

1. *duḥkhe dharmajñānakṣānti*

2. *duḥkhe dharmajñāna*

3. *duḥkhe anvayajñānakṣānti*

4. *duḥkhe anvayajñāna*

5. *samudaye dharmajñānakṣānti*

6. *samudaye dharmajñāna*

7. *samudaye anvayajñānakṣānti*

8. *samudaye anvayajñāna*

9. *duḥkhanirodhe dharmajñānakṣānti*

10. *duḥkhanirodhe dharmajñāna*

11. *duḥkanirodhe anvayajñānakṣānti*

12. *duḥkhanirodhe anvayajñāna*

13. *duḥkhapratipakṣamārge dharmajñānakṣānti*

14. *duḥkapratipakṣamārge dharmajñāna*

15. *duḥkhapratipakṣamārge anvayajñānakṣānti*

16. *duḥkhapratipakṣamārge anvayajñāna* (At this 16th moment, the practioner enters into the Path of Cultivation).

The above sequential process of *abhisamaya* and progressive abandonment of defilements represent the Sarvāstivāda position that the direct realization into the truths is gradual process. To refute the opposite position that the realization is abrupt — held by the Vibhajyvādinas and the Mahāsāmghikas — the MVŚ quotes a *sūtra* in which the Buddha tells Anāthapiṇḍada explicitly that *satyābhisamaya* is a gradual process, like ascending a four-rung ladder.[57]

Stream entry is not susceptible to retrogression. The MVŚ[58] explains that this is because a very firm foundation for the Path of Insight has been built by successfully going through the preceding stages of Requisites and Preparatory Efforts:—

Question : Why is there no retrogression from stream entry?

Answer : Because of the firmness of its foundation.

What is the foundation?

It comprises the [following practices] of the seeker for liberation: giving; ethical living; engagement in the works of the Buddha, *Dharma* and *Saṅgha*; attending on the old and the sick, recitation of the noble words and expounding them to others, (this is the stage of Requites) proper mental application (*yoniśo manaskāra*); the practice of the contemplation on the impure, contemplation of the three meanings (三義), skillfulness with regard to the seven abodes ( 七 處 善 ; *sapta-sthāna-kauśala*), warmed-up, summits, receptiveities and the supreme worldly *dharma-s.* (This is the stage of preparatory efforts).[59]

Other explanations for the non-retrogressibilty of stream-entry are also given in the MVŚ:[60] It is a very swift process, without being held back or prematurely interrupted. This is compared to a person being swept forward by a rapid incapable of holding back. When the practitioner is on this path, he is being swept along by the mighty and swift current of the Dharma; he cannot but moves forward.

The Sarvāstivāda distinguishes two types of practitioners who enter the Path of Insight are: The weak faculty (*mṛdvindriya*) who enters wit the support of and with the sharp/strong faculty (*tīkṣṇendriya*) who does so on the strength of his understanding of the Dharma.   In the first 15 moments of the path, the former is called a 'faith-pursuer' (*śraddhānusārin*) and the latter, 'doctrine-pursuer' (*dharmānusārin*).[61]   At the 16th moment, the former is called 'one freed through predominance of faith' (*śraddhādhimukta*); the latter, 'one attained through views' (*dṛṣṭi-prāpta*).

## 3.2.1.4. Path of Culivation (*bhāvanā-mārga*)

Of the 16 moments in the process of *abhisamaya*, from the first to the 15th moment, the *ārya* is called the candidate for or "one who is heading towards" the fruit of stream-entry (*srotaāpatti-phala-pratipannaka*). At this stage, he has abandoned 88 defilements which are of the nature of cognitive error.   At the 16th moment, he is called the "abider in the fruit of stream entry (*srotaāpatti-phala-stha*). He is now attained the frst of four spiritual fruits and arrived at the beginning of the next stage, the Path of Cultivation (*bhāvanā-mārga*). Although already an *ārya*, he has still to eliminate the remaining defilements through this path, called "dfilements abandonable through cultivation (*bhavanā-heya*). There are 10 categories of them. Four pertain to the *kāmadhātu*, namely, greed (*rāga*), hostility (*pratigha*), delusion

(*moha*) and conceit (*māna*); and three each (i.e., excluding *pratigha*) pertaining to the two upper spheres. These defilements are colectiely divided into nine grades: weak-weak, weak-medium, weak-strong; medium-weak, medium-medium, medium-strong, strong-weak; strong-medium, strong- strong. These are to be counteracted in respect of a total of nine *bhūmi*-s — *kāmadhātu*, four *rūpa* realms and four *ārūpya* relams. This yields a total of 88 diviions of *bhāvanā-heya* defilements to be overcome. As the practitioner progressively overcomes more and more defilements, he attains the other higher fruits.

The term *bhāvanā* is from a causative stem of the root √*bhū*. It therefore conveys the sense of 'cultivation' or 'development' of the mind. This development, of course essentially relies on the practice of mediation. The MVŚ states explicitly that the two Paths — of Insight and and of cultivation, are not truly separable from each other, but are differentiated as follows: complete knowledge (*parijñā*) predominates in the former, and heedfulness (*apramāda*) predominates in the latter — but both *dharma*-s are present in both the Paths.[62]

In addition to the supramundane Path of Cultivation, there is also the mundane Path of Cultivation. It is through the latter that an ordinary worldling abandons his defilements. But because the counteragent that he can rely on is of the nature of impure or with-outflow knowledge, he can only abandon them temporarily. It is a distinctive doctrine of the Sarvāstivāda Ābhidharmikas that

in spite of this fact, the abandonment by an ordinary worldling is ultimately not in vain. This in contrast to the position of the Dārṣṭāntikas, the "abrupt-*śramaṇa*-s", and others, who totally deny the ability of an ordinary worldling to abandon any defilement.[63]

The mechanism of abandonment in the mundane Path of Cultivation also involves two paths (two steps): the unhindered path and the path of liberation. To overcome attachment to a lower sphere and go up to a higher sphere, he contemplates on six modes of activity (*ākāra*). In the unhindered paths, he reflects on the lower spheres as being coarse (*audārika*), unsatisfactory (*duḥkhila*), and like a thick wall (*sthūlabhittika*) — thereby generating disgust. In the path of liberation, he sees the upper spheres as being calm (*śānta*), excellent (*praṇīta*), and escape (*niḥsaraṇa*) — thereby generating delight. This mechanism is also interseting the perspective of Buddhist psychology: spiritual progress requires not only the negative mental state of disgust and disillusion in the practitioner; it is equally important, if not more, that he is positively inspired by higher states and higher possibilities.

### 3.2.1.5 The Path of the Non-trainee (*aśaikṣa-mārga*)

The whole journey of spiritual struggle culminates in the final stage known as the Path of the Non-trainee. The term "non-trainee" refers to the arhat. In

contrast to the other three types of *ārya*, the arhat has completed all training. He has no more defilement to be overcome, and his wisdom is perfected. Hence he is called a non-trainee. The other *ārya*-s are called trainee because they still have to cultivate and overcome defilements.

When the practitioner is in the unhindered path of the ninth grade of defilement pertaining to "existence-peak" (*bhavāgra*) — so called because this is the highest realm of existence pertaining to the *ārūpya* sphere — he is a candidate for arhatship. This unhindered path is is called the *vajra-like* (*vajropama*) *samādhi* because it is the most powerful of all, capable of breaking all defilements whatsoever that still happen to remain. When this ninth grade is finally abandoned, there arises in him the "knowledge of exhaustion" (*kṣaya-jñāna*), i.e., the knowledge that all his outflows (defilement) have been exhausted.

There are basically two types of arhats: the circumstantially liberated (*samaya-vimukta*) who are susceptible to retrogression, depending on circumstances, and the non-circumstantially liberated (*asamaya-vimukta*) or the immovable type. For some schools like the Mahāsāmghika and the Theravāda and the Vibhajyavāda,[64] arhats do not retrogress. The Sarvāstivāda, however, maintains that an *arhat* who has started as a faith-pursuer, is susceptible to retrogression. He is said to be one circumstantially liberated (*samaya-vimukta*). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the MVŚ speaks of

five causes for the retrogression of such an *arhat*: having too many undertaking, indulging in proliferation (*prapañca*), being fond of dispute, indulging in traveling, being constantly sick. In contrast, one who has started as a doctrine-pursuer is not retrogressible.  He is said to be non-circumstantially liberated and is called "one liberated through wisdom" (*prajña-vimukta*). If, additionally, he has also overcome the hindrance to *samāpatti* and can enter into the *nirodha-samāpatti* at will, he is said to be 'liberated doubly' (*ubhayobhāga-vimukta*) or "liberated in both ways".  The Sarvāstivāda distinguishes a total of six types of arhat-s, as follows:

1. *parihāṇa-dharman* — of the nature of retrogression;

2. *cetanā-dharman* — of the nature of being capable of ending their own existence at will;

3. *anurakṣaṇā-dharman* — of the nature of  being able to guard against losing what has been acquired;

4. *sthitākampya* — those being stable in their stage of attainment, with neither progress nor retrogression;

5. *prativedhanā-dharman* — of the nature of being capable of penetrating the state of the immovable type of *arhat*;

6. *akopya-dharman* — of the nature of being immovable (non-retrogressible). Types 1. to 5. are the circumstantially liberated ones, and the last type is non-circumstantially liberated.[65]

Immediately after the knowledge of exhaustion, the practitioner becomes an *arhat*. If he is of the immovable type in the *vimukti-mārga*, there arises in him the "knowledge of non-arising" (*anutpāda-jñāna*), i.e. the knowledge that the outflows will never arise any more. According to the Sarvāstivāda, the arising of this knowledge is necessary to ensure that he is absolutely free from all defilements. Another perspective of explaining the fact of non-retrogression of this type of *arhat*-s is in terms of defilements, their traces (*vāsanā*) and what is called nondefiled ignorance (*akliṣṭa-ajñāna*).[66] In the case of a buddha or an immovable arhat, he has at tis point absolutely abandoned all defilements along with their traces (*vāsanā*) and overcome the nondefiled ignorance (*akliṣṭa-ajñāna*). Otherwise, if he is a retrogressible type, there arises in him, immediately after this moment, the same knowledge of exhaustion or the perfect view of the non-trainee.

### 3.2.2. Sequential and non-sequential attainement of the four fruits

Before entering into the Path of Insight, if the practioner has not overcome any defilement by means of the mundane Path of Cultivation, he is called "one who is fully bound [by the fetters]" (*sakala-bandhana*). Upon entering the path of Insight, he begins to attain the spiritual fruits sequentially: Stream-entry ==> Once-retunershp ==> non-returnership ==> arhatship (*srotaāpatti,*

*sakṛdāgāmin, anāgāmin, arhat*). However, if he has already abandoned some defilements as an ordinary worldling by means of the with-outflow knowledge as counteragent, he can emerge from the Path of Insight either as a once-returner, or non-returner, depending on the amount of defilements he has earlier overcome. These defilements do not have to be abandoned again. But their corresponding "disjunctions" (*visaṃyoga*) — i.e., the cessations through deliberation (*pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*) — have to be acquired anew, now by means of the outflow-free knowledge. This means that the new acquisitions (*prāpti*) of these cessations are now of the stronger type, capable of ensuring that the defilements do not arise any more. These explanations need to be understood in the context of the distinctive Sarvāstivāda doctrine: Firstly, abandoning a defilement does not mean destroying the defilement as a *dharma* forever; no *dharma* can be destroyed. It means that a force in the universe called "acquisition" which has earlier effected the acquistion of that defilement is now severed from the continuum of the practitioner, and the defilement is now no more connected with him. As this happens, a corresponding "cessation" (*nirodha*) — a real force which is an unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) *dharma* — arises together with its *prāpti* which links it with the practitioner's continuum. This cessation, being a real force, contributes positively to ensure the future non-arising of the said defilement.

## 3.3 Summary

From the above discussion on the community of *yogācāra*-s within the mainstream Sarvāstivāda, we can understand that there has always been a tradition within the school which emphasizes spiritual praxis and realizations. The *yogācāra*-s exemplify this. These *yogācāra*-s, highly respected by Abhidharma masters, in fact significantly contributed to the doctrinal development of the Sarvāstivādin Ābhidharmika-s. It is in consideration of this fact that we are led to the conviction that Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma is inextricably based on spiritual praxis and its soteriological goal. It is therefore no wonder that expositions on methods of meditation abound in its *Abhidharma* texts.

In the second major part of this chapter on the path of spiritual progress, we see the Sarvāstivāda has developed a well organized fivefold path structure, with very articulate descriptions of the gradual practice and realization of the advancing practitioner. The structure as a whole suggests that intellectual understanding of the *Tripiṭaka* (with *Abhidharma* as the major emphasis) constitutes a very preliminary — albeit indispensable — step in the spiritual struggle. The ultimate goal is none other than the attainment of perfect insight which alone can liberate us from the saṃsāric predicament.

**NOTES**

[1]  Edward Conze, *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies*. Indian reprint (New Delhi, 2000), 213.

[2]  Schmithausen, Lambert. "On the problem of the relation of spiritual practice and philosophical theory in Buddhism". In : *German Scholars on India,* Vol. 2 (New Delhi, 1976), 239.

[3]  One the relationship between the Sarvāstivādin *yogācāra*-s and the Mahāyāna Yogācāra school, see also: KL Dhammajoti, "*Sarvāstivāda, Dārṣṭāntika and Yogācāra* — Some Reflections on their Interrelation". In: *Journal of Buddhist Studies* (Colombo, 2006), 184 ff.

[4]  KL Dhammajoti, "Emergence of Mahāyāna and Yogācāra". In Yogācāra Lecture Series, HKU, 2008 (unpublished).

[5]  Yin Shun, 印度佛教思想史 (*History of Buddhist Thoughts in India*), 244 ff. KL Dhammajoti, *ibid*.

[6]  Silk, Jonathan, 'The *Yogācāra Bhikṣu*'. In: *Wisdom, compassion and the search for understanding: the Buddhist studies legacy of Gadjin M. Nagao.*(Honolulu, 2000), 265 ff.

[7]  Cf. KL Dhammajoti, *op.cit*.

[8]  KL Dhammajoti, Lecture 1, Yogācāra Lecyure Series, 2008. International Buddhist College, Hatyai. (unpublished).

[9]  MVŚ, 939 a-b: ... 齊此諸瑜伽師我想一合想皆得止息。法想差別想修習圓滿。故名法念住。謂瑜伽師分析身已便計受爲我。分析受已。便計心爲我分析心已。便計法爲我分析法已。便知一切非我有情唯空行聚。是故齊此

法想圓滿名法念住.

10  For an explanation of this term, see SA, 594 ff.

11  MVŚ, 417c: 第四靜慮三瑜伽師依之得入正性離生， 得果盡漏。謂佛獨覺
    及諸聲聞. Nishi, 227.

12  MVŚ, 341a, 407a; Nishi, 227, 228.

13  MVŚ, 205b: 瑜伽師修不淨觀總有三位，一初習業位，二已熟修位，三超
    作意位. Nishi, 230.

14  MVŚ, 205a-c.

15  MVŚ, 38b-c; Nishi, 232.

16  *Study*, 615.

17  Ny, 686a: 此中上座，違越百千瑜伽師依真現量證所說 …

18  *Cf*. SA, 4ᵗʰ edition, chapter 15.

19  In MVŚ, 327c., the Buddha is cited as saying that to reach the state of
    Buddhahood, one must practise for three *asaṃkhyeya-kalpa*-s
    (innumerable aoens) to cumulatively and gradually fulfill the six
    *pāramitā*-s to finally acquire true insight and omniscience.

20  SA, 569-570.

21  MVŚ, 3b. Translation is based on that by KL Dhammajoti in SA, 567, 568.

22  MVŚ, 363c ：「有餘師說。菩薩福慧極增上故將入胎時無顛倒想不起婬
    愛。輪王獨覺雖有福慧非極增上。將入胎時雖無倒想亦起婬愛故。入胎位
    必從生門」

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23  MVŚ, 479a ：「又前三種入胎不同。謂轉輪王。獨覺大覺。如其次第。初入胎者。謂轉輪王。入位正知。非[1]住非出。二入胎者。謂獨勝覺。入住正知。非於出位。三入胎者。謂無上覺。入住出位。皆能正知。此初三人。以當名顯復有差別。如次應知業智及俱三種勝故。第一業勝。宿世曾修廣大福故。第二智勝。久習多聞勝思擇故。第三俱勝。曠劫修行勝福慧故。」

24  AKB, 334: satyāni hi draṣṭukāma ādita eva śīlaṃ pālayati | tata satyadarśanasyānulomaṃ śrutam udgṛhṇāty arthaṃ vā śruṇoti | śrutvā cintayati | aviparītaṃ cintayitvā bhāvanāyāṃ prayujyate | samādhau tasya śrutamayīṃ prajñāṃ niśritya cintāmayī jāyate | cintāmayīṃ niśritya bhāvanāmayī jāyate |

25  MVŚ, 35a4-6.

26  MVŚ, 35a6-7.

27  MVŚ, 35a-b; SA, pp 572-274.

28  AKB, 346. Translation adapted from SA, 578.

29  MVŚ, 30a.

30  MVŚ, 3b.

31  MVŚ, 28a.

32  MVŚ, 34c20-26.

33  AKB, 119b20-21.

34  MVŚ, 30b.

35  *Cf*. AKB, 344; MVŚ, 25c.

36   AKB, 344.

37   MVŚ, 24a ff.

38   Vy, 533. English translation from SA, 583.

39   MVŚ, 30b28-29, c1-2.

40   AKB, 119c2-12.

41   See SA, 583.

42   AKB(C), 23c-d.

43   *Vibhāṣā*, TD27, 352a14.

44   MVŚ, 352a12-13.

45   MVŚ, 6b26-29.

46   *Cf.* MVŚ, 5a ff.

47   AKB, 345: laukikāścaite'grāśca dharmāḥ │ sarvalaukikaśreṣṭhatvād iti laukikāgradharmāḥ │ vinā sabhāgahetunā mārgasya tatpuruṣakāreṇākarṣaṇāt │ See also: MVŚ, 11b7-10.

48   MVŚ, 4a-b.

49   E. Frauwallner, *Studies in Abhidharma Literature and the Origins of Buddhist Philosophical Systems*. English tr. by Sophie Francis Kidd (New York, 1995), 149 ff.

50   "Stream entry" is explained in MVŚ, 240a. *Cf.* AKB, 356.

51   AKB, 356.

52   MVŚ, 12a.

53   AKB, 350, Also Entrance 217f., n.446.

[54]  Samghabhadra for one — cf. Ny, 735c.

[55]  For a good discussion of tghis term, see SA, 589 and notes 76 and 77.

[56]  MVŚ, 16 a10-18.

[57]  MVŚ, 265a4-6.

[58]  MVŚ, 933c.

[59]  Translation by KL Dhammajoti, in SA, 569.

[60]  Cf. MVŚ, 265a ff.

[61]  Vy 548.

[62]  Vasumitra and others offer some other explanations on the distinction of the two paths. Cf. MVŚ, 276a-c.

[63]  See MVŚ, 465c; etc.

[64]  MVŚ, 312b. Also: T49, 15c; T41, 375a.

[65]  AKB, 372ff, MVŚ, 315b.

[66]  See SA, 464 ff.

# Chapter 4 — *Śamatha* and *Vipaśyanā*

Concerning the relationship between doctrines and praxis in the Buddhist tradition as a whole, Edward Conze argues that each doctrinal propostion of Buddhism must be considered as a formulation of meditational experiences.[1] In a similar manner, Lambert Schmithausen, on the basis of the oldest materials of Mahāyāna Yogācāra, states that "Yogācāra idealism primarily resulted from a generalization of a fact observed in the case of meditation-objects". [2] This conclusion, though stated with respect to Yogācāra, is directly relevant to the Abhidharma tradition since the early Mahāyāna Yogācāra was evolved from within the broad Sarvāstivāda tradition in which the *yogācāra*s were a group specifically devoted to spiritual praxis.[3]

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the major part of the Sarvāstivāda scheme of spiritual praxis consists of *śamatha* (calm) and *vipaśyanā* (insight). This is true throughout all the five stages of spiritual progess starting with the stage of Preparatory Effort. It is therefore clear that *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* are two branches of mental development which are of central importance in the spiritual practice of Buddhism. The reason for this is not far to seek. The practitioner requires calming or concentration to develop insight which in turn facilitates a higher level of concentration and insight. That is to say, they are to be repeatedly practiced at progressively higher and higher levels through the

various stages of spiritual progress until finally direct realization or ultimate wisdom is attained.

In this context, for the Sarvāstivādins, *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* are not viewed as mutually exclusive practices. In fact, they are complimentary to each other. In order to attain enlightenment, one needs to co-ordinate the two practices in a perfectly skillful and balanced manner. In the Sarvastivāda discussion on the uniqueness of the four fundamental *dhyāna*-s, one important point of emphasis is that only these four so called *dhyāna* because in them *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* are mutually balanced. In this connection, it should be noted that in the Noble Eightfold Path prescribed by the Buddha for the attainment of enlightenment, "Proper Meditation (*samyak-samādhi*) is defined in terms of the *dhyāna*. That is to say: An essential part of this path consists of meditative training, and this training is the practice of *dhyāna* characterized by the harmonized balance of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*.

Among the ancient Sarvāstivādins, it was the Dārṣṭāntikas, well known for advocating meditative praxis, [4] who distinctively describe this path as comprising *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*. That is, whereas early Buddhism and the Ābhidharmikas would generally prescribe the path as the Noble Eight-fold Path (*āṣṭāṅgika-mārga*; 八正道) of which meditation (*samādhi*) is one of the limb (*aṅga*); for the Dārṣṭāntikas: "*śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* constitute the Truth

of the Path [to the cessation of *duḥkha*].[5] In other words, it is *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* that can lead to the total cessation of *duḥkha*.

The emphasis on their complimentarity and mutually balancing is also to be found in the Theravāda tradition. In the words of a modern Theravāda scholar:

> The central point that emerges when considering the relationship between calm and insight is the need for balance. Since a concentrated mind supports the development of insight, and the presence of wisdom in turn facilitates the development of deeper levels of concentration, calm (*śamatha*) and insight (*vipaśyanā*) are at their best when developed in skilful cooperation.[6]

The Buddha emphasizes that a *bhikkhu* who neglects seclusion and not devoted to mental calm within (*riñcati paṭisallānaṃ nānuyuñcati ajjhattaṃ cetosamathaṃ*) is susceptible to retrogression in his spiritual training.[7] The two terms in Pāli, *samatha* and *vipassanā* sometimes occur together in the Sutta. For instance, in the *Majjhima-nikāya*, it is stated that when one is unperturbed by lust, one eventually comes to fulfill the Noble Eightfold Path and other factors conducive to Enlightenment. For such a person, "these two things — *samatha* and *vipassanā* — operate in union" (*tass' ime dve dhammā yuganandhā vattanti samatho ca vipassanā ca*).[8] The same *sutta* also

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states that it is these two *dhamma*-s, *samatha* and *vipassanā*, that are to be developed through higher knowledge (*abhiññā*).[9]

It is worth noting that in the *sūtra*, the Buddha does not seem to teach the two as being a totally contrasting pair, mutually exclusive in functions. We may conclude from the *Majjhima* reference above that, according to the Buddha, *samatha* and *vipassanā* together constitute the whole of the Noble Eight-fold Path; they are to be developed together, and they occur in union to one fully endowed with this Path.[10]

Sometimes, the two terms as such do not occur; but the harmonized co-existence and co-functioning of concentration and insight are emphasized with no less clarity. The following exhortation illustrates this:

> O *bhikkhu*-s, you should develop concentration. He whose mind is concentrated sees things truly as they are.[11]

The above statement represents an important teaching of the Buddha concerning the inseparabilty of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*: This inseparabilty does not consist merely in the fact that *vipaśyanā* is attained on the basis of *śamatha*. It must further be understaood that *vipaśyanā* is developed at the very moment when the meditator attained *śamatha*. This is quite a far cry from the

type of emphasis in the commentarial tradition ⸺ particularly the Theravāda, such as Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* ⸺ which very often treat the two as being pertaining to two distinctly separate domains.[12] Content-wise, the *Visuddhimagga* is structured according the *sutta* division of the path of training into *sīla–samādhi–paññā* (ethical practice–meditation–wisdom). However, *samādhi* is not understood as meditative devlopment as a whole, but rather, as concentration in the narrow sense, and 40 subjects (*kammatthāna*) for the development of *samatha* are fitted into this section. The section of *paññā* is completely contrasted with that of *samādhi*, and specific methods of *vipassanā* are exclusively fitted into this section. The practitioners are therefore required to first develop the *samatha* practices and then only proceed to *vipassanā* development. But according to the Pāli discourses, this is not necessarily so. In the *Yuganaddha-sutta* of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, for instance, it is taught that some practitioners may first develop *samatha* and then go on to *vipassanā*; other may proceed in the opposite manner; yet others may develop both *samatha* and *vipassanā* conjointly.[13] As we shall see below, this teaching is emphasized in the Sarvāstivāda system which speaks of two types of practitioners ⸺ the *śamatha*-type and the *vipaśyanā*-type.

This type of distinct, black-and-white separation of *samatha* and *vipassanā* is also found in the Theravāda commentarial exposition, and may be illustrated in the following story of Vacchagotta. In the *Mahāvacchagotta-sutta*,[14]

Vacchagotta, originally a heretic, entered the *Saṅgha* and (according to the commentary) soon attained non-returnership. He then went to the Buddha to ask for further teachings. Thereupon, the Buddha told him to further two things, *samatha* and *vipassanā* for attaining the "higher knowledges (*abhiññā*: psychic power, divine vision, divine ear, knowledge of others' minds, knowledge of one's past lives, knowledge of the passing away and reappearing of beings, knowledge of the exhaustion of outflows). Vacchagotta followed the instruction and eventually became an *arahant*. Commenting on the Buddha's instruction to Vacchagotta, the Pāli commentary says that the Buddha knew of his disposition and taught him the attainment of the five mundane knowledges through *samatha*, and that of *arahat*-hood through *vipassanā*. However, even though it is true that the general Buddhist teaching is that psychic powers are develoed on the basis of concentration; as we can see, there is no such implication of the separate roles of *samatha* and *vipassanā* in the *sutta* itself.

## 4.1  Meaning of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*

We shall now examine the meaning of the two terms, *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* as used in the Buddhist Canon. *Śamatha* is derived from the root √*śam*, which means 'calm down', 'cease'; and *tha* is a noun suffix. The term therefore *Śamatha* means appeasement or calm. Besides the context of meditation, it

occurs in the *vinaya* in the sense of settling or calming down of a dispute.[15] In the *sūtra*, we find the usage of calming of the faculties: (Pāli) *indriyāni samatha*; calming down of the conditioning forces, *sabba-saṃkhāra-samatha*; etc. These canonical usages suggest that *samatha/śamatha* connotes much more than mere "stilling" or "concentration", even though it is true that tranquility presupposes an absence of distraction or mental dispersion.[16]

The term, *vipaśyanā*, is best rendered as "insight", being derived from √*paś* which means 'see' with the added prefix *vi* which means 'distinctly'/'clearly'.

As to be expected, in the Abhidhamma/Abhidharma texts, the meanings of theses two terms are more articulated, and a string of synonyms are often used in an attempt to bring out their meanings in a manner that might be descfribed as "rhetorical". Thus, in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* of the Theravāda, *samatha* occurs together with various terms regarded as synonymous with "*samādhi*" defined as "one-pointedness of thought" (*cittassa ekaggatā*):

> *yā cittassa ṭhiti saṇṭhiti avaṭṭhiti avisāhāro avikkhepo avisāhaṭa-manasatā, samatho samādhindriyaṃ samādhi-balaṃ sammā-samādhi*[17]
>
> ("Mental stability/abiding, complete stabilty, firm stability, non-dispersion, non-distraction, non-dispersed mentality, *samatha*, the faculty of equipoise, the power of equipoise, Proper

Equipoise.")[18]

We can see that the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* here enumerates a total of 10 terms describing mental stability: (1) *ṭhiti*, (2) *saṇṭhiti*, (3) *avaṭṭhiti*, (4) *avisāhāro*, (5) *avikkhepo*, (6) *avisāhaṭa-manasatā*, (7) *samatho*, (8) *samādhindriyaṃ*, (9) *samādhi-balaṃ*, (10) *sammā-samādhi*. We may thus regard the nine terms excluding *samatha* as the defining characteristic of *samatha*. Moreover, we see that out of these nine terms, three pertain to *samādhi*. This implies that we should understand *samatha/śamatha* as esentailly of the nature of *samādhi* which, for all Buddhist traditions, certainly connote much more than the sense of mere "concentration".

Very similar nine-term descriptive definitions of *samādhi* and *śamatha* are also to be found in the early Sarvāstivāda canonical Abhidharma texts. For instance, the DSŚ explains samādhi as follows:

> *Samādhi* is the [following], generated by the predominance of contemplation (觀增上所起): stability of thought (/mental stability; 心住), complete stability (等住), continuous stability (近住), firm stability (安住), non-dispersion (不散), non-distraction (不亂), concentration (攝止), equipoise (等持), one-poitedness of thought (心一境性).[19]

An additional point to be noted in this context is the beginning phrase: "generated by a predominance of contemplation". Once again, it is a clear suggestion that, *samādhi*, though characterized by mental stability or steadfastness, is in fact generated from contemplation — the key function of *vipaśyanā*.

Likewise, another Sarvāstivāda canonical text, the DKŚ, too gives a virtually identical nine-term definition of *samādhi*, differing from the DSŚ definition in apparently in the term, 寂止 which however most probably corresponds to *śamatha*. (cf *śamayati*; 寂靜, in the YBŚ list below).[20]

The *Yogācārabhūmi* which was evolved from the Sarvāstivāda lineage also preserves a definition of the nine-mode abiding(/stability) of thought as follows:

> *tatra navākārā cittasthitiḥ katamā / iha bhikṣur adhyātmam eva cittaṃ sthāpayati / saṃsthāpayati / avasthāpayati / upasthāpaysati / damayati / śamayati / vyupaśamayati / ekotīkaroti / samādatte /* "Therein, what is the nine-mode abiding/steadiness of thought? Here, a *bhikṣu* makes his thought abide internally, makes it fully abide, makes it abide firmly, makes it abide closely/continuously, subdues it, calms it (*śamayati*), makes it quiescent, focuses it,

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equipoises it." (云何名爲九種心住? 謂有苾芻, 令心內住、 等住、
安住、近住、調順、寂靜、最極寂靜、專注一趣、及以等持).[21]

To summarize: the Theravāda, the Sarvāstivāda and the Yogācāra all preserve
an ancient, common, Abhidharmic description of *samādhi* and *śamatha* in
nine-modes. The terms for the modes, of course, differ slightly. In the YBŚ,
*citta-sthiti* (心住) itself is treated as the general term of which the nine modes
are descriptive, and two terms conncted with √śam (śamayati, vyupasamayati)
are enumerated among the nine modes. However, basically, the terms in all the
three traditions agree very closely. This can be shown in the following table:

| Dhammasaṅgaṇi | DSŚ | DKŚ | YBŚ |
|---|---|---|---|
| cittassa ṭhiti | 心住 | 心住 | 令心內住 |
| saṇṭhiti | 等住 | 等住 | 等住 |
| avaṭṭhiti | 近住 | 現住 | 安住 |
| avisāhāra | 安住 | 近住 | 近住 |
| avikkhepa | 不散 | 不亂 | 調順 |
| avisāhata-manasatā | 不亂 | 不散 | 寂靜 |
| samādhindriya | 攝止 | 攝持 | 最極寂靜 |

| samādhi-bala | 等持 | 等持 | 等持 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sammā-samādhi | 心一境性 | 心一境性 | 專注一趣 |

As I have remarke above, the both the Theravāda and Sarvāstuvāda indicate an inseparable relationship between *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* on the one hand, and samādhi on the other. On the nature of *śamatha*, the *Yogācārabhūmi* in this context states that one-pointedness of thought — which is the key definition for *samādhi* — may pertain to either *śamatha* or *vipaśyanā*. That which specifically pertains to *śamatha* is "that one-pointedness of thought occurring in the nine-mode abiding of thought (*citta-sthiti*)."[22]

As for the Abhidharmic definition of *vipaśyanā*, the Theravāda tradition generally defines it (*vipassanā*) as *paññā* and *ñāṇa-dassana* ('knowledge and vision'). [23] Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma further defines Proper View (*samyag-dṛṣṭi*) in terms of *vipaśyanā*, besides *prajñā*, etc. The following example is from the DSŚ:

> What is Proper View?
> A noble disciple (*ārya-śrāvaka*) reflects on unsatisfactoriness with regard to what is Unsatisfactoriness, reflects on its origin with regard to what is the Origin, reflects on its cessation with regard to

what is Cessation, reflects on the path with regard to what is the Path. With regard to the *dharma*-s, all that is discernment (*vicaya*; 簡擇), complete discernment (*pravicaya*; 極簡擇), utter discernment (*parivicaya*; 最極簡擇), comprehension (解了), full comprehension (等了), close/continuous comphrehension (近了), cleverness (機黠), penetration (*prativedha*; 通達), clear observation (審察), intellegence (聰叡), realization (*pāṇḍitya*; 覺明), operation of understanding (*prajñā-cāra*; 慧行), *vipaśyanā* — all these which are conjoined with outflow-free mental application (*anāsrava-manasikāra*) — are called Proper View.[24]

Elsewhere in the same text, *prajñā* is defined with an identical string of synonyms ending with *vipaśyanā*. At the end of this string, it states:

These are collectively called *prajñā*. They are also alled *prajñā-indriya*, also called *prajña-bala*, also called the enlightenment-factor (*bodhy-aṅga*) of *dharma-pravicaya*, also called Proper View. They operate in accompaniment of the noble supramundane outflow-free path ...; and they can properly brings an end to unsatisfactoriness ...[25]

## 4.2 *Śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* in context of meditative Praxis

From the above discussion, it should be clear that Buddhist meditation embraces both "*śamatha*", the development or cultivation of mental stabililty and "*vipaśyanā*", the development of insight.

Particularly in the Sarvāstivāda tradition, in the context of meditation, *śamatha*, as a rule, occurs together with *vipaśyanā*. In Chinese, these two terms are generally translated as 奢摩他 and 毘鉢舍那 respectively. They are also sometimes translated as "stilling/tranquillity" (止) and "contemplation" (觀)

In brief, on the meaning of *śamatha*, we might say, on the basis of the foregoing discussion, including its various usages in the *tripiṭaka*, that, in the meditative context of the Sarvāstivāda *abhidharma* system, *śamatha* is firstly concentration whose intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) is the thought-concomitant (*caitta*), *samādhi*. This thought-concomitant is in fact one of the ten universal thought-concomitants (*mahābhūmika-dharma*; 大地法) which always and necessarily co-arise withany thought (*citta*). In other words, there is always some degree of concentration in any mental state (according to the Sarvāstivāda, even a distracted mental state, *vikṣepa*, is to be understood as a weak state of concentration). When, in meditative praxis, the mind becomes

concentration, it is a case of this same mental force, *samādhi*, acquiring its strength. When this concentration is no mere concentration, but operating dominantly in the form of *śamatha*, capable of inducing *vipaśyanā*, it is then possible for the meditator to attain a *dhyāna* state. The notion that a specific *dharma* (in this case, *samādhi*) with a unique intrinsic nature can exist in different modes is quite in keeping with the Vaibhāṣika tenet, and is especially claer in Dharmatrāta's explantion on *sarvāstivāda*. We can therefore understand why the same *samādhi* connotes various senses: of concentration, stilling and even *dhyāna* (understood as *citta-ekāgratā;* 心一境性). But it is worth re-emphasising that in this context, its mode of functioning or being is not mere concentration pure and simple, but calm and serenity developed as a result of concentration.

## 4.3 Complimentarity of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*

It may be said that, compared to Theravāda Abhidharma, Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma more consciously preserves the Buddha's own emphasis of the complimentarity of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*. The *Saṅgītiparyaya* passage referred to in section 4.1 above, after defining *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, cites the Buddha's statement that underscores the complementarity of the two, and further elaborate on it:

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As the Bhagavat has said:

> There is no *dhyāna* for one without *prajñā*;
>
> and no *prajñā* for one without *dhyāna*.
>
> Only he who has *dhyāna* and *prajñā*
>
> can realize *Nirvāṇa*.[26]

"There is no *dhyāna* for one without *prajñā*" —— If one has such a *prajñā*, then one has attained a corresponding category of *dhyāna*. If one does not have such a *prajñā*, then one has not attained such a *dhyāna*.

"No *prajñā* for one without *dhyāna*" —— If one has *prajñā* which is born of *dhyāna* and has *dhyāna* as its origination; this category of *prajñā*[27] is projected by *dhyāna*. If one has such a category of *dhyāna*, then there can be the attainment of such a category of *prajñā*. If one does not have such a *dhyāna*, then one cannot attain such a *prajñā*.

"Only he who has *dhyāna* and *prajñā* can realize *Nirvāṇa*" —— *Nirvāṇa* is the exhaustion, detachment and cessation of craving. One must possess both *dhyāna* and *prajñā* in order to realize it; if one of the two is lacking, its realization is impossible.[28]

## 4.4 The distinctive nature of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*

However, the Abhidharma texts, while underscoring the complimentarity of the *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* practices, also highlight their distinctive contribution in their own distinctive manners to the practitioner's spiritual attainment. This twofold aspect is mentioned in the Theravada tradition as follows: —

> In the beginning there are two paths to emancipation: the path of tranquillity (*samatha-yāna*), and the path of insight (*vipassanā-yāna*). These two correspond to the two kinds of individuals: those who are of a passionate disposition (*taṇhā-carita*) and those who are of a skeptical disposition (*diṭṭhi-carita*). The former type attains Arahatship through *vipassanā* preceded by *śamatha*, and the latter through *śamatha* preceded by *vipassanā*.

> Again, these two paths correspond to the two faculties, faith and wisdom. Those who have entered into the religious life through strong faith are trained in the *samādhi* path. Practising *karmaṭṭhāna* meditation, experiencing psychic powers, they enter in the end, as said in the above passage, the *vipassanā*-path with a view to the acquisition of full knowledge which leads to

Arahatship.[29]

Within the Sūtra, it is already taught that the full accomplishment of Buddhist meditative praxis involves both *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*. The following is an example:

> The elder, Mahānāma, answers: "O Venerable Ānanda, practicing *śamatha*, one eventually becomes accomplished in *vipaśyanā*; practicing *vipaśyanā*, one also eventually becomes accomplished in *śamatha*. That is: a noble disciple (*ārya-śrāvaka*) who practices both *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* and acquires the Elements of Liberation (*vimokṣa-dhātu*).[30]

This *sūtra* from the *Saṃyuktāgama* is cited is and elaborately discussed in the MVŚ[31]:

> As is said in the *sūtra*: At that time, Ānanda asked the elder, Mahānāma, "A *bhikṣu* who dwells in an *araṇya*, or under a tree or in a secluded room, or in the cemetery — what are the *dharma*-s that he can repeatedly practise? Then, the elder Mahānāma told Ānanda, ... he should repeatedly contemplate on two practices: *śamatha* and *vipasyanā*. Why? He who has developed (熏修; *paribhāvita*) his *citta* through *śamatha* is liberated resorting to

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*vipaśyanā*. He who has developed his *citta* through *vipaśyanā* is liberated resorting to *śamatha*. He who has developed his *citta* through *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* is liberated in respect of the three elements (*dhātu*; 界). What are the there elements? The abandonment-element, the detachment-element and the cessation-element.[32]

Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma in fact deals at length on the distinctive natures of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*. One such discussion is in consideration of the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma tenet that the two of them are always co-nascent in every instance of mental operation. That is: *śamatha* corresponds to *samādhi* and *vipaśyanā* corresponds to *prajñā* (also cf. section 4.1 above); and *samādhi* and *prajñā* are among the set of ten universal thought-concomitants (*mahā-bhūmika-caitta*). This Abhidharma tenet beautifully demonstrates the Sarvāstivāda understanding that the two are not mutually exclusive but rather, complementary in function. But then, since they always occur together in one and the same person's mental stream, how can a *śamatha*-practitoner be distinguished from a *vipaśyanā*-practitoner? The Sarvāstivāda answers that they can be distinguished at the stage of preparatory practice (*prayoga*): If the practitioner prepares himself mostly through *śamatha*, then when he finally enters the Nobl Path at the stage of the Path of Vision (*darśana-mārga*), he is to be known as a *śamatha*-practitioner. If he prepares himself mostly through

*vipaśyanā* — studying and reflecting on the *tripiṭaka* teachings and discerning the *dharma*-s (*dharma-pravicaya*) — then when he enters the Noble Path, he is to be known as a *vipaśyanā*-practitioner.

Various other distinctions are also made. For instance: a *śamatha* type is one possessing blunt faculties and requires the help of others in making progress. A *vipaśyanā* type is one possessing sharp faculties and progresses through his own ability.[33] Another distinction: a *śamatha*-practitioner is a faith-pursuant (*śraddhānusārin*), a *vipaśyanā*-practitioner is a Doctrine-pursuant (*dharmānusārin*). Yet another distinction: A practitioner entering the Noble Path by first cultivating *śamatha* is susceptible to retrogression. On the other hand, a practitioner entering the Noble Path by first cultivating *vipaśyanā* is not susceptible to retrogression.[34]

Despite the above distinctions between the two, it is important to note that the most important aspect in the relationship between *śamatha* and *vipasyanā* is "balance". This relationship is epitomized in the meditation attainement known as *dhyāna* in which the two functioning of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* are fully harmonized (See *infra*, chapter on *dhyāna*).

## 4.5 Summary

From the information gathered in the MVŚ, we can see that, in keeping with the Buddha's own teachings in the *sūtra*, the Sarvāstivāda preserves the consistent ancient Buddhist tradition that *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* practices are complementary, rather than being mutually opposed in nature. Indeed, accoding to Sarvastivāda Abhidharma, in one and the same moment of *citta*, the two qualties —— under the names of *samādhi* and *prajñā* —— co-exist and together make possible the various forms of spiritual practices. At the same time, they also have their own distinctive modes of functioning, and these came to be elaborated in the commentarial and Abhidharma tradition. As meditaion practices, both are neccesary, even though practitioners of different temperament may focus on one or the other at the preparatory stage.

**NOTES**

[1] Edward Conze, *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies*. Indian reprint (New Delhi, 2000), 213.

[2] Schmithausen, Lambert. "On the problem of the relation of spiritual practice and philosophical theory in Buddhism", in : *German Scholars on India,* Vol. 2 (New Delhi, 1976), 239.

[3] One the relationship between the Sarvāstivādin *yogācāra*-s and the Mahāyāna Yogācāra school, see also: KL Dhammajoti, "*Sarvāstivāda, Dārṣṭāntika and Yogācāra* — Some Reflections on their Interrelation", *Journal of Buddhist Studies* (Colombo, 2006), 184 ff. Also cf. *supra*, chapter three.

[4] *Cf.* Yin Shun, , 說一切有部為主論書與論師之研究 (*A Study of the Śāstras and Ācāryas of the Sarvāstivāda and Other Schools*). (Taipei, 1968), 365 ff.

[5] MVŚ, 397b.

[6] Venerable Analayo, in Satipat, 88.

[7] *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, iii, 116.

[8] *Majjhima-nikāya*, iii, 289. *Cf. Saṃyutta-nikāya*, v, 52; *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, ii, 247.

[9] *Majjhima-nikāya*, iii, 290.

[10] See also, *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, ii, 94: *saṅkhārā daṭṭhabbā sammasitabbā vipassitabbā …*

[11] *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, iii, 13. This statement of the Buddha is also quoted in the northern Abhidharma texts. E.g. AKB, 385; AVN, 224: *samāhitacitto yathābhūtaṃ prajānāti* |

[12] For another canonical passage laying equal emphasis on the two, we may cite *Theragāthā,* 584:

One should at the proper time, devote to the practice of *samatha* and *vipassanā*. (*samatham anuyuñjeyya kālena ca vipassanaṃ*).

[13] *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, ii, 157.

[14] *Majjhima-nikāya*, I, 494 ff.

[15] This is in the context of the "seven *dharma*-s for appeasing disputes" (*saptādhikaraṇa-śamatha-dharmāḥ, satta adhikaraṇa-samathā dhammā;* 七止諍法). Cf., *Vinaya* IV, 207.

[16] See KL Dhammajoti, "*Śamatha* and *Vipaśyanā* in Abhidharma", in unpublished Lecture Notes for the Abhidharma course conducted in The university of Hong Kong, 2008.

[17] *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*, 10.

[18] English translation from BM, 18, with slight adaptation.

[19] 三摩地者。謂觀增上所起。心住等住。近住安住。不散不亂。攝止等持。心一境性。是名三摩地。」(T26, no. 1537, p. 474, c14-19)

[20] 《阿毘達磨界身足論》:「三摩地云何。謂心住等住。現住近住。不亂不散。攝持寂止等持。心一境性。是名三摩地。慧云何。謂於法簡擇。最極簡擇極簡擇。法了相近了相等了相。聰叡通達。審察決擇。覺明慧行。毘鉢舍

那是名慧。」(T26, no. 1540, p. 614, c22-26)

21　　T30, 450c.

22　　T30, 450c.

23　　See BM, 22.

24　　《阿毘達磨法蘊足論》卷 6：「云何正見? 謂聖弟子, 於苦思惟苦, 於集思惟集, 於滅思惟滅, 於道思惟道 ━ 無漏作意相應, 所有於法簡擇, 極簡擇,最極簡擇, 解了, 等了, 近了, 機黠, 通達, 審察, 聰叡, 覺明, 慧行, 毘鉢舍那 ━ 是名正見。

A very similar definition from the SgPŚ (T26, 375b) is translated by Prof KL Dhammajoti in the lecture hand-out, entitled "*Śamatha* and *Vipaśyanā* in Abhidharma" of his lecture series on Abhidharma delivered at Hong Kong University, 2008.

Also *cf*.: DSŚ, T26, 474c：此中觀者。謂依出家遠離所生善法所起。於法簡擇。極簡擇。最極簡擇。解了等了近了。機黠通達。審察聰叡。覺明慧行。毘鉢舍那。是名觀。

25　　DSŚ, 492b：「彼如實知善不善法。廣**說**乃至緣生法時。所有無漏作意相應。於法簡擇, 極[簡擇。最極簡擇。解了等了近了。機黠通達。審察聰叡。覺明慧行。毘鉢舍那。總名爲慧。亦名慧根。亦名慧力。亦名擇法覺支。亦名正見。是聖出世無漏無取道隨行道**俱**有道隨轉。能正盡苦。作苦邊際。...]

26　　T26, 375b: 非有定無慧, 非有慧無定。要有定有慧, 方證於涅槃. Cf.

*Dhammapada* 372: *natthi jhānaṃ apaññassa paññā natthi ajjjhāyato | yamhi jhānaṃ ca paññā ca sa ve nibbānasantike |* Udv XXXI, 25: *nāsty aprajñasya vai dhyānaṃ prajñā nādhyāyato'sti ca | yasya dhyānaṃ tathā prajñā sa vai nirvāṇasāntike |*

[27] 定 here seems to be error for 慧.

[28] T26, 375b–c. My translation here is adopted from KL Dhammajoti's Abhidharma lecture hand-out, HKU, 2008.

[29] BM 342.

[30] T02, no. 99, 118b21-25《雜阿含經》：尊者阿難復問上座。修習於止。多修習已。當何所成。修習於觀。多修習已。當何所成。上座答言。尊者阿難。修習於止。終成於觀。修習觀已。亦成於止。謂聖弟子止‧觀俱修。得諸解脫界。 Also cf. *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, xvii, 170.

[31] 雜阿含經, *sūtra* 424, T2,118b–c. This *Sarvāstivādin sūtra* does not seem to have a corresponding version in the Pāli.

[32] MVŚ, 147c–148a. The English translation here is adapted from KL Dhammajoti's Abhidharma lecture hand-out, HKU, 2008. In this hand-out, Dhammajoti further examine the meaning of "liberated in respect of the three elements", utilizing important textual material from the Abhidharma texts as well as the YBŚ.

[33] Cf. MVŚ, 148, a20-b6：「問依對法義於一心中有奢摩他毘鉢舍那云何建立如是二種行者差別。答由加行故二種差別。謂加行時或多修習奢摩他資糧。或多修習毘鉢舍那資糧多修習奢摩他資糧者。謂加行時恒樂獨處閑居

寂靜怖畏憒鬧見誼雜過恒居靜室入聖道時。名奢摩他行者。多修習毘鉢舍那資糧者謂加行時恒樂讀誦思惟三藏。於一切法自相共相數數觀察入聖道時。名毘鉢舍那行者。復次或有繫心一緣不分別法相。或有分別法相不繫心一緣。若繫心一緣不分別法相者入聖道時。名奢摩他行者。若分別法相不繫心一緣者入聖道時。名毘鉢舍那行者。復次若利根者。名毘鉢舍那行者若鈍根者。名奢摩他行者。」

[34] For other similar distinctions made in the Abhidharma texts, *cf*. Dhammajoti's Abhidharma lecture hand-out, HKU, 2008.

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# Chapter 5 — *Samādhi*

## 5.1 The central importance of *samādhi* in the Buddhist training

*Samādhi* is key term for the Buddhist concept of meditation. One major reason for my rendering of this term as "equipoise" is in fact to indicate that it stands for much more than just "concentration", a translation commonly found in many English books on meditation. Being derived from sam–ā–√dhā, it conveys the sense of perfect mental equipoise or full integration of the whole being. Its central importance in the Buddhist scheme of spiritual progress becomes obvious when we consider the fact that the whole spiritual path is prescribed as a threefold training (*sikkhā*; *sikṣā*): *śīla–samādhi–prajñā* ('ethical living–equipoise–wisdom'). It shows that ethical alignment is only the first step on the basis of which one must strive for meditative equipoise. It is finally on the basis of equipoise that one can attain the liberative wisdom, transcending all *duḥkha* inherent in saṃsāric faring. Put differently: liberative insight is possible only through a process of mental training culminating in a total transformation of consciousness. This transformation is *samādhi*.

Its importance is also underscored in another equally important prescription of

the Buddhist path, the Noble Eightfold Path (*āryāṣṭāṅgika-mārga*) of which it is the last component: 1. *samyag-dṛṣṭi*, 2. *samyak-saṃkalpa*, 3. *samyag-vācā*, 4. *samyak-karmānta*, 5. *samyag-ājīva*, 6. *samyag-vyāyāma*, 7. *samyak-smṛti*, 8. *samyak-samādhi*. In this important schme, we can hardly imagine that the Buddhists intend to teach that their complete path of practice culminates in nothing more than just "concentration".

Moreover, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the Abhidharma tradition, whether Theravāda or Sarvāstivāda, understands *samādhi* as comprising both *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* which together represent the whole of mediatative praxis.

## 5.2 Types and intrinsic nature of *samādhi*

In Abhidharm terms — especially in terms of Dharmatrāta's explanation on *sarvāstivāda* — although the intrinsic nature of *samādhi* (and for that matter, for any truly existent *dharma*) always remains the same, there are many modes (*bhāva*) of its operation.[1] Thus, Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma speaks of different types of *samādhi*. In this chapter, however, I shall mainly focus on the set of three types of samādhi; other topics related to samādhi are given elsewhere in the present thesis.

## 5.2.1 *Samādhi* as one of the ten universal thought-concomitants (*mahābhūmika-caitta*)

According to the doctrines of the Sarvāstivāda, *samādhi* is one of the ten *mahābhūmika* (universal) *dharma*-s. *Mahābhūmika* are *caitasika dharma*-s (thought concomitants) that arise whenever a *citta* arises. The other nine *mahābhūmika dharma*-s are *vedanā* (sensation), *cetanā* (volition), *saṃjñā* (ideation), *chanda* (predilection), *sparśa* (contact), *prajñā* (understanding), *smṛti* (mindfulness), *manaskāra* (mental application) and *adhimokṣa* (resolution). The importance of *samādhi* for the Sarvāstivāda is also underscored by the MVŚ in describing it as the predominent *caitta* (thought concomitant).

> Question: Why it is called "*predominent caitta*"?

> Answer: That *caitta* is *samādhi*. There is no *samādhi* which has great power, great function and capacity of achieving great accomplishments like that of the four *dhyāna*-s. That is why it is solely called the predominent *caitta*.[2]

We must of course remember that the MVŚ is here speaking in the context of *dhyāna*, and *samādhi* refers to that of *dhyāna*. Thus, *samādhi* as the predominant *caitta* here is to be understood in the sense that the *dhyāna*-s are

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predominant in their great efficacies spiritual qualities (*guṇa*; 功德).

The doctrine that *samādhi* is a universal thought-concomitant means that in every instance of mental activity, there is an element of concentration. this element is contributed by the unique force in the universe known as *samādhi*. This doctrine also entails that even the so called "dispersion/distraction" (*vikṣepa*)[3] is also a form of *samādhi*, albeilt in the form of an extremely weak concentration. It further implies that there be spiritual positive and negative samādhi. The former belongs to the class known as "proper samādhi". The later pertains to "false *samādhi*" (*mithyā samādhi*), such as that conjoined with the thougjt of hatred of an evil magician, capable of killing an enemy.

## 5.3 The threefold *samādhi* as gateways of liberation (*vimokṣa-mukha*; 解脫門)

In Abhidharma, the important Buddhist doctrine on *samādhi*, known as the three gateways of liberation, came to be well developed. These are: "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*; 空), "aspiration-less" (*apraṇidhi*; *apraṇihita*; 無願) and signless (*ānimitta*; 無相). However, the Sarvāstivāda reminds us that this is only one of the doctrinal perspective — albeit a very important one — on *samādhi*; and in fact *samādhi* can be classified from many different

pers[ectives. The MVŚ explains thus.

> There are three *samadhi*-s, namely, emptiness, aspiration-less and sign-less. However, for *samadhi*, one should also say that there is only "one," that is the *caitta* which is under the *mahābhūmika dharma*-s called "*samādhi*." And, one of the five spiritual faculties (*pancedriyāni*) is called the *samādhi* faculty; one of the five spiritual powers (*panca-balāni*) is called *samadhi* power; one of the seven enlightenment-factors (*sapta bodhyanga*) is called *samādhi* enlightenment-factor; one of the limbs (i.e., components) of the Noble Eightfold Path called proper *samādhi* (*samyak-samādhi*). Or rtaher, one should say, there are "two": i.e., defiled or non-defiled, non-liberated or liberated, linked or non-linked (to the three spheres of existence). Or one should say, there are three like what is said above (i.e., defilement, liberation and linkage). Or one should say, there are four: i.e., those linked to the "three spheres of existence and the "one" that is non-linked. Or rather, one should say that there are five: i.e., those linked to the "three" spheres of existence, to the trainee and to the non-traninee. And so on until, if it is classified in terms of series of moments, there are immeasurable *samadhi*-s.[4]

It is explained that although there are immeasurable types of *samādhi*, the three noted in the introduction to this section are emphasized because they are

established from three specific perspectives: counteraction (pratipakṣa; 對治), intention (āśaya; 期心) and cognitive object (ālamaba; 所緣). The MVŚ gives detailed adhidharmic analyses of these basic forms of *samādhi* originating from the three perspectives.

**(1) The emptiness *samādhi* designated on the basis of counteraction (*pratipakṣa*)**

From the perspective of counteraction, it is the *samādhi* of emptiness because it is the counteraction for the view of existent-self (*satkāya-dṛṣṭi*).

Question: The *samādhi* of emptiness has two modes of activity, emptiness and no-Self. The view of existent-self has two modes of activity, Self and what pertains to the Self. Among these, which modes of activity counteract which modes of activity?

Answer: By means of the mode of activity of no-Self (*anātman*)it counteracts the mode of activity of Self (*ātman*). By means of the mode of activity of emptiness to counteract the mode of activity of what pertains to the Self (*ātmīya*). Further, it uses the mode

of activity of no-Self to counteract the five views of Self. It uses the mode of activity of emptiness to counteract the mode of activity of fifteen views of what pertainis to the Self. Just as how the modes of activities of the "view of the Self" and the "view of what pertains to self" are counteracted, likewise, are the modes of activity of the "view of mine" and the "view of what pertains to me" counteracted … Furthermore, it uses the mode of activity of non-Self to counteract the mode of activity of the attachment to the Self. It uses the mode of activity of emptiness to counteract the mode of activity of the attachment to what pertains to the Self … Further, by means of the mode of activity of non-Self, the mode of activity that "the *skandha*-s are self" is counteracted, by means of the mode of activity of emptiness, the mode of activity that "the Self exists in the *skandha*-s" is counteracted. Likewise for the counteractions of the modes of activities "the *āyatana*-s are the Self" and of "the Self exists in the *āyatana*-s"; also, "the *dhātu*-s are the Self" and of "the Self exists in the *dhātu*-s"[5]

**(2) The "aspiration-less *samādhi* designated on the basis of "intention" (*āśaya*)**

That perspective of intention refers to the intention of those practitioners of the aspiration-less *samādhi*; for, they doi not aspire for the dharma-s pertaining to the three spheres of existence.

Question:     Do they also not aspire for the Noble Path?

Answer:     Although it is not that they totally do not aspire for the Noble Path, but their intention is not inclined to (/does not aspire for) the Noble Path of the three spheres of existence on account of being existence. Thus, they also no aspiration.

Also, their intention is not inclined to the Noble Path of the five aggregates on account of its being aggregates. Thus, they also no aspiration.

Also, their intention is not inclined to the Noble Path of the three periods of time on account of its falling within temporality. Thus, they also no aspiration.

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Also their intention is not inclined to the Noble Path of various forms of *duḥkha* on accocunt of its being in a successive continuity with *duḥkha*. Thus, they also no aspiration.

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Question:    If this is so, why do they practice the Noble Path?

Answer:      They practice the Noble Path for the sake of attaining *Nrivāṇa*.

The practitioners reflect as follows: "Through what is the ultimate *Nirvāṇa* achieved?" After thinking over, they know that they necessarily have to go through the Noble Path. Thus, although they have no inclination/aspiration, they must practice it; just as one has to rely on a boat in passing through a rapid.[6]

**(3) The signless *samādhi* established from the perspective of cognitive object (*ālamabana*)**

That perspective of cognitive object refers to that of the signless *samādhi*, for, this *samādhi* is devoid of the ten signs (*nimitta*). That is, it is devoid of the signs of: visual form (*rupa),* sound, smell, taste,

contact, male, female, production (*jāti*), deterioration (*jarā*) and cessation (*nirodha*).

Furthermore, "sign" refers to the *skandha-s*. The cognitive object of this *samādhi* is devoid of the signs of the *skandha-s*; hence it is called called "sign-less".

Furthermore, "sign" refers to time (*adhvan*), to sequential order, to gradation. The cognitive object of this *samādhi* is devoid of the signs of these; hence it is called called "sign-less".[7]

According to some: all the three *samādhi-s* are established from the perspective of the different counteractions. That is, the *samādhi* of emptiness counteracts directly the view of the existent-Self; the aspiration-less *samādhi* counteracts directly the irrational adherence to abstentions and vows; the sign-less *samādhi* counteracts directly doubt. With these (counteractions) as the beginning, all the remaining [hindrances] can be counteracted.

According to some others: All the three *samādhi-s* are established in accordance with their different modes of activity. That is, the *samādhi* of emptiness has the modes of activity of emptiness and non-Self; the aspiration-less *samādhi* has the modes of activities of *duḥkha* and

impermanance and the four respective modes of activities of *samudaya* and *mārga.* The signless *samādhi* has the four modes of activities of *nirodha.* Therefore there are only three types of *samādhi*-s established.[8]

The *Prajñapti-śāstra* offers a similar analysis of the three types of *samādhi*, distinguishing them mainly by differences with respect to mode of activity and counteraction:

> The *Prajñapti-śāstra* has the following explanation at the beginning:
> The *samādhi* of emptiness is emptiness, but not aspirationless or signless. The aspiration-less *samādhi* is aspiration-less, but not emptiness or signless. The signless *samādhi* is signless, but not emptiness or aspiration-less. Why? Because the modes of activity of these three are different.

> In that very same *śāstra*, a second explantion is given:
> *Samādhi* of emptiness is emptiness and of aspiration-less, but not signless. The aspirationless *samādhi* is aspiration-less and emptiness, but not signless. The signless *samādhi* is only signless, but neither emptiness nor of aspirationless.

> Question:    Why   are   (the   *samādhi*   of)   emptiness   and   the

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aspirationless have modes common to them while the signless is unique?

Answer:  This is because of the differences and similarities at the initial attainment. That is, if one relies on the *samādhi* of emptiness to enter into *samyaktva-niyamāvakrānti* (正性離生) (i.e., darśana mārga), during the four moments of *abhisamaya* of the truth of suffering, one also cultivates the aspiration-less. If one relies on the aspiration-less *samādhi* to enter into *samyaktva-niyamāvakrānti*, during the four moments of *abhisamaya* of the truth of suffering, one also cultivates emptiness. That is why (the *samādhi*-s of) emptiness and the aspiration-less have common modes. During the initial attainment of the signless (*samādhi*), one cultivates the modes specific to it, but not other.

Furthermore, this is because of the differences and similarities at the initial counteraction. That is, for the *samādhi*-s of emptiness and the aspiration-less, during the stage of initial counteraction, they both can counteract those defilements that are abandonable through the insight into *duḥkha*, etc. For the signless

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*samādhi*, at the stage of initial counteraction, it can only counteract those defilements that are abandonable through the insight into *nirodha*.

In that very *sāstra*, again it explains like this:
The *samādhi* of emptiness is emptiness, and also aspiration-less and signless. The aspiration-less *samādhi* is aspiration-less, and also emptiness and signless. The signless *samādhi* is signless, and also emptiness and aspirationless.

Question:    Why, for these three (*samādhi*-s), each one of them possesses three?

Answer:    Because the intrinsic nature of each one of them is enwowed with three significations. That is, each one of them is impermanent, non-eternal, not unchanging, not the Self and not what pertains to the Self. Therefore, they are all called emptiness.

Having no aspiration for the growth of greed, hatred and ignorance etc. and future birth — therefore they are all said to be aspiration-less. Being devoid of the

seven signs of *rūpa*, sound, smell, taste, contact, male and female — therefore they are all said to be signless.[9]

# 5.4 The nomenclature and meaning of the three types of *samādhi*

The Sanskrit word *samādhi* can be broken down into *sam, ā* and *dhi. Sam* means completely or fully, *ā* means completely and has the additional sense of properly, and *dhi* comes from the root √*dhā*, which means to sustain. In other words, *samādhi* means to sustain in a complete, full, even and balanced manner. The MVŚ, in this same context, proceeds to give an in-depth analysis of the nomenclature of *samādhi* from various perspectives.

Question:   Why it is called *samādhi*?

What is the meaning of *samādhi*?

Answer:   Because of three reasons, they are called *samādhi*.

First, even-ness (平等); second, sustenance (攝持); and third, homogeneous continuation（相似相續）. For "even-ness": from beginningless time, thought and thought-concomitants are perverted by defilements,

evil practices and wrong views, so that they operate in a crooked manner. Because of the power of this *samādhi*, thought and thought-concomitants can operate upon the objects in a straight and even manner; that is why it is called *samādhi*.

For "sustenance": from beginningless time, thought and thought-concomitants operate upon the objects in a scattered manner; With the power of this *samādhi* as the expedient, thought and thought-concomitants are sustained to abide on one object; that is why it is called *samādhi*.

For "homogeneous continuation": from beginningless time, thought and thought-concomitants continue as heterogeneous series — skilffful, defiled, or neutral. Because of the power of this *samādhi*, it becomes a series of a single species of merely wholesome, that is why it is called *samādhi*.

Furthermore, because of three reasons, it is called *samādhi*. That is, (i) abiding in a single object, (ii) abiding continuously, and (iii) proper contemplation.

Furthermore, because of three reasons, it is called *samādhi*. That is, (i) it sustains the body, making it even, (ii) it sustains theskillful *dharma*-s so that they are not dispersed, (iii) it ensbles the skillful thoughts to operate evenly.

Furthermore, because of three reasons, it is called *samādhi*. That is, (i) it constantly does not relinquish the cognitive object, (ii) it sustains various excellent (*viśiṣṭa*; 勝) skillful *dharma*-s, (iii) it enables *śamatha* and *vipaśanā* to abide on a single object and operate evenly

The great master Vasumitra says: "Why it is called *samādhi*?" Because it sustains numerous types of skillful *citta* and *caitta*-s so that they can continuously operate on a single object in an even manner, so it is called *samādhi*. He further says: it holds evenly, hence called "even holding" (等持; this is the Chinese rendering of *samādhi*). It is just like one who holds a baby is called the baby-holder; one who can hold water is called water-holder; one who can hold a balance is called a balance-holder. This is also so; it can hold hold various types of excellent and even *dharma*-s, hence called *samādhi*.

The great master Dharmatrāta says, this *samādhi* ('even holding') is

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also called *samāpatti* ('even attainment', 等至) … Here, it refers to the holding/sustaining of skillful *citta*-s and *caitta*-s which can therefore operate evenly in a series. It does not refer to the case of the unskillful or neutral *dharma*-s.[10]

# 5.5 The relationship between the three forms of *samādhi* and liberation

The three forms of *samādhi* are known as the three gateways of liberation because each plays a vital role in the pursuit of *nirvana*. They are in fact dcalled "gateways of liberation" on account of the fact that they lead to the attainment of *Nirvāṇa* which is liberation. In the following passages, the MVŚ provides an in-depth analysis of their arising and specific functions along the spiritual path of progress:

> These three *samādhi*-s are also called the three gateways of liberation.

> Question:     What are the differences between the *samādhi*-s and
> the gateways of liberation?

Answer:        The *samādhi*-s may be with-outflow or outflow-free. Gateways of liberation are exclusively outflow-free.

Question:     Why are the gateways of liberation exclusively outflow-free?

Answer:        It is not logically proper (*na yujyate*) that a gateway of liberation is with-outflow and conduces to bondage.

Question:     From what perspective is a gateway of liberation established/designated? Is it from the perspective of *samyaktva-niyamāvakrānti*? Is it from then perspective of the exhaustion of the outflows (*āsrava-kṣaya*)?

What is the fallacy (involved in each case)?

If it is based on the entrance into *samyaktva-niyamāvakrānti* that a gateway of liberation is established, then only those *samādhi*-s conjoined *duḥkhe dharma-jñāna-kṣānti* can be called gateways of liberation.

If it is based on the extinction of outflows that a gateway of liberation is established, then only the diamond-like *samādhi* (*vajropama-samādhi*) can be

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called a gateway of liberation.

Answer:     It should be said as follows: gateway of liberation is established from both perspectives. However, gateways of liberation collectively include all outflow-free *samādhi*-s. That is, all Noble Paths are called *samyaktva-niyamāvakrānti*. The acquisition of all Noble Paths are called "entrance" (*avakranti*); the abandonments of defilements are all called exhaustion of outflows.

The *samādhi*-s associated with the four paths (namely worldly path, *darśana-mārga*, *bhāvanā-mārga* and aśaikṣa-mārga) are all endowed the meaning of exhaustion.

For example, at the moment immediately after the Supreme Mundane Dharma when *duḥkhe dharmajñānakṣānti* arises, the attainment of the *samādhi* of emptiness is called the entrance into *samyaktva-niyamāvakrānt*. At the moment immediately after the direct realization of *duḥkha* when the direct realization of *samudaya* arises, the attainment of the

*samādhi* of no will is also called *samyaktva-niyamāvakrānt.*

At the moment immediately after the direct realization of *samudaya* when the direct realization of *nirodha* arises, the attainment of the signless *samādhi* is also called *samyaktva-niyamāvakrānti.* The same applies to the outflow-free *samādhi*-s which arise immediately after all other stages.

At the stage of *darśana-mārga*, the three outflow-free *samādhi*-s arise individually, and the outflows are exhausted individually. At the stage of *bhāvanā-mārga,* the three outflow-free *samādhi*-s arise collectively, and the outflows are exhausted collectively. At the stage of non-trainee, the three outflow-free *samādhi*-s arise collectively, and the outflows are abandoned (*prahīṇa*) collectively; it is also called exhaustion of outflows. Therefore, the outflow-free *samādhi*-s are collectively subsumed under the three gateways of liberation.

Question:     Why are they called gateways of liberation?

Answer:       *Nirvāṇa* is called liberation. Basing on these three

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*samādhi*-s, one can move towards the realization of liberation; therefore they are called gateways of liberation.

Furthermore, they are like a shield [in a battle]; therefore they are called gateways of liberation. Just as in a battle, a shield is first used to guard against the enemy, a sharp sword is then used to cut down his head, making it fall onto the battle ground, so that one can move on as one wishes. Likewise, when the practitioner is battling with a defilement-enemy, he first uses the shield of the three gateways of liberation to guard against the defilement-enemy, and subsequently uses the sword of the outflow-free *prajñā* to cut off the endowment-head ('endowment' here is in the technical sense of *samanvāgama = prāpti*)[11] of the defilement, causing it to fall onto the ground of non-endowment (*samanvāgamai*), so that he can move on towards *Nirvāṇa* in accordance with his original resolve.

The *Sūtra* says, concentration[12] is the proper path (*samyag-mārga*), non-concentration is the false path (*mithyā-mārga*). The concentrated (*samāhita*) *citta* can attain liberation, not the non-concentrated *citta*.

Thus, the three outflow-free *samādhi*-s, and not the with-outflow *samādhi*-s, are gateways of liberation.[13]

# 5.6 Summary

*Samādhi* is a key concept in the Buddhist doctrine on meditative praxis. In Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, this concept came to be highly developed. *Samādhi* essentially signifies a state of perfect integaration — and much more than just mere "concentration" in the ordinary sense — of psycho-physical energies which renders the whole being of the practitioner fit for the attainment of spiritual insight. One of the most important teachings concerning *samādhi* is the doctrine of the threefold *samādhi*: *śūnyatā-*, *apraṇidhi-/apraṇihita-* and *ānimitta*. Importantly, these three are called "gateways of liberation" because through them one is said to be able to attain *Nirvāṇa* (= "liberatoion"). The compilers of the MVŚ explain that these three are so designted from three respective perspectives: 1, counteraction of the defilements, particularly the existent-Self view; 2, the meditator's disinclination towards (non-aspiration for) whatever that is conducive to saṃsāric existence; 3, the cognitive object of meditation being devoid of the ten mental signs of visual objects, etc.

**NOTES**

1    For a good discussion on Dharmatrāta's theory, see KL Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, (Hong Kong, 2009), 119 ff.

2    MVŚ, 417, c21-24.

3    See Wei Shan, "*Samādhi* and *vikṣepa* in Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma". In: JCBSSL, vol III, 190 ff.

4    MVŚ, 538, a19-27.

5    MVŚ, 538, b1-17.

6    MVŚ, 538, b17-27.

7    MVŚ, 538, b27-c2.

8    MVŚ, 538, c3-10.

9    MVŚ, 538, c10-29, 539, a1.

10    MVŚ, 539, a3-29.

11    When a defilement is initially acquired or re-acquired after having been lost, it is called an acquisition (*prāpti*; 得) of the defilement. When it has been acquired and continues in the state of being acquired, it is called an endowment (*samanavāgama*; 成就) of it.

12    定; to be understood as mental integration (even though I have used the word "concentration" here) in the proper sense of *samādhi*.

13    MVŚ, 539, a18-540,a20.

# Chapter 6 — The Five Hindrances

To be successful in meditation, one must investigate the factors that affect this praxis. The consideration of hindrances (*nivaraṇa*-s) is of great importance to Buddhism as a soteriological system, and thus the doctrine of the five hindrances came to be extensively elaborated in the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma.

Starting from the Buddha's own teachings in the *sūtra*-s,[1] Buddhism teaches that a meditator must overcome five hindrances to succeed in his meditative practices. The following is an example from the *Saṃyuktāgama* which is in the context of describing the practice of the mindfulness of breathing:

> This *bhikṣu*, … well protects his body and guards the faculties … Under a tree or on the ground in the open space, he sets his body upright and establishes mindfulness right in front of him. He abandons sensual greed in the world, and becomes purged of craving, hatred, torpor, distraction and remorse. He eliminates doubt … freed from the five hindrances.[2]

As we have seen in Chapter 3,[3] the important doctrine of the *avatāra-mukha* and the five methods of stilling the mind were developed in the Abhidharma to counter these hindrances. As they are progressively overcome, meditation becomes smoother, and the practitioner advances accordingly. From a certain perspective, we can say that an enlightened person — one whose consciousness has been fully transformed spiritually — is totally freed from these hindrances.

## 6.1 What are the five hindrances?

The Sanskrit word that is rendered as "hindrance" is *nivaraṇa* (Pāli: *nīvaraṇa*), which means "covering." The Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma enumerates the five hindrances that are identified in the *sūtra*-s: sensual desire (*kāma-rāga*; 貪欲), malice (*pratigha*; 瞋恚), torpor-drowsiness (*styāna-middha*; 惛沈睡眠), restlessness-remorse (*auddhatya-kaukṛtya*; 掉舉惡作) and doubt (*vicikitsā*; 疑). These are found in the sphere of sensuality as they are always unskillful.[4]

An orthodox Sarvāstivāda work, Skandhila's *Abhidharmāvatāra*, explains that the five hindrances are so named because they are obstacles to the Noble Path, detachment, and the roots of skillfulness, which are preparatory (*prāyogika*) for the preceding two.[5] The MVŚ also lists these hindrances and gives a similar definition of *nivaraṇa* (蓋):

> Question: Why they are called hindrances? What does hindrance (蓋) mean?

> Answer: It means obstructing, covering, breaking, ruining, causing to fall and causing to lie down. Out of these, obstructing means hindrance because it obstructs the noble path and the roots of skillfulness which are preparatory for the noble path, it is thus called hindrance.

As the above passage illustrates, the MVŚ identifies a hindrance as not only that

which obstructs but also that which covers, breaks, ruins and causes falling or lying down.[6]

It then explains that ignorance constitutes a sixth hindrance but is not enumerated among the five hindrances because of its grave nature as a defilement. It is therefore separately taught as a distinct hindrance:

> Some may give rise to the doubt that there are only five hindrances and ignorance is not a hindrance. To remove this doubt it is here stated that there is a sixth hindrance, i.e., *avidyā-nivaraṇa* . . . Although *avidyānuśaya* is also a *nivaraṇa*, it is not mentioned among the five *nivaraṇa*-s owing to its heaviness; the Bhagavat has designated it separately as the sixth *nivaraṇa*: *avidyā* is mentioned separately because it is heavy compared to the previous five *nivaraṇa*-s which are of equal strength.[7]

To explicate the various meanings — covering, breaking, ruining and causing to fall or lie down — a simile is taken from the *sūtra*-s, in which the five hindrances are likened to five large trees whose seeds are small but twigs and trunks are large enough to cover other, smaller trees. As a result, the stems and branches of the smaller trees wither and fall off, and these trees can produce neither flowers nor fruit. In the same way, the mind-tree of a being in the sensuality sphere is blighted by the five hindrances and collapses, and thus the seven factors of enlightenment (*bodhyaṅga*; 覺支) cannot be developed nor the four fruits of spiritual attainment (*śrāmanya-phala*; 沙門果) be obtained.

Although these adverse effects can also be produced by other defilements, only the five obstacles listed above are specifically identified as hindrances in the *sutra*-s. Various explanations for this are given in the MVŚ, including the following.

(i) Venerable Parśva says that the Buddha classifies those *dharma*-s with an intrinsic nature, characteristics, power and function bearing the characteristics of a hindrance as hindrances. Those which do not have the characteristics of a hindrance are not classified as hindrances.[8]

(ii) Venerable Ghoṣaka says that the five hindrances are much greater obstacles to the Noble Path and operate more swiftly than other defilements.

(iii) These five are grouped together because they function as obstacles during the stages of both cause and effect. This is further elaborated:

> At the stage of cause, when any one of the five arises, there cannot be the arising of even what is with-outflow (impure) wholesome or neutral (無記), less still the Noble Path. At the stage of fruit, they constitute the obstacles because they can cause the falling into the unfortunate realms (*durgati*; 惡趣) and thus generally obstruct all virtues.[9]

A detailed analysis of the intrinsic nature of the five hindrances is given in the MVŚ as follows:

> Question: What is the intrinsic nature of the five hindrances?

> Answer: The intrinsic nature is the thirty entities (instances of

existence) in the sensuality sphere. For sensual-desire and malice, each pertains to the five categories of abandonability (*pañca-prakāra-praheya*) in the sensuality sphere, totalling ten. For torpor and restlessness, each pertains to the five categories of abandonability in the three spheres; they are either non-wholesome or neutral, but only the non-wholesome ones are established as hindrances; thus there is a total of ten entities. Drowsiness pertains to the five categories of abandonability in the sensuality sphere; they are either wholesome, non-wholesome or neutral, but only the non-wholesome ones are established as hindrances, thus there are five entities. Malice is abandonable through cultivation and is either wholesome or non-wholesome. Only the wholesome one is established as a hindrance, thus it has only one entity. Doubt pertains to the five categories of abandonability in the three spheres, they are either non-wholesome or neutral. Only the unwholesome ones are established as hindrances, thus they have four entities. Because of the above, the intrinsic nature of five hindrances are thirty entities of the sensuality sphere.[10]

The MVŚ then discusses the features of the five hindrances:

Question:     What are the characteristics of Hindrances?

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Answer: Venerable Vasumitra says that intrinsic nature is characteristic and characteristic is intrinsic nature, because the intrinsic natures and characteristics of all *dharma*-s are mutually inseparable. Furthermore, craving for sensual pleasure is the characteristic of sensual desire; feeling hatred and anger about other sentient beings is the characteristic of malice; the bogging down of mind and body is the characteristic of torpor; excited movement of mind and body is the characteristic of restlessness; causing the mind to be blur and reduced is the characteristic of drowsiness, causing the mind to turn into the state of being regretful is the characteristic of remorse, causing the mode of activity of mind to be indecisive is the characteristic of doubt.[11]

## 6.2 Mode of operation of the five hindrances

The five hindrances are also set apart from all other defilements based on their manner of operation. First, unlike the others, they arise in the majority of sentient beings in the sphere of sensuality and have a subtle mode of activity. Those beings excluded comprise, among others, individuals in hell who are undergoing grave suffering, in whom the defilement of conceit (*māna*; 慢) cannot arise, and small animals, such as shrimp, which lack sufficient intelligence to generate the defilement of view (*dṛṣṭi*; 見).

According to Venerable Ghoṣaka, the defilements other than the five hindrances can also obstruct the Noble Path. But these five manifest repeatedly and have a very subtle mode of activity. Hence they are specifically established [as hindrances].[12]

The implication is that subtle modes of activity are not easily detected by sentient beings; hence, the five hindrances operate successfully as obstacles to spiritual progress. To a much greater extent than other defilements, they obstruct concentration and the fruit of concentration and impede sentient beings in the three spheres in their pursuit of the abandonment of defilements, nine universal knowledges (*parijñā*), Noble Path and four fruits.

The operation of each of the five hindrances produces a different kind of damage: sensual desire thwarts the abandonment of all sensual desire *dharma*-s; malice, the abandonment of all bad *dharma*-s; torpor-drowsiness, *vipaśyanā*; and restlessness-remorse, *śamatha*. Sensual desire and malice destroy and obstruct the aggregate of precepts, torpor-drowsiness destroys and obstructs that of understanding and restlessness-remorse destroys and obstructs that of concentration.

The individual operation of the five hindrances is summarized as follows. Doubt can arise among ordinary worldlings (*pṛthagjana*-s), whereas the other four hindrances can arise among both saints and ordinary worldlings. Also, the defilements operate through either joy or sadness. Sensual desire operates only through joy, whereas malice, remorse and doubt operate only through sadness.

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Torpor-drowsiness can operate by either of these modes of activity.[13]

Regarding the subtlety of its operation, a defilement is categorized in the MVŚ as either an *anuśaya* or a non-*anauśaya*:

> All defilements are either *anuśaya* (隨眠) or non-*anuśaya* (非隨眠). In the case of sensual desire, malice and doubt hindrances, generally speaking, they are *anuśaya*(s). In the case of torpor-drowsiness and restlessness-remorse, generally speaking, they are *non-anuśaya*(s).[14]

In the Sarvāstivāda tradition, although a defilement is generally called a *kleśa*, it is also known by other terms among which "*anuśaya*" ("proclivity") is important. *Anuśaya* is derived from *anu* (subtle) and √ *śī* (lie down, sleep), which together convey the subtlety of a defilement. That is: because defilements are so subtle, they are difficult to detect. The term *anuśaya* emphasizes that we continuously possess these defilements and cannot detect their arising unless we have sufficient awareness.

# 6.3 Abandonment and counteraction of the five hindrances

Successful meditation requires the counteraction of the five hindrances. Accordingly, the *Abhidharma* elaborates how this can be achieved. First, concerning the different categories of abandonability, the MVŚ says:

Hindrances are designated as being only five types [as] defilements correspond to one category of abandonability, or four categories or five categories. Thus, the enumeration of remorse is intended to correspond generally to one category. For doubt hindrance, it is intended to generally correspond to four categories. The remaining hindrances, they are intended to correspond generally to all the five categories.[15]

The MVŚ then lists the five categories of abandonability: 1) through insight into unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkha*), 2) through insight into the origin of unsatisfactoriness, 3) through insight into the cessation of unsatisfactoriness, 4) through insight into the path leading to the cessation of unsatisfactoriness and 5) through the path of cultivation (*bhāvanā-mārga*). It notes:

All defilements are either abandonable merely through insight, or merely through cultivation, or through both insight and cultivation. The enumeration of doubt hindrance is intended to refer collectively to those abandonable merely through insight. The enumeration of remorse is intended collectively to those abandonable merely through cultivation. The enumeration of the remaining hindrances is intended to refer collectively to those abandonable through both insight and cultivation.[16]

The five hindrances are also discussed in the *Abhidharma* in terms of their grouping based on three important aspects: source of nourishment, antidote/counteraction and the shouldering of a burden. The notion of nourishment

refs to the fact that the body, mind and mental factors (thought-concomitants) require sources of sustenance: for example, the body is sustained by food. This doctrine is inherited from the *sūtra*-s.

Regarding the source of nourishment and counteraction, sensual desire is nourished by a beautiful and excellent appearance and contemplation of the impure is its antidote. Hence, it is established as an individual hindrance. Malice is nourished by the appearance of hatefulness and the meditation on loving kindness is its antidote. Hence, it too is established as an individual hindrance. The hindrance of doubt is nourished over three periods of time, the past, present and future, and the contemplation of conditioned co-arising is its antidote. Hence, it is also established as an individual hindrance.

In contrast, both torpor and drowsiness are nourished by five *dharmā*-s —— exhaustion/*tandrī*, disgust/*arati,* yawning/*vijṛmbhikā*, imbalanced diet/*bhakte asamatā* and sinking of the mind/*cetaso līnatva*)[17] —— and have *vipaśyanā* as their antidote. Hence, they are collectively established as an individual hindrance. Likewise, both restlessness and remorse are nourished by four *dharma*-s —— the seeking of relatives, land and living forever and the memory of past happiness —— and have *śamatha* as their antidote. Hence, they are collectively established as an individual hindrance.

Finally, sensual desire, malice and doubt can individually bear the full burden of one hindrance. Hence, each is established as an individual hindrance. In contrast, torpor and drowsiness can bear the full burden of a single hindrance only on a joint basis, and thus they are collectively established as an individual hindrance.

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Restlessness and remorse are collectively established as another single hindrance for the same reason.

## 6.4 Sequential order of the five hindrances

The *Abhidharma* also explains the sequence of the five hindrances (sensual desire, malice, doubt, torpor-drowsiness and restlessness-remorse). The Buddha enumerates them in this way based on the order of their arising. The MVŚ explains that their order is given to facilitate ("be in accordance with"; 隨順) the instructor and learner. It cites the following explanation given by Vasumira. First, sensual desire arises on account of the pleasant objects that one experiences. When these pleasant objects are lost, malice arises. When one dwells on this loss, the mind is weakened and torpor arises. Then, the mind becomes depressed and sinks, and drowsiness arises. This leads to restlessness, which in turn gives rise to remorse (*kaukṛtya*; 惡作; "badly done"). Remorse takes the form of regretting either the good or bad deed that one has done and feeling that one should not have done it, which leads to doubt.[18]

## 6.5 Summary

To achieve success in his meditation practices, the practitioner must have a thorough understanding of the five hindrances. He must learn their intrinsic nature, characteristics and modes of operation, and how they can be overcome. The MVŚ

provides a wealth of information to aid the practitioner in these endeavors by elaborating on the doctrine of the five hindrances, which is taken from the Buddha's own teachings in the *sūtra*-s.

# NOTES

1. M II 203; SV 92, 127 and A III 63.

2. T02, no. 99, 206a20-26《雜阿含經》：是比丘若依聚落‧城邑止住。晨朝著衣持鉢。入村乞食。善護其身。守諸根門。善繫心住。乞食已。還住處。舉衣鉢。洗足已。或入林中‧閑房‧樹下。或空露地。端身正坐。繫念面前。斷世貪愛。離欲清淨。瞋恚‧睡眠‧掉悔‧疑斷。度諸疑惑。於諸善法心得決定。遠離五蓋

3. 3.2.1.2.1 of this thesis on *Mokṣa-bhāgīya*.

4. AKB, 318. Cf. *Entrance*, 100.

5. Entrance, 100. Also, Ny, 648c; cf. MVŚ, 249c.

6. MVŚ, 249c.

7. MVŚ, 194c-195a.

8. MVŚ, 249c14-16.

9. MVŚ, 249c18-22.

10. MVŚ, 249b15-23.

11. MVŚ, 249b23-29.

12. MVŚ, 249c27-29.

13. MVŚ, 250b6-12.

14. MVŚ, 250a27-29, b1.

15. MVŚ, 250a20-23.

16. MVŚ, 250a23-27.

17. SA, 288.

18. MVŚ, 250c19-24.

# Chapter 7 — Mindfulness of Breathing

## 7.1 The importance of mindfulness of breathing

Mindfulness of breathing (Sanskrit, *ānāpāna-smṛti*; Pāli, *ānāpāna-sati*) is considered to be one of the most important methods of mental training in Buddhism, and is recommended by the Buddha in various *sūtra*-s. In the *Saṃyutta-Nikāya*,[1] he calls this meditation *Ariya-vihāra* ("abode of the Saint"), *Brahma-vihāra* ("abode of the Brahma") and *Tathāgata vihāra* ("abode of the *Tathāgata*/Buddha").

In the Sarvāstivāda, we find a similar description in *Abhidharma* texts. The following passage is taken from the MVŚ:

> What is the abode of the Saint?
>
> What is the abode of the Deva?
>
> What is the abode of the Brahma?
>
> What is the abode of the Buddha?
>
> What is the abode of the Trainee?
>
> What is the abode of the Non-trainee?
>
> The answer [in each case] is "mindfulness of breathing".

Why? Because mindfulness of breathing enables the trainees to attain the unattained and the non-trainees to attain the state of happiness in the present life (*dṛṣṭadharma-sukhavihārāya*; 現法樂住). Because mindfulness of breathing is outflow free, it is called the abode of the saints (*ārya*). Because its intrinsic nature is shining and pure, it is called the abode of the *deva*-s. Because its intrinsic nature is calm and peaceful, it is called the abode of *Brahma*. Because all Buddha-s abide there frequently, it is called the abode of the Buddha. Because it is the attainment of the trainees, it is called the abode of the trainee. Because it is the attainment of the non-trainees, it is called the abode of the non-trainee. Because through mindfulness of breathing, superior *abhisamaya* is attained and defilements are abandoned, it is called the attainment of the unattained. Because through this, the non-trainees can attain the unshakable liberation of the mind (*akopya-ceto-vimukti*; 不動心解脫), it is called "happiness in the present life". Because this mindfulness of breathing can induce sainthood, it is called the abode of the saints. Furthermore, because it can induce non-traineeship, it is called the abode of the non-trainee. Because through this meditation, trainees can attain *arahat*-hood, it is called the attainment of the unattained. The non-trainees can abide on four types of happiness through this meditation, it is called "happiness in the present life". The four types of happiness are happiness of

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refuge, escape, peace, and *Bodhi*.[2]

The *Mahāsaccaka* relates that the Buddha entered into the first *dhyāna* while he was an infant through practicing mindfulness of breathing. According to the commentary on the *Bhayabherava sūtra,* the Buddha also used this method under the bodhi tree as the path to enlightenment. Therefore, the practice of this meditation alone is sufficient to attain *nirvāna*.

The MVŚ states:

> Sentient beings, through practising these two meditations, enter into the gateways to immortality (*amṛta-dvāra*; 甘露門) of Buddhism. These meditations are first, mindfulness on the impure and second, mindfulness on breathing. Mindfulness on impure contemplates on *rūpa* and mindfulness on breathing contemplates on the Great Elements. If one contemplates on *rūpa* and the Great Elements, he can gradually attain the three types of *Bodhi* namely Buddha-, *Pratyekabuddha-* or *Śrāraka-*.[3]

"Immortality" (*amṛta-dvāra*) refers to the fruit of the Noble Path, especially *arhat*hood.[4]  In the AKB, these two meditations are called the "two gateways to entry" (*avatāra-mukhas*; 入修二門).[5]

As mentioned, Buddhist mental training takes into consideration the specific counteraction of different personality (*carita*) problems. In this context, we can see the origin of this doctrine on the gateways to immortality and its later, more developed form. The various Buddhist traditions recount that the contemplation of the impure or loathsome (*aśubhā*) was prevalent among monastic members as the main method of training in dealing with the problem of sensuality. We are told that this practice produced an undesirable consequence: some monks developed an excessive and one-sided sense of disgust, and committed suicide. It was at this juncture that the Buddha introduced the practice of mindfulness of breathing.

We find in the later *sūtra*-s several types of meditation mentioned together as character rectification methods: mindfulness of breathing to counteract sorrow and contemplation of the impure to counteract sensuality, as well as loving-kindness to counteract hatred, compassion to counteract harmfulness, sympathetic joy (*muditā)* to counteract jealousy and equanimity (*upekṣā*) to counteract conceit[6] (the latter are known as the "four immeasurables"; *apramāṇas*).[7] In the *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* of the YBŚ,[8] we see the following five types of *avatāra-mukha*-s, which later came to be known in the Chinese tradition as, collectively, the "five-fold stilling of the mind" (五停心):

(1) contemplation of the loathsome — greed (*rāga*);

(2) loving-kindness — hatred (*pratigha/dveṣa*);

(3) conditioned co-arising qua specific conditionality

(*idaṃ-pratyayatā-pratītya-samutpāda*) — delusion (*moha*);

(4) analysis of the elements (*dhātu-bheda*) — conceit (*māna*); and

(5) mindfulness of breathing — intellectual distraction (*vitarka*).[9]

Although mindful breathing and contemplation of the loathsome together are called the gateways to immortality, the MVŚ emphasizes the superiority of the former: one who has extinguished defilements will fall back if one has done so using meditation on the impure as the preparatory effort (*prayoga*). However, one will not fall back if one has used mindfulness of breathing in the preparatory stage.[10]

Both the Theravāda and northern Abhidharma texts, starting from the *sūtra*-s, stress the importance of mindfulness of breathing.

In the *Saṃyutta-Nikāya*, it is written:

> Monks, I then used to spend most of my time in this practice of *ānāpānasati-samādhi*; and as I lived practicing it, neither my body nor my eyes were fatigued; as the result of it my mind was free from the *āsavas* (mental taints).[11]

The following dialogue between the Buddha and his disciples illustrates the significance of mindfulness of breathing:

Buddha said, "If there is a heretic (外道) who asks what sort of meditation your master has entered during the two months retreat, you should tell him that it is mindfulness of breathing."

Question:   Since all heretics do not know the term mindfulness of breathing not to mention its intrinsic nature, why should we tell them the above?

Answer:   For the purpose of introducing those sentient beings from heretics into Buddhism. If they hear that the Buddha enters into mindfulness of breathing during the two months retreat, curiosity will arise. They will come to the heritage of Buddha who then gives dharma talk for them to believe in and follow. Furthermore, it is to protect the young monks from deserting Buddhism. There are monks who do not show respect in learning mindfulness of breathing in the beginning and want to return to heretic for learning other practices. These young monks will not give up if they know that even heretics come to the heritage of Buddha to receive the practice with respect.

Question:   During your retreat, you have universally entered into all *dhyāna*-s, liberation, *samadhi-s* and *samāpatti-s*, why do you only mention mindfulness of breathing?

Answer:   Although I have entered into all those practices, I only mention mindfulness of breathing because it is the foremost (上首) of all these practices. Furthermore, all these practices are only associates of mindfulness of breathing.[12]

Although mindfulness of breathing is specifically prescribed for the distracted type, its universal suitability is obvious, especially in view of its pacifying effect on the mind as well as the body. A modern Theravāda scholar makes the following observation:

*Ānāpānasati* is extremely peaceful, quiet, calm and happy in its intrinsic nature. The aspirant will feel continually refreshed and serene through its aid, and will never be satiated, owing to its sublime state of peace and intellectual profundity. Its practice therefore involves no difficulty or danger as in the case of the *Haṭha Yoga* system. From the very beginning it calms both mind and body; every taint of mind will disappear, full knowledge of *Vipassanā* will be attained, and finally the disciple will realize its

ultimate result, the happiness of *Nirvāṇa*.[13]

## 7.2 Stages of the practice of mindfulness of breathing

Commentaries of the Theravāda school state that one can practice mindfulness of breathing in the forest, under the foot of a tree or in an empty house. One practices seated with the legs crossed, body upright, and mind set in front at the top of the nose.[14] The MVŚ describes the technique thus: "Monks, breathing in and out, I am mindful that I breathe in and out."[15]

Both the Theravada and northern Abhidharma texts describe mindfulness of breathing in terms of sixteen stages. However, there are small differences in their explication of these stages. I shall follow mainly the description in the MVŚ. The first four stages are:

i) Mindfulness of breathing in and out short;

ii) Mindfulness of breathing in and out long;

iii) Realizing the whole body breathing in and out; and

iv) Calming the bodily elements of breathing in and out.

The MVŚ differs from the Theravāda texts in reversing the order of the first

and second stages, and gives the following explanation for doing so:

> Question:    For the mindfulness of breathing, is short breath first or
> long breath first?

> Answer:    Short breath first, then long breath. As it is said in the
> *Prajñapti-Śāstra* (施設論): when the *Bodisattva* enters
> into meditation, his breath is quick and fast. When the
> meditation is long enough, the breath will be stabilized.
> E.g., when a man carries heavy goods to walk through
> difficult and deep area, his breath is quick and fast.
> Then he reaches flat area, his breath is stabilized.
> Therefore, breath in and out short is before breath in
> and out long."[16]

The MVŚ[17] then explains that in the first two stages, breathing is done through
the nose. In the third stage, that is, realizing the whole body breathing in and
out, breathing is done through all of the pores throughout the body, just as in a
piece of lotus root air goes in and out throughout the whole segment. In the
fourth stage, calming the bodily elements of breath involves making the breath
smaller and finer until it does not arise.

It is important to note that in these stages, mindfulness of breathing in and out

is a general characteristic and breathing short and long and realizing and calming are individual characteristics. In addition, this practice is sustained by sensual elements (*dhatus*). Mindfulness of breathing in and out short is the first *dhyana*; that of breathing in and out long, the second; realizing the whole body, the third; and calming the bodily elements, the fourth.

The fifth through eighth stages are:

v)  experiencing the joy of breathing in and out;

vi) experiencing the happiness of breathing in and out;

vii) experiencing the mental elements of breathing in and out; and

viii) calming the mental elements of breathing in and out.

The fifth stage involves the contemplation of the joy of the *bhūmi* of the first and second *dhyāna*-s; the sixth, the contemplation of the happiness of the *bhumi* of the third *dhyana*; the seventh, the contemplation of *saṃjñā* and *cetanā*; and the eighth, making mental elements smaller and finer until they do not arise.

The next four stages are:

ix) realizing the mind of breathing in and out — this is to contemplate the body of consciousness;

x) gladdening the mind of breathing in and out;

xi) concentrating the mind of breathing in and out; and

xii) liberating the mind of breathing in and out.

Although the Buddha does not practice stages ten through twelve, *bodhisattvas* do them repeatedly.

The last four stages are:

xiii) contemplating the impermanence of breathing in and out;

xiv) contemplating the abandonment of breathing in and out;

xv) contemplating the escape of breathing in and out; and

xvi) contemplating the cessation of breathing in and out.

The MVŚ discusses the last four stages as follows:

> According to Venerable Vasumitra, "Contemplating impermance is to contemplate the impermance of breathing in and breathing out. Contemplating abandonment is to contemplate the abandonment of eight fetters. Contemplating escape is to contemplate the abandonment of craving (*tṛṣṇā*) fetter. Contemplating cessation is to contemplate the abandonment of fetter *dharma*."

> Others say, "Contemplating impermance is to contemplate the impermance of the four big elements. Contemplating abandonment is to contemplate the impermance of the ignorance fetter.

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Contemplating escape is to contemplate the abandonment of the craving fetter. Contemplating cessation is to contemplate the abandonment of all other fetters."

Others say, "Contemplating impermance is to contemplate the impermance of rūpa. Contemplating abandonment is to contemplate the abandonment of past fetters. Contemplating escape is to contemplate the abandonment of the present fetters. Contemplating cessation is to contemplate the abandonment of future fetters."

Others say, "Contemplating impermance is to contemplate that both the big elements and *rūpa* etc. are impermanent. Contemplating abandonment is to contemplate the abandonment of sufferings. Contemplating escape is to contemplate the abandonment of happiness. Contemplating cessation is to contemplate the feeling of neither suffering nor happiness."

Dharmatrāta says, "Contemplating impermance is to contemplate the impermance of the five *skandha*-s. Contemplating abandonment is to contemplate the emptiness and non-self of the five *skandha*-s. Contemplating escape is to contemplate the suffering of the five *skandha*-s. Contemplating cessation is to contemplate five *skandha*-s not turning into cessation.[18]

## 7.3 Mode of operation of mindfulness of breathing

It is debated whether breathing abides in the body or the mind for its operation. According to the *sūtra*-s,

> Buddha said, "Breathing is a body *dharma* and the body is its basis. It is associated with the body and abides to the body for its operation."

> *Prajñapti-śāstra* said, "Why a dead person does not have breathing? Because breathing is operated through force of the mind, a dead person has the body but not the mind."[19]

The MVŚ states that breathing can operate through either the body or mind depending on the situation, but four conditions must be fulfilled: i) the body for the breathing to abide in; ii) air channels; iii) openness of the pores; and iv) the arising of coarse mind at the level (*bhūmi*) of the breath. It explains that there is no breathing in either the meditation of non-ideation (*acittaka*; 無想定) or that of cessation (滅盡定). If mindfulness of breathing operates through the body and not the mind, then it does so at the above two meditation levels, for although the conditions of the body, pores and air channels are fulfilled, there is no arising of coarse mind. If mindfulness of breathing operates through the

mind and not the body, then it does so among the *ārūpya*-s (formless realms). *Ārūpya*-s have no breath because they have none of the four conditions. If mindfulness of breathing operates through both the mind and body without fulfilling the four conditions, then embryos can breathe. They cannot breathe because the four conditions are not fulfilled: although they have coarse mind, their bodies are immature and neither their air channels nor pores have opened.[20]

K. L. Dhammajoti has recently published a comparative study of the doctrine of mindfulness of breathing preserved in the various traditions, especially the northern tradition, which represents a significant contribution to Buddhist scholarship on the subject. He summarizes his findings as follows.[21]

A survey of the various texts . . . suggests that there are distinctively two broad textual traditions:

i) One, represented by *Thera*, and joined by *Śāri* and AVN, enumerates the sequence, impermanence –> detachment –> cessation –> renunciation. The enumeration in *SarvV*, *DZDL* and *DSS* may be considered a variant of this tradition.

. . .

(ii) The other textual tradition, found in all the other northern texts, represented by *Sarv* and Yogācāra, enumerates the sequence:

impermanence –> abandonment –> detachment –> cessation. The *ŚrBh* offers the most elaborate rationale for this latter sequence, linking the last three modes to the Sarvāstivāda doctrine of the three types of *dhātu*.

Among the northern texts, there are differences pertaining to some details: as to whether the meditator first breathes in or out and whether he first breathes long or short. It is noteworthy that the *sūtra* and *vinaya*, whether *Thera* or northern, all agree that he first breathes in long. This most likely reflects the authenticity of the ancient *sūtra-vinaya* tradition here.

. . .

In the canonical Abhidhamma/Abhidharma texts of the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda, the 16-mode *ānāpānasmṛti* is not attested, with the interesting exception of the ancient \**Śāriputrābhidharma*. It is found extensively in the post-canonical Abhidharma texts and commentaries.

Following the *sūtra*, the post-canonical Abhidharma texts and *Śāri* explicitly correlate the four tetrades with the four abodes of mindfulness. However, *ŚrBh* may be a noteworthy exception, since its explanatory part does not suggest such a correlation. This correlation results in the need to explain away certain

difficulties some of which may not be entirely satisfactory. For instance, VII should come under *vedanā-smṛtyupasthāna,* but it speaks of "experiencing *citta-saṃskāra*", and accordingly the various texts have to offer their interpretations.

*Thera*, *Sarv* and *ŚrBh*, which correlate modes I-IV to the attainment of the four *dhyāna*-s seek to explain in their respective ways how the practice of *ānāpānasmṛti* is applicable in the 4$^{th}$ *dhyāna* where, according to all Buddhist traditions, breathing ceases totally.

The various texts correlate *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* with the 16 modes differently. Thus, *Thera* correlates the first three tetrades with both *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, and the last exclusively with *vipaśyanā*. On the other hand, *ŚrBh* speaks of modes I-XII as *śamatha*, XIII as *vipaśyanā*, and XIV-XVI as both *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*.

The 16-mode practice is from a certain perspective sequential. But it is at the same time not exclusively a linear process; at any rate a beginner cannot expect to perfect all the 16 aspects in one or two sittings. It is more appropriately understood as a spiral — going round at ever higher and higher levels. This is especially

clear from the exposition in *DDS* which explains the meditation in terms of the paths of preparatory effort and advancement.

For one who is the intellectually restless type or who too easily falls prey to conceptual entanglement, *ānāpānasmṛti* is the appropriate antidote. But the explanations of the 16-mode meditation in all traditions confirm that at its highest level, it is a complete path of liberation capable of leading to *arhat*-hood.

## 7.4 Six-stage mindfulness of breathing

In addition to the sixteen-mode mindfulness of breathing, which is elucidated in the *sūtra*-s, the Abhidharma tradition expounds on the six-stage mindfulness of breathing, which is not found in the *sūtra*-s. This six-stage or sixfold operation (*ṣaḍ-kāraṇa*) method is the main one expounded in the MVŚ. The stages include: 1) counting (*gaṇanā*), 2) following (*anubandha/ anugama*), 3). stilling/fixing (*sthāpanā*), 4) observing (*upalakṣaṇa*), 5) transforming/turning (*vivartana*) and 6) purity (*pariśuddhi*).

1. Counting
There are five types of counting, namely, full, reductive, additive, disorderly

and pure. Full counting involves counting from one to ten; reductive, counting in descending order; additive, counting in ascending order; and disorderly, counting past ten. According to some masters, disorderly counting is to count breathing in as breathing out, and vice versa, whereas others say it is to count in a disorderly manner. Pure counting is to count the five in-breaths as the five times of breathing in and the five out-breaths as the five times of breathing out.[22]

The MVŚ includes the following discussion on whether the breath in or the breath out should be counted first:

> Question: Should we count the breathing in first or we should count the breathing out first?

> Answer: Count the breathing in first, then the breathing out, because when there is birth, breathing in takes place and when there is death, breathing out takes place.

> Birth and death process clearly indicates that "in" then "out" and not the other way round.[23]

## 2. Following

This involves making the mind follow the breath from without to within. One

follows the breath from the mouth or the nose to the throat, chest, navel and finally tips of the fingers and toes. The mind follows the whole path from outside to inside. When breathing out, the process is reversed. It is stated that the mind should follow the breath traveling out to the extent that the practitioner is capable (隨根勢力).[24]

(3) Stilling/fixing

This concerns fixing the mind on where the breath abides: it initially abides at the mouth and nose, then the throat, chest, navel and finally tips of the fingers and toes. The mind will go to where the breath rests and fix itself thereon.[25] According to some masters: "Stilling is the contemplation on the breathing by the stilling the mind which abides throughout the whole body. It is like the thread inside a chain of pearls."[26]

(4) Observing

This is the observation and contemplation of the resting breath at its various abodes, including the mouth, nose, throat, fingers and toes and so forth. In this contemplation, the practitioner is mindful of the four great elements in the air. All *rūpa*-s are made of these four great elements. The derived *rūpa*-s are the abodes inducing the arising of the *citta* and *caitta*-s. Through operating in such a way, starting from contemplation of the breath, the contemplation process continues until insight into the nature of the five *skandha*-s is achieved.[27]

(5) Transforming/turning

This is the stage of the arising of the fourfold application of mindfulness of the body (*kāya* 身), sensation (*vedanā* 受), *citta* (心) and *dharma* (法) through the mindfulness of breathing.


(6) Purity

This refers to the stage of attainment from warmed-up (*uṣmagata*) to the stage of the non-trainee. Some masters say that the four *nirvedha-bhāgīya*-s are subsumed under transforming and not purity, and that the latter starts from *duḥkhe dharmajñānakṣānti* (苦法智忍) until the stage of the non-trainee. Others say that transforming proceeds from the fourfold application of mindfulness until *vajropama-samādhi* (金剛喻定) because until then, the practitioner still has defilements and cannot be called pure.[28]


# 7.5 Functions of the six stages of mindfulness of breathing


The MVŚ states that various functions are performed in each of the six stages of mindfulness of breathing:


Counting can perform two functions: first, counting the breathing in

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and the breathing out; second, equanimitising the attachment.

Following can perform two functions, first, following the breathing in and the breathing out; second, equanimitising the escape (*niḥsaraṇa*).

Stilling can perform two functions, first, calming the breathing in and the breathing out; second, abiding to *śamadhi*.

Observing can perform two functions, first, contemplating the breathing in and the breathing out; second, grasping completely the characteristics of the *dharma*-s of *citta* and *caitta*.

Transforming can perform two functions, first, turning the mindfulness of breathing; second, entering into the contemplation of the four noble truths. Others say that turn can perform two functions, first, detaching the nature of *pṛthagjana*; second, attaining the nature of *ārya*. Others say that turn can perform two functions, first, detaching defilements; second, attaining pure wisdom.

Purity can perform two functions, first, contemplating the four noble truths; second, entering into the path of *ārya*. Others say that

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pure can perform two functions, first, experiencing directly *nirvāṇa*; second, experiencing directly *parinirvāna*. Others say that pure can perform two functions, first, experiencing directly bliss of the present life; second, experiencing directly the dhatu of the two *nirvāṇa*-s.[29]

The MVŚ then discusses the categorization of these six stages under *śamatha* or *vipaśanā*:

> Question: Out of these six stages of mindfulness of breathing, how many are categorized under *śamatha* and how many are categorized under *vipaśanā*?

> Answer: Some say that the former three are categorized under *śamatha*, the latter three are categorized under *vipaśanā*.

> Furthermore, some say that the former three are categorized under *vipaśanā* and the latter three are categorized under *śamatha*. This is to say that it is not definite; all may be categorized under *śamatha* or under *vipaśanā*.[30]

The above discussion supports the position taken in the previous chapters that

*śamatha* and *vipaśanā* are not mutually exclusive. During meditation, both *śamatha* and *vipaśanā* exist, although one may predominate at a given time.

Regarding the doctrine of the six-stage mindfulness of breathing, K. L. Dhammajoti concludes:

> The six-stage doctrine was very probably originated with the northern commentarial traditions, most likely within the broad Sarvāstivāda lineage. Venerable Buddhaghosa's eight-stage version could well have been a development on the basis of the four-stage doctrine in the Vmm[31]. This four-stage enumeration is shared by at least two other extant northern texts.

> Although the six-stage doctrine came to generally represent the main exposition on *ānāpānasmṛti* in the northern tradition, it did not seem to have been unanimously accepted, as evidenced by the criticism in the *Satyasiddhi-śāstra*. Interestingly, the early Yogācāra tradition, while inheriting the sixteen-mode exposition, in its essential, does not teach the six-stage doctrine, but offers instead a five-stage exposition on *ānāpānasmṛti* culminating in the sixteen-mode practice.

> There are differences between the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda lineages concerning the detailed explanations on the stages. Of particular

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interest is that on the stage of following. The Sarvāstivāda texts here clearly contain an element of visualization operated through *adhimukti*. Such a feature is not to be found in all the expositions, whether southern or northern, on the sixteen-modes.

Like the sixteen-mode exposition, the six-stage doctrine covers all the stages of spiritual progress right up to *arhat*-hood. Accordingly, *ānāpānasmṛti* is no mere "breathing exercise", nor is it to be confined to merely the *śamatha* category of meditation. There is, however, some exception, as in the *\*Dharmatrāta-dhyāna-sūtra* which includes it under the path of preparation. In this respect, it is similar to the exposition on *ānāpānasmṛti* in the Theravāda as well as the early Yogācāra traditions in that the meditation is fully accomplished only at the culmination of the sixteen-mode operation. However, the divergence on this point from the rest of the textual traditions discussed does not seem so significant when it is remembered that both the sixteen-mode and the six-stage cultivations properly speaking represent a spiral, rather than linear, path of progress.

## 7.6 Summary

Following the Buddha's own teaching, mindfulness of breathing is expounded in Abhidharma texts as one of the most important methods of mental training, and described as one of the two gateways to immortality. The two major forms are the sixteen-mode practice inherited from the *sūtra*-s and the six-stage (or six-operation) method. In both forms, it is clear that mindfulness of breathing is not simply a method for gaining *śamatha* or counteracting distraction. When pursued properly, it can lead to the final goal of practice — enlightenment.

**NOTES**

[1] BM, 18, 227.

[2] MVŚ, 136c26.

[3] MVŚ, 662c8-10.

[4] For example, SĀ, 139b; AVS, 806a; MVŚ, 944a

[5] AKB, 341.

[6] EĀ, 581c.

[7] The *Abhidharmahṛdaya-vyākhyā* (雜阿毗曇心論) mentions only three portals for crossing over (度門), which most likely correspond to the *avatāra-mukhas*: *aśubhā* for the greed type, *ānāpana-smṛti* for the *vitarka-vicāra* type and *dhātu* contemplation for the view type. T28, 908b; see K. L. Dhammajoti, "The Sixteen-mode Mindfulness of Breathing," *Journal of Buddhist Studies*, Vol. VI (Colombo, 2008), 252.

[8] U Wogihara, *Bodhisattva-bhūmi*, 110: *Cittaṃ indriyaṃ āśyaṃ anuśayaṃ paryeṣya yathāyogaṃ yathā'rham eva vicitreṣv avatāra-mukheṣv avatārayati aśubhayā maitryā idaṃ-pratyatyatā-pratītya-samutpādena dhātu-prabhedena ānāpanasmṛtyā yathā-yogaṃ yath'rhaṃ avatāra-mukheṣv avatārya.*

[9] See K. L. Dhammajoti, *op. cit.*, 252ff.

[10] MVŚ, 993c17-18.

[11] BM, 18, 236ff.

   S.v. 317.

[12] MVŚ, 136 a1-16.

[13] BM, 18, 237.

[14] BM, 18, 233.

[15] MVŚ, 136a17ff.

[16] MVŚ, 136a22-b1.

[17] MVŚ, 136b1ff.

[18] MVŚ, 136b29ff.

[19] MVŚ, 132a3-6.

[20] MVŚ, 132a12ff.

[21] K. L. Dhammajoti, *op. cit.*, 281ff.

[22] MVŚ, 134c27ff.

[23] MVŚ, 135a5-8.

[24] MVŚ, 135a9-15.

[25] MVŚ, 135a15-17.

[26] MVŚ, 135a17-18.

[27] MVŚ, 135a18-23.

[28] MVŚ, 135a23-28.

[29] MVŚ, 135a29-b12.

[30] MVŚ, 135b13-18.

[31] Vmm = *Vimuttimagga* 解脱道論 T32, no. 1648.

# Chapter 8 — Contemplation of the Impure (*aśubhā*; 不淨觀)

## 8.1 The importance of *aśubhā* contemplation[1]

Buddhist doctrines of spiritual praxis and the path of progress are intertwined with cosmological doctrines. An important tenet is the division of sentient existence into three spheres (*dhātu*-s): the sphere of sensuality (*kāma-dhātu*), that of fine materiality (*rūpa-dhātu*) and that of non-materiality (*ārūpya-dhātu*). To experience a mental state higher than that of a higher sphere, a sentient being can practice meditation. However, this requires the ability to transcend sensual greed (*kāma-rāga*), which characterizes existence in the sensual sphere. Hence, the success of meditation praxis is primarily dependent on the transcendence of sensual desire, which can be achieved through *aśubhā* meditation. Ghoṣaka, one of the main ancient Sarvāstivāda masters, argues that this meditation is especially important because it leads to the overcoming of sensual greed; once this is achieved, the other hindrances to meditation success can readily be overcome.

In the general Abhidharma tradition, contemplation of the impure and mindfulness of breathing are called the two gateways to immortality (*amṛta-dvāra*-s), and constitute the first of the requisite practices to achieve

*nirvāṇa*. Of the former, the MVŚ states: "Contemplation on Impure is the foremost of all contemplation practices."[2]

Venerable Vajirañāṇa, author of *Buddhist Meditation*, highlights the importance of the contemplation of the impure as follows:

> The loathsomeness of the body was very widely recognized among the sages of India, but this method of meditating upon a dead body has not yet been found in any Indian system other than Buddhism . . . The practice is recommended in Buddhist teaching for those who are of a lustful disposition.[3]

## 8.2 The process, methodology and objects of the contemplation of the impure

The aim of contemplation of the impure is to achieve a state in which sensual desire is subdued through recognition of the repulsive nature of the body. It is a fact that we are trapped in samsaric existence because of our attachment to our personal existence (*ātma-bhava*); thus, even sensual desire can be at least in part linked with the desire for existence (*bhava-rāga*), because our personal existence — as we still exist in the sensuality sphere — entails sensual

attachment. Hence, the practice of *aśubhā* meditation, while primarily serving as the antidote to sensual greed, contributes to overcoming the greed for existence.

I shall first discuss the practice as it is expounded in the Theravada tradition, especially in the *Visuddhimagga*, a commentary written by Buddhaghosa in the fifth century CE, as the Theravāda Abhidhamma texts offer many details of the various stages of the practice, including the elaborate process of preparation. This will provide a better understanding of the Sarvāstivāda explication, which is similar. The important differences between the two expositions shall also be discussed.

## 8.2.1 Description of the contemplation of the impure in the *Visuddhimagga*

Traditionally, in India, corpses were left in the open in charnel grounds. *Aśubhā* meditation entailed visiting these grounds, and thus the following procedure was developed.

Initially, the practitioner must approach a teacher to obtain the necessary information of the practice including the various rules and duties, such as the path of going and returning, characterization of the surroundings and signs of

a corpse and methods of meditation.

Before going to the charnel grounds, the practitioner has to gather information about the corpse (e.g., whether it has been eaten by animals) and its location (e.g., whether there is any danger in going there). On approaching the corpse, he has to pay attention to the direction of the wind to avoid inhaling the unpleasant smell. The surroundings and various signs of the corpse's location (e.g., trees and rocks) should be studied so that no illusionary visions caused by these signs will arise during meditation.

Ten signs, or characteristics, of a corpse are to be apprehended:

i) color —the color of the dead body (e.g., black, white, yellow);

ii) mark — the age of the dead person (e.g., young, middle-aged, old);

iii) shape — the shape of each part (e.g., head, arm, foot);

iv) direction — this can mean either the direction of the corpse relative to the practitioner or the two directions, upper (above the navel) and lower (below the navel);

v) location — this can mean either the location of the practitioner relative to the dead body or the locations of the various parts of the corpse; and

vi) limit — the corpse is limited below by the sole of the foot, above by the hair and across by the skin and so forth.

After contemplation of the above, an afterimage may appear in any part of the corpse. If not, the practitioner should grasp the swollen corpse and apprehend the following five characteristics:

vii)joints — one hundred and eighty joints of the corpse, including the fourteen large joints (e.g., three joints in the right arm);

viii) openings — hollows between hands, arms, legs and so forth;

ix) concavities — concave places of the body (e.g., eye sockets, mouth); or, the practitioner notes that he is standing in a concavity and the corpse is lying on a convexity; and

x) convexities — raised places of the body (e.g., knee, forehead); or, the practitioner notes that he is standing on a convexity and the corpse is lying in a concavity.

The object of this meditation is neither easy to obtain nor long lasting; hence, once the sign of the object is lost, the practitioner has to sit down and reflect on the object as it is placed in front of him. During this process, a mental image (*uggahanimitta*) will arise. After continuous reflection on this image, an afterimage (*patibhāga-nimitta*) will arise.

The object of the meditation, the corpse, has ten states, which produce different mental and afterimages for contemplation. The states are as follows.

1) Swollen corpse (*uddhumātaka*). The mental image is of a swollen corpse,

foul and repulsive, which destroys passion related to the body. The afterimage is of a fat man lying down, which abolishes the notion of individuality. Through the contemplation of this afterimage, sensual desire subsides and hindrances are gradually eliminated.

> *Vitakka* lifting the mind on to the same sign, *vicāra* keeping the mind upon it, *pīti* causing physical tranquility, *sukha* reposing the mind, and *samādhi* concentrating the mind and thought, arise in the *Jhāna* state. Thus at that very moment the First *Jhāna* is produced in him through the image of the swollen corpse. This *Jhāna* is called "*Uddhumātaka*."[4]

2) Discolored corpse (*vinālaka*). The mental image is of a corpse with blotchy, discolored skin and the afterimage is of one the skin of which is mainly one color. This induces the *dhyana* called *vīnilaka*.

3) Festering corpse (*vipubbaka*). The mental image is of a corpse from which fluid trickles and the afterimage is of one that is motionless.

4) Fissured corpse (*vicchiddaka*). This corpse is usually scattered. The practitioner should not put together the pieces of the body by hand but rather seek assistance from others (e.g., monastery attendant, ascetic) or use a walking stick. Through directing the attention to the object and comprehending the repulsiveness of that which is cut up, the mental image is of a corpse cut in the middle. The afterimage is of one that is whole.

5) Mangled corpse (*vikkhāyitaka*). The mental image is of a corpse that is mangled in places, and the afterimage is of one that appears complete and whole.

6) Scattered corpse. The natural decay process results in the scattering of the various parts of the corpse. The practitioner must gather these parts and assemble them into the shape of a body. There will be spaces and gaps between these parts. The mental image is of a corpse with evident gaps, and the afterimage is of one complete and whole.

7) Cut and scattered corpse. This type is similar to the scattered corpse, but the scattering is caused mainly by cutting. The mental image is of a corpse fissured by wounds, and the afterimage is of one complete and whole.

8) Bleeding corpse. When a person is wounded (e.g., on a battlefield), blood trickles from the wounds. The mental image is of a red banner waving in the wind, and the afterimage is of a corpse that appears undisturbed.

9) Worm-infested corpse. A corpse several days old is filled with masses of worms, which then come forth from the nine doors. The mental image is of a moving mass, and the afterimage is of a ball of boiled rice as large as the body.

10) The skeleton. The mental image is of the bony framework of a body in which holes and gaps appear, and the afterimage is of a skeleton unbroken and whole.

In conclusion, the practitioner should go to the location of the corpse and

apprehend the ten signs of foulness from ten perspectives.

> It is a peculiarity of the asubha meditation that the sign of its mental image is born in the mind only when the idea of the loathsomeness of the body is thoroughly grasped. Though it is ten-fold in object, it is one in characteristic; that is the repulsive, disgusting and abominable state.[5]

It is important to note that foulness also appears in a living body, although it is less evident. The contemplation of the ten objects counteracts the different types of greed that are related to the body as follows:

swollen corpse — shape of the body;

discolored corpse — color of the body;

festering corpse — smell of the body (e.g., scents and perfumes);

fissured corpse — compactness of the body;

mangled corpse — accumulation of flesh (e.g., breasts);

scattered corpse — grace of the limbs;

cut and scattered corpse — fineness and completeness of the body;

bleeding corpse — elegance (produced by ornaments) of the body;

worm-infested corpse — ownership of the body; and

skeleton — fine teeth.

## 8.3 Descriptions of the contemplation of the impure in the Abhidharma and examples of Abhidharmic analysis

### 8.3.1 Sarvāstivada description of the contemplation of the impure

As noted, contemplation of the impure and mindfulness of breathing are described as the two *amṛta-drāra*-s. The former is one of the three *avatāra-mukha*-s (異分),[6] and an antidote to the hindrance of sensual craving.[7]

### 8.3.2 Meditation practice as Abhidharma

The importance of meditation in the Abhidharma is underscored in the following definition of Abhidharma given in the MVŚ, which directly links the two:

> The intrinsic nature of *abhidharma* from the standpoint of absolute truth (*paramārtha*; 勝義) is none other than the outflow-free (pure) *prajñā* . . . For this reason, the *cintā-mayī prajñā* generated —

namely, the *aśubhā*, the *ānāpānasmṛti*, etc. — are also known as *abhidharma*; this is because they are able to contemplate on the aggregates individually and collectively . . . Moreover, these requisites (*saṃbhāra*; 資糧) sustain the outflow-free *prajñā* which [as a result] becomes more prominent; for this reason they are also known as *abhidharma*.[8]

## 8.3.3 *Adhimukti-manaskāra*-s — instruments for the contemplation of the impure

A *citta* arises on account of a mental application (*manaskāra*), among which *adhimukti-manaskāra* is instrumental in *aśubhā* contemplation. The term *adhimukti* (also, *adhimokṣa*) has various shades of meaning. Those which pertain to this context are "resolve" and "determination," signifying a state of firm resolution in which the mind is totally freed from doubt. The *Abhidharma* teaches three types of mental application.

1. Mental application to an intrinsic characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa-manaskāra*; 自相作意) — for example, "*Rūpa* has the characteristic of *rūpaṇā* [變礙]."

2. Mental application to a common characteristic (*samānyalakṣaṇa-manaskāra*) — that which is conjoined with the 16

modes of understanding (*ākāras*; 行相).

3. *Adhimukti-manaskāra* (勝解作意) — this mental application proceeds from *adhimukti*, in contrast to the "mental application to the real" (*tattva-manaskāra*; 真實作意). It is constructed by the imagination, and essential for the contemplation of *aśubhā*, *apramāṇas* (四無量), *abhibhv-āyatanas* (勝處), *kṛtsnāyatanas* (遍處) and so forth.

The MVŚ gives four opinions about the relationships among these three *manaskāras* and the arising of the Noble Path, of which the compilers endorse the first:

(i) Immediately after any of the three, the Noble Path can arise, and conversely. This conforms to the *sūtra* statement: "He develops the enlightenment-factor, mindfulness, together with the *aśubhā*" (*aśubhā-sahagataṃ smṛti-bodhyaṅgaṃ bhāvayati*); "together (*saha*)" meaning "immediately after (*anantaram*)";

(ii) Immediately after any of two types, the Noble Path can arise — excepting that to intrinsic characteristic. Immediately after the Noble Path, all three can arise;

(iii) It is only after the *sāmānyalakṣaṇa-manaskāra* that the Noble Path can arise. Immediately after the Noble Path, all three can arise. This does not contradict the above-mentioned *sūtra*, because it says so on the basis of successive causation: *adhimukti-manaskāra* induces *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*

which in turn induces the Noble Path;

(iv) Immediately after *sāmānyalakṣaṇa-manaskāra*, the Noble Path arises; and conversely.[9]

It is clear that, according to the Sarvāstivāda, a practice such as *aśubhā* contemplation, which operates by virtue of an *adhimukti-manaskāra*, can lead to the attainment of spiritual enlightenment. Although it is not a *tattva-manaskāra*, neither is it an "illusion" in the ordinary sense. An experience of so-called reality is relative from the Buddhist point of view. The experience of a particular type of reality is that with which our consciousness is correlated at the corresponding level. From this perspective, the genuine spiritual experience in an *adhimukti-manaskāra* meditation could (at least for an advanced meditator) be understood as one correlating to an even higher level of reality than that which is normally experienced by an enlightened worldling in an unconcentrated (*asamāhita*) state of consciousness. Saṃhgabhadra explains that although in *aśubhā* meditation one visualizes skeletons and so forth where there are none, this is not erroneous/upside down (*viparyasta/viparīta*; 顛倒):

> In general, there are two types of *aśubhā* meditation, one relies on the reals belonging to oneself, the other relies on *adhimukti*. (i) The first type is the case where, by virtue of the understanding (*prajñā*) conjoined with mental application, one examines, truly as they are,

the impurities of the internal bodily parts within oneself . . . Because it is conjoined with a mental application to intrinsic nature, it cannot result in the absolute abandonment of defilements. (ii) The type relying on *adhimukti* is the case where by virtue of *adhimukti*, one visualize (假想思惟) the various of impurities. This does not come under erroneous mental application, as it is opposed to the nature of the defilements. In fact, what is erroneous/upside-down cannot accomplish what one has intended. The [type of contemplation] can subdue defilements according to one's intention. How is it erroneous? It might be argued thus: Its object does not consist entirely of bones, and it is taken as being entirely bones — is not that upside-down? But this argument is not admissible, since this is a comprehension accordingly as the case actually is. That is: one who cognizes a man with regard to a post does not comprehend thus: "I am now seeing the appearance of a man with regard to the post." ⸺ this is then upside down. In this case (i.e. *aśubhā* meditation *adhimukti-manaskāra*), the meditator thinks thus: "Although the objects are not entirely bones, for the sake of subduing defilements, I should see them all as bones through *adhimukti*." Since he is comprehending accordingly as they actually are, in accordance with his intention, and is this able to subdue the defilements, how can it be upside-down? The power of this contemplation can suppress the defilements rendering them

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incapable of manifestation for the time being — since it has such a power of a skill in means, how it is unskillful?[10]

In the MVŚ, the function and significance of resolution in the contemplation of the impure are discussed as follows:

Question: In the meditation room which is full of bones, what objects are taken by this contemplation on the impure?

Answer: Some say that this contemplation takes the bones of the (practitioner's) own body as the object.

Other masters say that bones seen in the graceyard are taken as the object.

Others say that all the physical space in the room is taken as the object.

Comment: It should be said that this is the imaginative mental application of resolution conjoined with non-greed. There is thus no fault no matter what objects one likes to take.

Question: This contemplation takes all non-bones as bones, is it

not topsy-turvy?

Answer:  Although it is imaginary, it is not topsy-turvy for these reasons: Because it is wholesome; it is induced to arise by the proper mental application; it has the wholesome faculty of non-greed as its intrinsic nature; it induces the arising of the supreme preparatory effort leading to the path of noble; it suppresses defilement and effects a desirable fruit.[11]

Question:  If it is so, why it is not unwholesome?

Answer:  One is called unwholesome because of two causes, first, the object is topsy-turvy; second, the intrinsic nature is topsy-turvy. For this contemplation on the impure, the object is topsy-turvy, but the intrinsic nature is not topsy-turvy. Furthermore, there are another two causes for unwholesome, first, the object is topsy-turvy; second, the intention (*āśaya*; 意樂) is topsy-turvy. For this contemplation on the impure, the object is topsy-turvy but the intention is not topsy-turvy, so it is not unwholesome.[12]

### 8.3.4 Typical *sūtra* description of meditation practice

A typical description of the beginning of a meditation practice (including *ānāpānasmṛti* and *aśubhā* contemplation) is as follows:

> Here, O *bhikhu*-s, a *bhikṣu* has gone to the hermitage (*araṇya*; 阿練
> 若), to the root of a tree, or to an empty hut. He reflects on this very
> body, truly and properly with understanding (*samyak prajñayā*),
> from the top of the head above to the soles of feet below, bounded
> by the skin, as they are located, as they placed (*yathāvasthitaṃ
> yathāpraṇihitam*), as full of various kinds of impurities thus: "There
> are in this body, head-hairs, body-hairs . . . flesh (*māṃsa*) . . .
> excrement (*purīṣa*) . . . bile (*pitta*) . . . the brain (*mastakaluṅgam*)."
> O *bhikṣu*-s, just as a man with good sight (*cakṣuṣmān*) looking into a
> storehouse with both doors opened, filled with various types of
> grains, rice, sesame seeds . . . In this very same way, O *bhikṣu*-s, a
> *bhikṣu* reflects on this very body . . . This, O *bhikṣu*-s, is the
> cultivation of *samādhi* which, when well practised, developed and
> done repeatedly, leads to the abandonment of sensual greed
> (*kāma-rāga*).[13]

The beginning of this passage from the AVN that is partially cited in the MVŚ
is closer to the *Pāli* version: "A *bhikṣu* dwells in an *araṇya*, or under a tree or a

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secluded hut. Having seated cross-legged, with the body upright, vowing properly and abiding in face-to-face mindfulness (*pratimukhī smṛti*; 對面念)."[14] The MVŚ version reads:

In the *sūtra*, a *bhikṣu* is often described as going to a forest clearing, sitting cross-legged and gets established in "face-to-face mindfulness." We see similar description in *Mahāyāna sūtra-s*. E.g., *Vajracchedikā prajñāpāramitā* speaks of the Buddha after returning from His alms round: *bhagavān . . . prajñapta evāsane paryaṅkam abhujya ṛjuṃ kāyaṃ praṇidhāya pratimukhīṃ smṛtim upasthāpya*.

The MVŚ records the following explanation of "face-to-face mindfulness":

Ghoṣaka: All smṛti induced by yoniśo manasikāra is pratimukhī smṛti. What is the meaning of *pratimukhī smṛti*? *Mukha* refers to the object of meditation, *prati* means gazing directly (現矚); this *smṛti* causes the *citta* to gaze directly at the object of meditation and discern without topsy-turviness. Further, *mukha* refers to defilements, *prati* means to counteract; this *smṛti* counteracts the chief defilements responsible for *saṃsāra*, hence called *pratimukhī smṛti*.[15]

The description of *aśubhā* meditation as *pratimukhī smṛti* is explained as follows:

Question:     Why is it called "face-to-face mindfulness"?

Answer:      The meditator fixes his mindfulness between the eye-brows. He contemplates [the cadaver] as turning bluish or becoming swollen or rotting or disintegrating or turning unusual red, or being eaten [by worms, etc.], or being torn apart; or he contemplates the white bones (白骨; *śvetāsthi*), or a chain of bones. These are called "face-to-face mindfulness."

Question: Why does he fix his mindfulness between the eye-brows?

Answer:      The meditator initially produces the happiness of the noble ones with this spot as the support and [the happiness] gradually permeates the whole body. Thus, he fixes mindfulness between the eye-brows. This is like one who experiences sensuality: the sensual pleasure initially arises at the place of the male or female organs, and gradually permeates the whole

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body. Likewise is the case here.

. . .

When the meditator in this way fixes his mindfulness between the eye-brows and contemplates on the cadaver's appearance as being blowish, etc. It is the contemplation on the loathsome. Here, it is called "face-to-face mindfulness."

It is then explained why the contemplation of the loathsome is called "face-to-face mindfulness" and not *ānāpānasmṛti* or *dhātu-bheda* contemplation. Various reasons are given, including:

(i) The other two could indeed also be so-called. (ii) The *aśubhā* is the first of all meditations, hence when it is so-called, the other can also be known likewise. (iii) Most meditators rely on the *aśubhā*, not the other two, to enter into the Noble Path. iv) Ghoṣaka gives similar reasons, and adds: "Sensual is the foremost of the hindrances, when it is counteracted by *aśubhā*, the other hindrances will be abandoned accordingly. The *aśubhā,* being thus the proximate counteraction, is called the "face-to-face mindfulness."[16]

## 8.3.5 Description of the contemplation of the impure in the MVŚ

The MVŚ provides explanations of various key terms in the *sūtra*-s and detailed analyses of various aspects of the contemplation of the impure.

### 8.3.5.1 Types of contemplation of the impure[17]

There are three types of contemplation of the impure: delight in brevity (樂略), details (樂廣) and brevity and details. In delight in brevity, the practitioner grasps skillfully the various signs of the corpse and apprehends these signs in his own body through meditation with the force of resolution (*adhimokṣa*). The meditation involves contemplation of the blotchy color of the skin and the various parts of the skeleton from the bones of the feet up to the skull. Upon completion of the contemplation of these impure objects, the practitioner brings his consciousness to the point between his eyebrows in a tranquil manner. Then, mindfulness is turned into body, feeling, mind and *dharma*. In delight in details, the above process is carried out until the abode of mindfulness lies between the eyebrows. The practitioner then contemplates the skull, followed by the various parts of the skeleton down to the bones of the feet. He goes further, contemplating the border of the bones, then the bed, room, temple, garden, boundary of the house, field, river, country, border of the sea and finally, the whole world, which is full of bones. The order of contemplation is then reversed, from the world back to the skull. Upon completion of the contemplation of these impure objects, the practitioner brings his attention back to the point between his eyebrows in a tranquil manner. Then, mindfulness is turned into body, feeling, mind and *dharma*.

In delight in brevity and details, the process for delight in details is carried out until mindfulness abides at the point between the eyebrows. This process is repeatedly practiced until full familiarity is achieved; then, mindfulness is turned into body, feeling, mind and *dharma*.

## 8.3.5.2  Objects of the contemplation of the impure

The objective of the contemplation of the impure is "mastery of the mind" (自在). It is clearly stated in the MVŚ that this is done through taking impure objects as the objects of contemplation:

> Question:  Why does the practitioner, during the practice of contemplation on the impure, repeatedly contemplate brevity and details with impure objects as the object of contemplation?

> Answer:  For the sake of manifesting the attainment of the mastery of mind through contemplation of mind. It is because only those who can attain the mastery of mind from the object are able to contemplate repeatedly brevity and details. If there is no mastery of mind, the ability does not exist.[18]

Mastery of the mind is achieved because, through contemplation of the impure, impurity is directly realized and greed is quashed.[19]

The relationship between the number of objects and degree of mastery of the mind is summarized in the MVŚ in parallel form as follows.

First:

i)   Contemplation of the impure with a small number of objects but without a small degree of mastery (for those who contemplate only their own body);

ii)  Contemplation of the impure with a small degree of mastery but without a small number of objects (for those who take the world as the object of contemplation but are unable to meditate in an orderly manner);

iii) Contemplation of the impure with a small number of objects and small degree of mastery (for those who take their own body as the object of contemplation but are unable to meditate in an orderly manner); and

iv)  Contemplation of the impure with neither a small number of objects nor a small degree of mastery (for those who contemplate the impure in an orderly manner with the whole world as the object).

Second:

v)   Contemplation of the impure with an immeasurable number of objects but without an immeasurable degree of mastery (which is equivalent to the

second contemplation);

vi) Contemplation of the impure with an immeasurable degree of mastery but not an immeasurable number of objects (which is equivalent to the first contemplation);

vii) Contemplation of the impure with an immeasurable number of objects and immeasurable degree of mastery (which is equivalent to the fourth contemplation); and

viii) Contemplation of the impure with neither an immeasurable number of objects nor an immeasurable degree of mastery (which is equivalent to the third contemplation).[20]


## 8.3.5.3 Levels of contemplation of the impure

There are three levels of mastery of the contemplation of the impure. The meditator may be (i) a beginner (*ādikarmika*; 初習業), (ii) one who has mastered the practice (*kṛta-parijaya*; 已熟修) or (iii) one who has gone beyond mental application (*atikrānta-manaskāra*; 超作意).[21] The above description of the meditator bringing his awareness to the point between the eyebrows pertains to the highest level.[22]

These three terms are not confined to meditation practice. Distinguishing among the three *piṭaka*-s, the MVŚ notes:

Further, there is also a difference in terms of their stages (*avasthā*): That is, in terms of the stage of the beginner, the *sūtra* is taught; in terms of the stage of *kṛtaparijaya* (one who is a master), the abhidharma is taught; in terms of the stage of *atikrānta-manaskāra* (an absolute master), the abhidarma is taught.[23]

(i) Beginner level

The practitioner first fixes his *citta* on a part of his body, such as the toes or forehead. Having brought his *citta* to abide there, he then, with the power of *adhimukti*, visualizes the skin and flesh rotting away progressively until he sees the whole body reduced to a skeleton. Next, he extends the visualization, doing the same for a second individual, then those in a monastery, village, whole country, and so on until he can see the whole earth, bounded by the sea, filled with skeletons. To enhance his power of visualization (*adhimukti*), he then reverses the process until he can see only his own skeleton. At this point, he is said to be a beginner in *aśubhā* meditation.

(ii) The level of mastery

To further advance his power of *adhimukti* in the practice of mental reduction, the practitioner now leaves out the bones of the feet and applies his mind to the remaining parts of his body, progressively leaving more and

more parts out, until he finally visualizes one half of the skull. He has now mastered the operation of reduction in *aśubhā* meditation and is said to have mastered the practice.

(iii) The level of going beyond *manaskāra*

The practitioner advances further: he leaves out even the half of the skull and holds his *citta* between his eyebrows. When he can do this, he is said to have gone beyond mental application and become an absolute master.

The three levels of each type of contemplation of the impure are discussed in the MVŚ as follows[24]:

For delight in brevity, at the beginner level, the practitioner starts by contemplating the blotchy color of the corpse until he can visualize the first fragments of bones of his own body; at the level of mastery, he contemplates his own bones up to his skull; at the level of going beyond *manaskāra*, he starts from the contemplation of his own impure body and then brings his awareness to abide at the point between his eyebrows until mindfulness turns into *dharma*.

For delight in details, at the beginner level, the practitioner starts by contemplating the blotchy color of the corpse, then objects far away from it, and finally the bones of his own body; at the level of mastery, he starts by

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contemplating the bones of his own body up to his skull; at the level of going beyond *manaskāra*, he starts by contemplating his own impure body and then brings his awareness to abide at the point between the eyebrows until mindfulness turns into *dharma*. The same technique is used for delight in brevity and details.

Some say that the level is not determined by the involvement in the different parts of the process, for both beginners and mature practitioners can go through the whole process. Rather, the level depends on the practitioner's degree of sharpness and ability to control his mind during the meditation.

## 8.3.5.4  The intrinsic nature of the contemplation of the impure

There are different opinions about the intrinsic nature of the contemplation of the impure. According to the MVŚ,[25] the wholesome faculty of non-greed is its intrinsic nature. Practitioners regard understanding (慧) as its intrinsic nature because the *sūtra* says, "After eyes have seen the rūpa, they contemplate on the impure and conduct mental application properly and so on. Contemplation is understanding."[26]

Other masters say that disgust is the intrinsic nature of this method because the practitioner is disgusted by the contemplated object.

However, critics support the view that neither understanding nor disgust but rather the wholesome faculty of non-greed is the intrinsic nature of the contemplation of the impure because it is the antidote for greed related to the different kinds of *rupa*, and argue that understanding corresponds to this contemplation but is not its intrinsic nature. Hence, *rūpa* is taken as both the contemplated and antidote object.

## 8.3.5.5 The importance of *rūpa* in the contemplation of the impure and other analytical aspects of this meditation

The contemplation of the impure belongs to the spheres of sensuality and *rūpa* but not that of *ārūpya* because the latter has no *rūpa* to take as the object of contemplation. This meditation abides in the body in the sensuality sphere but cannot do so in the body in either the *rūpa* or the *ārūypa* sphere. Its mode of activity is different from the sixteen modes of activities because it takes the *rūpa* object of the sensuality sphere as its object for contemplation. Hence, it can be seen that *rūpa* in the sensuality sphere is very important for this practice.

The MVŚ[27] includes an in-depth discussion of whether the object of the contemplation comprises all *rūpa* or a small part of the sensuality sphere. Its

compilers conclude that the object is all *rūpa*. A story about Anirudha is related in which he is said to be unable to take a great number of *rūpa* objects to successfully contemplate the impure, but his failure is not taken as a universal example for other capable practitioners, including the Buddha, *Śrāvaka*-s, Śāriputra and other disciples of the Buddha, can do so successfully.

There is an interesting discussion about whether the physical body of the Buddha can be taken as the object for the contemplation of the impure:

> Question:   Can one take the physical body of Buddha as the object for the contemplation on the impure?

> Answer:   There is a view that no one can do so, because the *rūpa* of Buddha is profound, extremely fresh and clean like pure light which can not create the feeling of disgust. Other masters say that Buddha himself, but no other person, can take his own physical body as the object for contemplation on the impure.[28]

Some say that there are two types of contemplation of the impure: the first depends on *rūpa* to arise and the second on the fault (*doṣa*; 過患) of *rūpa*. In the former, one can take the Buddha's body as the object, whereas in the latter one cannot.

Others say that the two types of contemplation of the impure are as follows: in the first, common characteristics are taken as the object, whereas in the second, individual characteristics are taken as the object. In the former, the body of the Buddha can be taken as the object, whereas in the latter, it cannot.[29]

Contemplation of the impure can also be analyzed from different perspectives. This type of examination may seem trivial or "academic" but it shows the amount of effort the Ābhidharmikas have made to understand the nature and function of this meditation. It also serves as a good illustration of what may be called the "abhidharmization of spiritual praxis," which in fact abounds in the Sarvātivāda texts. The following are examples of these perspectives examined in this context.[30]

As to knowledge, the contemplation is accompanied by conventional knowledge (sa*ṃvṛti-jñāna*).

As to *samādhi*, the contemplation is not associated with *samādhi*.

As to the faculties with which it is conjoined, in general terms, it is conjoined with three faculties: happiness, joy and equanimity.

As to time period: this contemplation is tritemporal — a past contemplation

takes past cognitive objects; a present one takes present objects; a future one, if it is destined for arising (*utpatti-dharmin*; 未來生法), takes future cognitive objects; if not destined for arising, then it takes tritemporal cognitive objects.

As to moral species, it is skillful (*kuśala*).

As to the spheres to which it and its cognitive object pertain, it pertains to the sensuality and *rūpa* spheres, and takes cognitive objects pertaining to the sensuality sphere.

As to whether it is trainee, non-trainee or neither-trainee-nor-nontrainee, it is neither-trainee-nor-nontrainee and takes cognitive objects that are neither-trainee-nor-nontrainee.

As to its abandonability or otherwise, it is abandoned through cultivation and takes cognitive objects abandonable through cultivation.

As to whether it takes name (*nāma*) or meaning (*artha*) as the cognitive object, it takes only meaning.

As to whether it takes as the cognitive object the practitioner's own serial continuity (*sva-santati*), the continuities of others or non-continuities (i.e., non-sentient things), it takes as the cognitive object the practitioner's own

continuity and those of other sentient beings.

As to the mode of acquisition (*pratilambha*) ⸺ whether (i) acquired through effort (*prāyogika*), (ii) acquired through detachment (*vairāgya*) or (iii) acquired through birth (*upapatti-prātilambhika*), it may be acquired through either effort or detachment, but not through birth. Acquired through detachment means acquired through cultivation at the time when detachment arises. Acquired through effort means that it is made manifest through effort. For the Buddha, there is no acquisition through effort; for the *Śrāvaka*-s, it is acquired through the lower grade of effort; for the privately enlightened ones, through an effort of a medium or higher grade; and for an ordinary worldling, through an effort of the higher grade.

As to whether it has been previously acquired or not, it may be both. For *ārya*-s and *bodhisattva*-s in the last life, it may either have been previously acquired or not so. In the case of other ordinary worldlings, it can only have been previously acquired.

As to whether it is derived from listening, reflection or cultivation, it pertains to all three types.

As to whether it exists in the mental or sensory stage (*bhūmi*), it exists in the mental stage.

As to whether it also takes as objects, sound, smell, taste, contact and *dharma*, it takes only visible forms as the cognitive object.

In this connection it is stated that although the contemplation of the impure takes *rūpa* alone as its cognitive object to counteract greed of *rūpa*, it can also serve as an antidote to the greed for the other five types of objects. This is because the pracitioner first comes to be disgusted with material objects by means of the contemplation of the impure; he then becomes capable of generating disgust with regard to the other five types of objects, which are based on *rūpa*. In fact, one who has mastered the contemplation of the impure with regard to material objects will later on be inclined towards disgust for other types of objects. It is possible to speak of two kinds of contemplation of the impure: fundamental and emenational (*naiḥṣyandika*). The former takes only the *rūpāytana* as cognitive objects; the latter may take all forms of material objects such as sound and so forth, and even thoughts and thought-concomitants. However, the Abhidharma discourses on only the fundamental type, whereas the *sūtra*-s speak of both.

As to who can give rise to this contemplation, *ārya*-s, whether trainees or non-trainees, and ordinary worldlings can.

## 8.4 Summary

Contemplation of the impure is one of the two gateways to immortality. It is therefore one of the most important Buddhist methods of meditation. However, it may not suit those with a very negative mentality. As mentioned, it is said that some monks who specialized in this contemplation committed suicide. Thus, it is a powerful practice that should be done under the proper guidance of an experienced teacher. In this chapter, a number of discussions in the MVŚ on this contemplation have been reviewed. Many may be described as the "abhidharmization" of spiritual praxis, although the motive is soteriological. In the description of this practice, we see, among other things, the important role of the Abhidharma category, *adhimukti*. It is explained that although this contemplation is an *adhimukti-manaskāra* — that is, an imaginative visualization — it is not topsy turvy in nature because it is done with clear awareness of the purpose and process involved, and yields a spiritually desirable effect.

**NOTES**

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[1] My discussion on the Theravāda version of this meditation is based on two books, ParavaheraVajirañāṇa's *Buddhist Meditation* (BM), and Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli's *Path of Purification*, which is an English translation of Buddhaghoṣa's *Visuddhimagga*.

[2] MVŚ, 205a18.

[3] BM, 14, 167.

[4] BM, 14, 177.

[5] BM, 14, 181.

[6] MVŚ, 58b, 205a.

[7] MVŚ, 250b-c.

[8] MVŚ, 3b.

[9] MVŚ, 53a-b.

[10] Ny, 672a-b.

[11] MVŚ, 208a5-13.

[12] MVŚ, 208a14-19.

[13] The passage is taken from AVN, 23-25: *Iha bhikṣavo bhikṣuraṇyagato vā vṛkṣamūlagato vā śūnyāgāragato vā │ imam eva kāyam ūrdhvaṃ yāvatpādatalādadhaḥ keśamastakāt tvakparyantaṃ yathāvasthitaṃ yathāpraṇihitaṃ pūrṇaṃ nānāprakārasyāśucer yathābhūtaṃ samyak prajñayā pratyavekṣate │ santi asmin kāye keśā romāṇi . . . maṃsam . . . purīṣam . . . pittaṃ . . . mastakaluṅgam iti pūrṇaṃ nānāprakārasyāśucer*

*yathābhūtaṃ pratyavekṣate* │ *tadyathā bhikṣava ubhayato dvāravinirmuktaṃ koṣṭhāgāraṃ paripūrṇaṃ nānāprakārasya sasyajātasya dhānyatilasarṣapamudgayavamāṣāṇām* │ *taccakṣumān puruṣo vyavalokayan jānīyād imāni śūkadhānyāni* │ *imāni haladhānyāni* │ *evam eva bhikṣavo bhikṣur imam eva kāyaṃ yathāvasthitaṃ yathāpraṇṇhitaṃ yāvat pratyavekṣate* │ *iyaṃ bhikṣavaḥ samādhibhāvanā āsevitā bhāvitā bahulīkṛtā kāmarāgaprahāṇāya saṃvartate.* Cf. *Majjhima-nikāya*, iii, 89ff.

[14] Cf. *Majjhima-nikāya*, iii, 89: *Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu araññagato vā rukkhamūlagato vā suññāgāragato vā nisīdati pallaṅkam ābhujitvā ujuṃ kāyaṃ paṇidhāya parimukkhaṃ sastiṃ upaṭṭhapetvā.*

[15] MVŚ, 204a-c.

[16] MVŚ, 205a-b.

[17] MVŚ, 205b13ff.

[18] MVŚ, 205c18-21.

[19] MVŚ, 205c21-29.

[20] MVŚ, 206a1-7.

[21] AKB, 338; MVŚ, 205a-206c.

[22] MVŚ, 205b.

[23] MVŚ, 2a.

[24] MVŚ, 206a, b, c.

[25] MVŚ, 206c11-20.

[26] MVŚ, 206c13-14.

[27] MVŚ, 206c.

[28] MVŚ, 207b2-5.

[29] MVŚ, 207b.

[30] MVŚ, 207b-c.

# Chapter 9 — The Four Immeasurables (*apramāṇa*)

We have seen in the previous chapters that the system of Buddhist meditative praxis takes into careful consideration the specific dispositions and personality deficiencies of the practitioners. This feature is especially clear in the doctrine known as the "fivefold stilling of thought" (*cf. supra*, chapter 7). In this context, there developed in the Buddhist tradition, meditative training specifically designed for the refinement and sublimation of the meditator's emotional energies. The radiation of loving kindness, (*mettā*; *maitrī*) for instance, is taught in the early *sūtra*-s as the specific method for developing universal love towards not just the practitioner's beloved ones, but all sentient beings. Thus, in the *Karaṇīya-mettā-sutta* of the *Khuddaka-nikāya*, the Buddha exhorts:

> Just as a mother protects
> her only son with her own life;
> Likewise, develop an immeasurable mind
> towards all living beings.

A set of four spiritually positive emotional qualities are taught in the Sūtra, and developed in the Abhidharma. These are called the four immeasurables

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(*apramāṇa*), also known as the four divine abodes (*brahma-vihāra*): loving-kindness (*maitrī*; 慈), compassion (*karuṇā*; 悲), sympathetic joy (*muditā*; 喜) and equanimity (*upekṣā*; 捨). Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma explains that they are important for spiritual praxis because they are i) mutually inducible with the *dhyāna*-s — i.e., they can induce the attainment of the *dhyāna*-s and the latter can also induce them; ii) regarded as the moral foundation of the path of spiritual praxis; and iii) the excellent qualities (*guṇa*) generated from the *dhyāna*-s. The MVŚ offers the following commentary:

> Question: Why are the four immeasurables discoursed immediately after the *dhyāna*-s?
>
> Answer: It is because the *dhyāna*-s induce the four immeasurables and, further, the *dhyāna*-s and the four immeasurables are mutually inducible.
>
> . . .
>
> The four immeasurables are the excellent qualities within the *dhyāna*-s.[1]

There are two basic senses of the term "immeasurable": (i) These states of mind are called the immeasurables because they take all sentient beings, without discrimination, as their cognitive objects; and (ii) they counteract immeasurable proliferations (*prapañca*; 戲論).

# 9.1 The intrinsic nature and characteristics of the four immeasurables

Just as in the case of other types of meditative practice, Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma inevitably comes to examine the intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) of the four immeasurables. The MVŚ offers a detailed analysis in this regard:

> Question: What are the intrinsic natures of these four immeasurables?

> Answer: Both loving-kindness and compassion have the skillful root (*kuśala-mūla*), non-hatred (*adveṣa*), as their intrinsic nature, because they counteract hatred. If we take into consideration their conjoined (*saṃprayukta*) *dharma*-s and co-nascent (*anu(pari)vartaka*) *dharma*-s, then the intrinsic nature comprises four *skandha*-s or five *skandha*-s: for the sphere of sensuality, it is four *skandha*-s; for the sphere of fine-materiality, it is five *skandha*-s.

> Question: If both loving-kindness and compassion have the skillful root of non-hatred as their intrinsic nature, and

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both counteract hatred, then what type of hatred is counteracted by loving-kindness, what type of hatred is counteracted by compassion?

Answer: Loving-kindness counteracts hatred in the form of killing. Compassion counteracts hatred in the form of striking.

Furthermore, loving-kindness counteracts hatred towards where it ought to arise; compassion counteracts hatred where it ought not arise.

According to some: the loving-kindness immeasurable has the skillful root of non-hatred as its intrinsic nature because it counteracts hatred. The compassion immeasureable has harmlessness (*avihiṃsā*) as its intrinsic nature because it counteracts harmfulness. Sympathetic joy has the faculty of joy (*prītīndriya*) as its intrinsic nature; if we take into consideration the conjoined *dharma*-s and the co-nascent *dharma*-s, then for the sphere of sensuality its intrinsic nature comprises four *skandha*-s, and for the sphere of *rūpa* it comprises five *skandha*-s.

Answer: If the immeasurable of sympathetic joy has the faculty of joy as its intrinsic nature, how are we to understand the following statement in the *Abhidharmaprakaraṇa-śāstra* ? For instance, it says:

"What is the immeasureable of sympathetic joy?

It is joy, and the sensation, ideation, conditionings and consciousness conjoined with joy."

Whatever bodily and vocal *karma*-s generated by it, whatever conditionings disjoined from thought generated by it — they are all called joy. This being the case, how can the sensation of joy (this refers to the faculty of joy) be conjoined with sensation?

Answer: That passage [in *Abhidharmaprakaraṇa-śāstra*] should have said: it is is joy and the ideation, conditionings and consciousness conjoined with joy. It should not have mentioned sensation. The mention of sensation [there] is an error on the part of the reciters.

Furthermore, that *śāstra* speaks of the five *skandha*-s

collectively as the intrinsic nature of the immeasurable of sympathetic joy. Although the sensation of joy is not conjoined with sensation, the other *citta* and *caitasika dharma*-s are conjoined with sensation; hence it is not illogical even if it speaks in such terms.

According to other masters: this immeasurable of sympathetic joy has delight (欣; *\*prāmodya*, *\*rati*)[2] as its intrinsic nature. Delight as a distinct entity is not sensation; there exists another distinct *caitta* conjoined with the *citta*.

According to some: delight is among those *dharma*-s which are conjoined with the faculty of joy.

According others: after the arising of the faculty of joy, delight is generated by the force of joy. Explained in this manner, it is not wrong to state that this immeasurable of joy is conjoined with sensation.

Equanimity has the skillful root of non-greed (*alobha*) as its intrinsic nature, because it counteracts greed. If we take into consideration the conjoined *dharma*-s and

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co-nascent *dharma*-s, then for the sphere of sensuality,
the intrinsic nature comprises four *skanda*-s; for the
sphere of *rūpa*, it comprises five *skandha*-s. Such are
the intrinsic natures of the immeasurables.[3]

The MVŚ also analyses the characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) of the immeasurables. But
the compilers explain that their intrinsic natures and characteristics are in fact
the same. Other masters, on the other hand, make distinctions among their
charactersitics.

Question:   What are the characteristics of these four
immeasurables?

Answer:   Intrinsic nature is characteristic and characteristic is
intrinsic nature; for, intrinsic nature and characteristic
are inseparable.[4]

The great master Dharmatrāta, however, differentiates the characteristics of
the four immeasurable as follows:

Giving of benefection is the characteristic of loving-kindness.

Removal of harm is the characteristic of compassion.

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Rejoicing over the attainment [of good things] and the relinquishing [of bad things] is the characteristic of sympathetic joy.

Emptying at heart and evenness is the characteristic of equanimity.[5]

## 9.2 The counteractive effect and modes of activity of the four immeasurables

The immeasurables are essentially methods for refining and sublimating emotional energies in the course of one's spiritual struggle. Emotional imbalance and negativities are rooted in craving and view — two fundamental "proliferations". Proliferation (*prapañc*; 戲論) is a central concept in Buddhism. In the Sūtra the Buddha repeatedly stresses that the root of the problem preventing us from complete liberation is in fact proliferation — the irresistible proclivity within an unenlightened being to proliferate concepts and views on the basis of his experience of the world.[6] The *bhikṣu*-s are therefore urged to put an end to proliferation, and the Buddha is described as "one freed from proliferation" (Pāli: *nippapañca*; Skt: *nisprapañca*). Being freed from proliferation is synonymous with attaining *Nirvāṇa*.[7] As is clear from the exposition quoted below, the MVŚ in this context, while explaining

the signification of the term "immeasurable", highlights the twofold proliferation of view and craving, and emphasizes the suppression of these proliferations as the main counteractive function of the immeasurables. In the discussion below, it is also enlightening to see how the MVŚ links the problem of emotional negativities (e.g., hatred) to that of conceptualization (e.g. view).

> Question:   Why they are called immeasurables? What is the meaning of "immeasurable"?

> Answer:   They are called immeasurables because they take collectively all sentient beings as cognitive objects, and counteract immeasurable defilements of proliferation.

> Question:   There are two categories of proliferation. First, the proliferation of craving; second, the conceptual proliferation of view. Which immeasurable counteracts which category of proliferation?

> Answer:   The immeasurables cannot abandon defilements; they can only suppress them, or make them become more distant. Sometimes, all the four types [of immeasurable] counteract craving. Sometimes, all the four types counteract view.

If we consider from the perspective of the four types of direct counteraction, then we should say: the immeasurables of loving-kindness and compassion counteract directly the conceptual proliferation of view because the view character type (*dṛṣṭi-carita*; 見行者) has much hatred; sympathetic joy and equanimity counter directly the proliferation of craving because the craving character type (*tṛṣṇā-carita*; 愛行者) has much attachment.

According to some: loving-kindness and compassion counteract directly the proliferation of craving. Sympathetic joy and equanimity counteract directly the proliferation of view.

Furthermore, they are called immeasurables because they take collectively all sentient beings as cognitive objects, and counteract immeasurable defilements of indolence (*pramāda*). That is to say, the four immeasurables can counteract directly all the defilements of indolence in the sphere of sensuality.

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Furthermore, they are called immeasureables because these four are the abodes of extensive sportive enjoyment (廣遊戲) for the saints (ārya). This is just as the case that the wealthy ones have immeasurable types of abodes of extensive sportive enjoyment such as gardens, pavilions, terraces and hunting grounds, etc.

Furthermore, they are called immeasurables because these four can take all sentient beings as cognitive objects, give rise immeasurable merits (puṇya) and bring about immeasurable fruits.[8]

In brief: the above exposition in the MVŚ not only brings out the intrinsic natures and characteristics of the four immeasurable, but also defines the term "immeasurable" articulately, and specifies their efficacies in the path of spiritual progress. Their modes of activity are also explained: the giving of joy (與樂), removal of suffering (拔苦), rejoicing (喜慰) and putting aside (捨置) are the respective modes of activity of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

## 9.3 The preparatory effort and the practice of the four immeasurables

The MVŚ also explains the preparatory practices (*prayoga*) involved before one can actually enter into the imeasurables proper.

One who is engaged in practicing the four immeasurables first takes seven types of sentient beings, divisible into three major groups, as their cognitive objects: lower, middle and upper beloved ones; lower, middle and upper enemies; and neutral (i.e., neither the beloved nor the enemies) persons. After one's repeated practice with these seven types of object, the practitioner then extends his radiation of loving-kindness, etc., to include all sentient beings without any discrimination. This stage of extension is an important one without which the loving-kindness, etc., would not be properly an immeasurable. Taking the practice of loving kindness as an example, the DSŚ (4861-c) says that this meditation has two levels. At the first level, *samādhi* is initially attained through focusing loving kindness on the beloved ones. The second level is attained through repeated practice of the above *samādhi*: that is, the radiation of loving kindness is now expanded, and applied to immeasurable sentient beings in all directions through the spiritual force of resolve (*adhimukti*). Thus, we see that this practice, like those of the *aśubhā*, etc., involves a strong element of visualization for which the operation of *adhimukti*

is indispensable.

As we can see below, the MVŚ provides elaborate description of the practice, both in respect of the necessary preparation and of the actual practice proper:

Question:     What is the preparation for these four immeasurables?

Answer:       It takes seven types of sentient being as objects to generate the preparation. The seven types of sentient being are [classified thus]: Sentient beings of the sphere of sensuality divided into three different divisions — the beloved, the enemies, and the neutral ones. For the division of the beloved and enemies, they are further divided into upper, middle and lower subdivisions. The neutral division is collectively classified as one because there is no difference [among them].   Among the objects of these seven divisions of sentient beings, if one wishes to practise loving-kindness, one initially takes the division of the beloved as the cognitivevobject. From the division of the beloved, one takes the upper subdivision as the cognitive object first. The upper subdivision of the

beloved includes one's own parents and teachers (軌範親教; *ācārya*), or any other persons who are respectful including fellow practitioners who are wise and learned.

With the upper subdivision of beloved sentient beings as the cognitive object, one reflects thus: "How shall I make such sentient beings attain such kind of happiness?" However, on account of the habituation developed from beginningless time, the mind is extremely stubborn and difficult to tame — so much so that [even] towards sentient beings who have been great benefactors, evil intentions (阿世耶; *āśaya*) grow freely. Even when wholesome intentions arise through mental effort, they cannot stay. One should [thus] further vigorously reflect on their great benefaction in order to make the mind stay. It is just like throwing mustard seeds onto the tip of a sharp instrument. They hit it sometimes but are difficult to stay on it; it is only through continuous practice for a long time that one can succeed through the force of skillfulness to make them (the seeds) stay [upon hitting it]. Likewise, with regard to the upper subdivision of the beloved, the

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practitioner has to diligently practise the intention of giving happiness. It is only after a long period of time that it can stay firmly.

After having succeeded in making the intention of giving happiness stay firmly with regard to the upper subdivision of the beloved, one next, in the same manner, practices the intention of giving happiness to the middle subdivision of the beloved. Having thus succeeded, one further practises the intention of giving happiness to the lower subdivision of the beloved.

After accomplishing this, one next practices likewise the intention of giving happiness with regard to the middle division (i.e., the neutral persons); next, the lower subdivision of the enemies; next the middle subdivision of the enemies, next the higher subdivision of the enemeries. [In this way] gradually practicing until the stage of complete achievement, when one's intention of giving happiness universally to all beings of the sphere of sensuality continues evenly in a series — as to the highest subdivision of the beloved, likewise to the highest subdivision of the enemies. Up

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to this point, the cultivation of loving-kindness is completely accomplished.

The sequence in practising compassion and sympathetic joy is likewise. [However], there is a difference between the intention of removal suffering (compassion) and of rejoice (sympathetic joy): "How shall I make these sentient beings free from such suffering" — this is the intention of compassion. "Isn't it joyful to make these sentient beings free from suffering and acquire happiness" — this is the intention of sympathetic joy.

When one wishes to practise equanimity, one initially takes the division of the neutral ones as cognitive object. That is, with regard to them, one gives rise to the intention of even-minded-ness (捨置; lit:"setting aside", apparently in the sense of detachment) because it is easiest to be even-minded towards sentient beings of the neutral division. When one takes the beloved ones as cognitive object, there arises craving. When one takes the enemies as cognitive object, there arises hatred. That is why one takes the neutral ones as

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cognitive object at the beginning of the practice of equanimity. Having practiced equanimity towards the neutral division, one next practises equanimity towards the lower division of enemies; next, one practises equanimity towards the middle subdivision of enemies; next one practises equanimity towards the upper subdivision of enemies; next, one practises equanimity towards the lower subdivision of the beloved; next, one practises equanimity towards the middle subdivision of the beloved; next, one practises equanimity towards the upper subdivision of the beloved.  That one practices equanimity towards the enemies first and the beloved ones last is because of the fact that the thought of hatred, but not passion, is easy to relinquish.  When one gradually practises up to the point of complete accomplishment, the intention of putting aside continues evenly and collectively towards all sentient beings of the sphere of sensuality, without any discrimination, just like holding the balance evenly. One cognises sentient beings just like viewing the forest as a whole. Up to this point, the practice of equanimity is perfected.[9]

The practice of the four immeasurables is regarded as essential to spiritual development in any branch of Buddhism. As we have mentioned above, these practices in fact existed before the time of Gotama Buddha. In the Theravāda school, the *Visuddhimagga* regards them as four different subjects of meditative practice, while the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* connects them with the *dhyāna*-s, relating the practice of loving-kindness, compassion and sympathetic joy to the first three *dhyāna*-s, and equanimity to the fourth and the fifth *dhyāna*-s.[10]

The methods of practising the four immeasurables in the Theravada tradition are genderally very similar to those described in the MVŚ. For example, in the practice of loving kindness, four kinds of sentient beings are taken as objects, namely, those who are not dear, very dear friends, neutral persons and enemies.[11]

## 9.4 Summary

The meditative praxis known as the four immeasurables are taught in the early Sūtra. The fact that they are also called "*brahma-vihāra*" may indicate their pre-Buddhist origin. But of course the Buddhist versions are distinctively

Buddhist. In Abhidharma, this practice comes to be highly developed and expounded elaborately. The exposition in the Sarvāstivāda texts, particularly those in the MVŚ, suggests that although they are often prescribed as antidotes or counteraction to the major defilements, if they are pursued thoroughly they in themselves could well lead to full liberation. The MVŚ specifically explains that their fundamental importance lies in being counteraction to the twofold proliferation — craving and view. Moreover, we learn from these expositions that the problem of cognitive errors (false views) and affective attachment (craving) are inter-connected, and must be addressed as a whole and not in mutual isolation. The doctrine of the immeasurables is a demontration of this Abhidharmic insight. It must further be noted in this connection that throughout both early Buddhism and the Abhidharma tradition, these two defilements are in fact taught as the root-problem of saṃsāric entrapment. That is, it is on account of the attachment to them that we are stuck in the mire of *saṃsāra*.

In the doctrine of these immeasurables, we also see a good illustration of the Abhidharma system's very concrete and elaborate teaching on the meditative training of refining and sublimating our emotional energies, rendering our whole being apt for spiritual transformation and the final attainment of liberative insight. In addition, the description of the immeasurables as the "extensive sportive enjoyment" of the *ārya*-s is very interesting. For one thing, it shows a positive aspect of the doctrinal system of the Abhidharma — it is

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not just exclusively preoccupied with the negative doctrinal aspect of the abandonment of defilements: when the emotional negativities and cognitive errors are overcome — such as through the praxis of the immeasurables — there is the spiritual experience of spontaneous joy and creativity, described as "sportive enjoyment". Such a doctrinal recognition in the Abhidharma of this early period represented by the MVŚ could possibly have contributed to the emerging Mahāyāna doctrines, particularly such doctrine as a buddha's "body of enjoyment" (*saṃbhoga-kāya*).

# NOTES

1 MVŚ, 420, b8–10.

2 For a discussion of this *caitta*, see KL Dhamajoti, *Entrance into the Supreme Doctrine*, 2nd edition (Hong Kong, 2008), 31, 85 and note 123.

3 MVŚ, 420, b11–c8.

4 MVŚ, 420, c8–9.

5 MVŚ, 420, c10–12.

6 For a good discussion on the meaning and fundamental problem of *papañca*, see Bhikkhu Ñāṇānanda, *Concept and Reality in EarlyBuddhist Thought* (Kandy, 1976).

7 E.g., *cf. Dhammapada* 254 (also T 4, 568c):

*ākāke padaṃ natthi*

*samaṇo natthi bāhire;*

*papañcābhiratā pajā*

*nippapañcā tathāgatā.*

Also *cf. Saṃyutta*, iv, 362 ff; *Dhammapadatthakathā* iii, 378 f.

8 MVŚ, 420, c13–29.

9 MVŚ, 421.c9–422, a22.

10 BM, 263.

11 BM, 293.

# Chapter 10 — The Fourfold Application of Mindfulness

In 3.2.1.2.1 *Mokṣa-bhāgāya*, I briefly mentioned the fourfold application of mindfulness, namely, mindfulness of the body, sensation, *citta* and *dharma*-s. The four applications are of great importance not only for the process of *samatha* and *vipasyanā* but also as the only means for the purification of beings, which is emphasized by the Buddha in the *sūtra*-s.[1] They counteract the four topsy-turvy views, that is, permanence (*nitya*), happiness (*sukha*), Self (*ātman*) and purity (*viśudhi*), which are the principal reasons that beings are bound by *samsāra*.

## 10.1 The fourfold application of mindfulness and its significance

The Sanskrit term for the application of mindfulness is "*smṛty-upasthāna*." The first component, "*smṛty*," means "mindfulness" or "awareness," while the second component, "*upasthāna*," means "abiding closely" or "focus [of operation]." Xuan Zang's Chinese rendering of upasthāna as "四念住" reflects his understanding of it in the sense of "focus"; hence, the English rendering

"foundation (application) of mindfulness."

In the *Arthaviniścaya Sutra*,[2] the four foundations of mindfulness are discoursed upon as follows:

> What then, monks, are the four foundations of mindfulness?

> Monks, here a monk abides contemplating the body (sensation, *citta, dharma*-s) internally: ardent, clearly aware, and mindful, neither covetous nor dejected with the world. Likewise, he abides contemplating the body (sensation*, citta, dharma*-s) as body (sensation, *citta, dharma*-s) externally: ardent, clearly aware, and mindful, neither covetous nor dejected with the world. Likewise he abides contemplating the body (sensation, *citta*, *dharma*-s) as body (sensation, *citta, dharma*-s) both internally and externally: ardent, clearly aware, and mindful, neither covetous nor dejected with the world.

In the passage, "ardent" signifies the elimination of torpor or drowsiness, "clearly aware," the elimination of doubt and "mindful," the elimination of restlessness and remorse, while non-covetousness signifies the elimination of sensual desire and non-dejection, the elimination of malice.

Contemplation is done internally, externally and both internally and externally for the removal of internal and external defiled entities.

In contemplating the body (sensation, *citta,* mind) as body (sensation, *citta,* mind), the practitioner contemplates the mental object as it really is, which is the development of *vipasyanā*.

The MVŚ clearly defines the fourfold application of mindfulness: "Fourfold application of mindfulness comprises: first, mindfulness of body; second, mindfulness of sensation; third, mindfulness of *citta*; fourth, mindfulness of *dharma*-s."[3]

The AKB explains why there are four kinds of mindfulness:

> After the [four] cultivations of concentration, the foundations of mindfulness (*smṛtyupasthāna*-s) are explained. To explain them [the question is put]: What then, monks, are the four foundations of mindfulness?

> Four refers to mindfulness of body, feeling, mind, and mental object.

> [Question:] Why four, and neither more nor less?

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[Reply:] Because these are antidotes to the four perversions respectively: [belief in] the purity of things (*śuci*), pleasure (*sukha*), permanence (*nitya*), and the self (*ātman*).[4]

The MVŚ explains:

> But, in brief, this application of mindfulness is only one. That is, among the thought-concomitants (*caitasika*; 心所), the one, "understanding" (*prajñā;* 慧), is its intrinsic nature . . . Or it is divisible into two; i.e., with-outflow and outflow-free. Or it is divisible into three: i.e., upper, middle and lower divisions. Or it is divisible into four: i.e., connected with the three spheres and unconnected. Or it is divisible into five: i.e., connected with the three spheres, and pertaining to the trainee and to the non-trainee. In this way, up to immeasurable divisions if it is differentiated in terms of serial continuity of moments (相續剎那).

> Question: Why does the Bhāgavant, in this context, merely speak of four types, making less elaboration and combining more together?

Answer: The Buddha establishes four basing on the different modes of activities (*ākāra*) and cognitive objects (*ālambana*) — gross or fine — of *prajñā*.

Question: If it is so, why does the *Sūtra* say that contemplating internally and externally, there are in both cases twelve different types?

Answer: It only speaks of four because they do not go beyond the four. Just as the "seven-leaf tree" and "seven lives of a stream entrant (*śrotaāpatti*), likewise is this way."[5]

The importance of this practice is elucidated in the following passage, which is attributed to the Buddha and found in not only Abhidharmic texts but also the *sūtra*-s of the Northern and Southern traditions[6]: "[The fourfold application of mindfulness] is the way leading directly/exclusively (一趣道; *ekāyāna-mārga*) to the purification of sentient beings, and to the transcendence of grief and sorrows."[7]

In other words, the process of spiritual evolution can commence only when the practitioner is sufficiently mindful. He must be clearly aware of his predicament in samsāric existence as well as the possibility and desirability of transcendence from such an existence. According to the Buddha, the path to

achieve this is the practice of the fourfold application of mindfulness. Mindfulness as the absolutely necessary condition for spiritual growth is also emphasized in various other doctrinal formulations in the *sūtra*-s. For instance, the seven factors conducive to enlightenment (*bodhyaṅga*; 覺支) begin with mindfulness.[8]

# 10.2 The types of the fourfold application of mindfulness and their relation with corresponding types of sentient beings

The MVŚ states that in the sūtras, the Buddha discourses on three types of applications of mindfulness, namely, the application of mindfulness of the intrinsic nature of the mind (自性念住), in the mixed form (相雜念住) and of a cognitive object (所緣念住). Concerning the first type, the Sarvāstivāda school holds that it is the concomitant called *prajñā* (see below).

The definitions of the three types are given in the MVŚ as follows:

> Question: Where is the discourse of the application of mindfulness in its intrinsic nature?

Answer: As the *Sūtra* says, "There is a directed path which enables sentient beings to become pure, transcend and destroy grief and sorrow. That is, the fourfold application of mindfulness."

Question: What are the four?

Answer: The complete mindfulness of the body to the complete mindfulness of *dharma*-s.

Question: Where is the discourse of the application of mindfulness in the mixed form?

Answer: As the Sutra says, "He who says that the aggregation of wholesome *dharma*-s is the fourfold application of mindfulness, this is a proper saying. Why? It is only the fourfold application of mindfulness which constitutes the full possession of the aggregation of wholesome *dharma*-s. What are the four? From the complete mindfulness of body . . . "

Question: Where is the discourse of the application of mindfulness of cognitive object?

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Answer: As the *Sūtra* says, "He who says that the totality of *dharma*-s is the fourfold application of mindfulness, it is a proper saying. Why? It is only the fourfold application of mindfulness that completely subsumes the totality of *dharma*-s. What are the four? From the complete mindfulness of body . . . "[9]

There are two categories of the application of mindfulness — one pertains to the absolute truth (*paramārtha*; 勝義) and the other is conventional (*saṃvṛti*; 世俗). Of the three types listed above, the application of mindfulness of the intrinsic nature of the mind pertains to the absolute truth (*paramātha;* 勝義) because it "cannot be lost or destroyed throughout all periods of time (於一切 時, 不可壞失)."[10] The other two types are conventional. This is why the Buddha in his discourses always speaks of mindfulness in terms of the intrinsic nature of the mind.

The MVŚ analyzes who should receive the teachings of which type of the fourfold application of mindfulness, and gives the following scheme.

| Consideration from different perspectives | Types of the fourfold application of mindfulness | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | application of mindfulness of the intrinsic nature of the mind 自性念住 | application of mindfulness in the mixed form 相雜念住 | application of mindfulness of a cognitive object 所緣念住 |
| Personality type | those deluded about the application of mindfulness of the intrinsic nature of the mind 愚自性念住 | those deluded about the application of mindfulness in the mixed form 愚相雜念住 | those deluded about the application of mindfulness of a cognitive object 愚所緣念住 |
| Practice 行 | master practitioner 超作意行 | experienced practitioner 已習行 | beginner practitioner 初業行 |
| Inclination 樂欲 | those inclined towards brevity 樂略者 | those inclined towards an average number of | those inclined towards great detail |

|  |  | details<br>樂中者 | 樂廣者 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Faculty<br>根 | sharp<br>利根 | average<br>中根 | dull<br>鈍根 |
| Jñāna<br>智 | jñāna born of<br>development<br>開發生智 | jñāna born of<br>analysis<br>分別生智 | jñāna that is<br>induced<br>引導生智 |

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# 10.3 The capability of the different types of the application of mindfulness for the abandonment of defilements

Of the three types of the fourfold application of mindfulness, only the application of mindfulness in the mixed form can result in the abandonment of defilements because this type fulfills two necessary conditions:

i)    it simultaneously involves the mental concomitants (助伴) in addition to *prajñā;* and

ii)    it is focused (總略) with regard to a cognitive object.

In the application of mindfulness of the intrinsic nature of the mind, only *prajñā* is involved and not the other thought-concomitants, while in the application of mindfulness of a cognitive object, mental application varies and is unfocused (普散). Thus, these two types do not enable the practitioner to abandon defilements.[12] We can understand the aforementioned rationale in this way. For one to be able to abandon a defilement, *prajñā* alone, the faculty of understanding, is insufficient; there must be the contribution from associated mental factors, including *samādhi,* which helps the mind to become concentrated, and *cetanā,* which helps the mind to enter into a volitional state, among others. Further, there must be insight into the nature of universal or common characteristics (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*-s; 共相). For instance, if one contemplates only the body and realizes its specific nature and even the common characteristic of impermanence, then only an insight into the impermanence of the body as a material *dharma* is obtained. That is, this insight, even though it is about the nature of a common characteristic, pertains to only one type of *dharma.* One can of course next contemplate sensation (the second application of mindfulness), and so forth. But in each case, the insight into permanence and other topsy-turvy views is not universal and thorough. It is therefore only in the case of the application of mindfulness in the mixed form that the insight into the nature of the common characteristic is universal and thorough, and hence sufficient to effect the abandonment of the defilement (e.g., craving).

The question arises: If such is the case, then what is the use of practicing the other two types of the application of mindfulness? The MVŚ answers this as follows[13]:

Question: If it is so, the practice of the other two types of application of mindfulness should be useless?

Answer: They can induce the arising of the application of mindfulness in the mixed form, so they are not useless. According to some: there are two types of abandonment, one is temporary abandonment, the other is absolute abandonment. The practice of the other two types of application of mindfulness can achieve temporary abandonment, therefore they are not useless.[14]

Because of the capability of the practitioner to abandon defilements with the application of mindfulness in the mixed form, this type is analyzed in great detail in the MVŚ. The analysis provides a wealth of information about aspects of meditation, and illustrates well the Abhidharmization of the spiritual practice of the Sarvāstivāda school. This process can be discerned in the following discussion:

Furthermore, there are three different types of applications of

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mindfulness in the mixed form; namely, *śrutamayī* (聞所成),
*cintāmayī* (思所成) and *bhāvanāmayī* (修所成).

Question: Out of these three, which one can abandon
defilements?

Answer: The *bhāvanāmayī* type can abandon defilements, and the
other two cannot.

Question: Why can't the *śrutamayī* type abandon defilements?

Answer: Because it relies on name to be able to operate on its
meaning. It is only a path which operates on meaning
without relying on name that can abandon defilements.

Question: Why can't the *cintāmayī* type abandon defilements?

Answer: Because this mental application pertains to the stage
(*bhumi*) of non-concentration (i.e., not in meditation),
and only that pertaining to the stage of concentration can
abandon defilements.

Question: Why can the *bhāvanāmayī* abandon defilements?

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Answer:   Because it fulfills the two conditions: i.e., it does not rely on name to operate on meaning, and it pertains to the stage of concentration.

Question: If it is so, the practice of the other two should become useless?

Answer:   They can induce the arising of the *bhāvanāmayī* type. That is: the *śrutamayī* type can induce the *cintāmayī* type; the *cintāmayī* type can induce the *bhāvanāmayī* type; and the *bhāvanāmayī* type can abandon defilements. Therefore (the other two) are not useless.

According to some: there are two types of abandonments (temporary and absolute), as it has been explained above in details.[15]

In the *bhāvanāmayī* type of the application of mindfulness, there are four sub-types: body, sensation, citta and dharmas.

Question: Out of these four, which one can abandon defilements?

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Answer: The application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s, but not the others, can abandon defilements.

Question: Why can't the former three applications of mindfulness abandon defilements?

Answer: Because, they belong to those which are in the form of mental applications (i.e., contemplation) on the self characteristics as objects. But it is only a path of the form of mental applications on common characteristics that can abandon defilements.

According to others: it is because they take the *skandha*-s separately one by one as the objects. It is only a path which takes the four *skandha*-s or the five *skandha*-s as a whole, or which is outside the skandhas as objects that can abandon defilements.

Question: If it is so, the practice of the former three should become useless.

Answer: [No, they are still useful] because they can induce the arising of the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s. i.e.,

the application of mindfulness of the body can induce the application of mindfulness of sensation, the application of mindfulness of sensation can induce the application of mindfulness of *citta*, the application of *citta* can induce the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s. The application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s can abandon defilements. Therefore [they are] not useless.

According to others: one must first examine the individual *skandha*-s before one can take them collectively as objects in order to abandon defilements. Hence, they are not useless. According to others: there are two types of abandonment, as we have said before in details.[16]

There are two types of application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s, first, that taking mixed objects (雜緣), second, that taking unmixed objects (不雜緣). If it takes the *saṃjñā skandha,* the *saṃskāra skandha* and the unconditioned *dharma*-s (individually) as the object, it is called unmixed. If it takes, from the five *skandha-s,* two by two as objects, or three by three as objects, or four by four as objects, or all the five collectively together with the unconditioned *dharma*-s as objects, it is called mixed objects.

Question: Out of these [two], which type of application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s can abandon defilement?

Answer: Both of the two can abandon. That is, if it is a path of abandonment of defilement which takes the *duhkha-satya*, *samudaya-satya* and *mārga-satya* as object, it is an application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s of mixed object. If it is a path of abandonment of defilement which takes the *nirodha-satya* as object, it is an application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s of unmixed object.[17]

## 10.4 The fourfold application of mindfulness as an antidote

One of the most important features of the fourfold application of mindfulness is that it is an effective antidote against the four topsy-turvy views. Various explanations of the roles of the four mindfulnesses as remedies are given in the MVŚ. The first explanation, ostensibly that of the compilers themselves, is as follows. Mindfulness of the body is the antidote against the topsy-turvy view of the impure as pure; of sensation, the antidote against the topsy-turvy view of the unsatisfactory as satisfactoty; of citta, the antidote against the

topsy-turvy view of the impermanent as permanent; and of *dharma*-s, the antidote against the topsy-turvy view of the non-self as self.

Some masters explain that the four mindfulnesses are antidotes against nourishment (*āhāra*; 食): mindfulness of the body is the antidote against solid food; of sensation, the antidote against the nourishment of contact; of *citta,* the antidote against the nourishment of *citta*; and of *dharma*-s, the antidote against the nourishment of volition.

Others explain that they are antidotes against the four abodes of *citta* (*vijñāna-sthiti*; 四識住): mindfulness of the body is the antidote against the abode of *citta* immediately induced by *rūpa* (*rūpāvacāra*; 色近行識住); of sensation, the antidote against the abode of *citta* immediately induced by sensation; of *citta,* the antidote against the *citta* abiding therein; and of *dharma*-s, the antidote against the abode of *citta* immediately induced by ideation and the conditionings.

Other masters explain that the four mindfulnesses are antidotes against the five *skandha*-s: mindfulness of the body is the antidote against the *rūpa-skandha;* of sensation, the antidote against the *vedanā-skandha*; of *citta,* the antidote against the *vijñāna-skandha*; and of *dharma*-s, the antidote against the *saṃjñā* and *saṃskāra skandha*-s.

Some explain that they are antidotes against the four types of non-cultivation (*abhāvanā*; 不修); mindfulness of the body is the antidote against the non-cultivation of the body; of sensation, the antidote against the non-cultivation of ethical behavior (*śīla*); of *citta*, the antidote against the non-cultivation of *citta*; and of *dharma*-s, the antidote against the non-cultivation of *prajñā*.

# 10.5 The intrinsic nature of the fourfold application of mindfulness

Although the application of mindfulness uses the nomenclature of mindfulness, the intrinsic nature of the mind is understanding (*prajñā*; 慧). The MVŚ explains in detail why understanding is properly speaking the intrinsic nature of the mind:

> Question: What is the intrinsic nature of the application of mindfulness? Is it "mindfulness" or "understanding"?
>
> If it is mindfulness, how can we explain the following discourse: "With the body as the object, he contemplates (*anupaśyati*) the body and so on"?

If it is "understanding", why it is called application of mindfulness?

Furthermore, how can we explain the *Sūtra* statement. E.g., the *Sūtra* says that "Where should we examine the faculty of mindfulness (*smṛty-indriya*)? It is in [the context of] the fourfold application of mindfulness."

Answer: It should be stated that understanding is the intrinsic nature.

Question: If it is so, why it is called the application of mindfulness?

Answer: Because mindfulness therein abides, fully abides and individually abides; it is therefore called the application of mindfulness.

. . .

According to some: because the force of mindfulness can give rise to specific, extensive effect (差別廣博作用) with regard to the

object, without it being lost (*vinaṣṭa;* 失壞), it is therefore called "application of mindfulness".

According to some: because of the force of mindfulness, the *yogācāra* (i.e., the meditator) can carefully remember the object so that he can recollect it again after having forgotten. It is therefore called "application of mindfulness".

According to some: the practitioner first abides on the object with mindfulness, and then contemplates on it. He further, having penetrated into the object, abides on it in order to guard it [against forgetfulness], like a guard at the gateway. It is therefore called "application of mindfulness".

According to others: this practitioner first sustains his focus on the object with mindfulness, then examines it by means of understanding, and in this way abandons defilements.[18]

. . .

Question: Its intrinsic nature is understanding, why does the Bhagavant speak of the "application of mindfulness"?

Answer: Because understanding is able to abide on the object through the force of mindfulness, it is therefore called "application of mindfulness". Or rather, the force of this understanding enables the mindfulness to abide on the object, it is therefore called "application of mindfulness". With regard to the object, these two mutually support each other in a manner excelling other *dharma*-s. Hence it is called "application of mindfulness."[19]

## 10.6 The nomenclature of the fourfold application of mindfulness

The MVŚ includes a discussion of the nomenclature of the fourfold application of mindfulness[20] in which many important features of the fourfold application of mindfulness, including its cognitive objects (所緣), relationship to various dharmas, and operation and achievement, are analyzed in detail in an Abhidharmic manner.

## 10.6.1 The nomenclature of the application of mindfulness of the body

The MVŚ explains that the mindfulnesses of the body, sensation and *dharma*-s are so named in accordance with their different objects. However, the word "*kāya*" (body; 身) has two different meanings, the physical body and the group. The word "body" in this context then means the physical body (*rupa kaya*; 色身) and not the group. Hence, only the application of mindfulness of the physical body can be called the application of mindfulness of the body.

> Question: Why it is called the application of mindfulness of body?

> Answer: Because this application of mindfulness takes the body as its cognitive object, it is thus called the application of mindfulness of body.

> Question: The other applications of mindfulness also take the body as their objects as it says that the application of mindfulness of sensation takes the six bodies of sensation as the objects, the application of mindfulness of *citta* takes the six bodies of *citta* as the objects, the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s takes the six bodies of *saṃjña* and the six bodies of *cetanā* as the

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objects etc. Why don't we call all of them the application of mindfulness of body?

Answer:   What we say here about taking the "body" as the object refers to taking the physical (*rūpa*) body as the object. The other applications of mindfulness take the non-physical bodies [in the sense of "group"] as the objects, so they are not called the application of mindfulness of body.[21]

It is also said that this type of mindfulness takes the visible body (現見身), which is coarse, obvious and easily seen, as the object, or that only an application of mindfulness taking the body, which is an aggregate of atoms, can be called the application of mindfulness of the body. Further explanations include the following:

Others say that if when one takes the body as the object, the knower and the known arise simultaneously, it is called the application of mindfulness of body. Although the other [applications of mindfulness] take a body [in the sense of a group] as the object, the knower and the known do not arise simultaneously, therefore they are not called the applications of mindfulness of body. Although in the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s, there can be the

simultaneous arising of the knower and the known, these are rare cases and therefore this application is not called the application of mindfulness of body.

Just as that which takes the body as the object is thus called the application of mindfulness of body, likewise, that which takes sensation as the object is called the application of mindfulness of sensation. That which takes *citta* as the object is thus called the application of mindfulness of *citta*. That which takes *dharma*-s as object is called the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s.[22]

## 10.6.2 The uniqueness and significance of the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s

*Dharma*-s refers in this context to mental objects, which are innumerable. Because of the diversity of the characteristics of various *dharma*-s taken as objects, this application of mindfulness has special significance in the meditation process. Its uniqueness and significance are analyzed in great detail in the MVŚ:

> Question:  Since all are *dharma*-s and [the objects of all four applications of mindfulness] are equally *dharma*-s, why

only the application of mindfulness of *dharma-s* is named as such, but not the other?

Answer: All are *dharma-s,* but only one [application of mindfulness] is established as the mindfulness of *dharma*. This is like case that all the eighteen elements (*dhātu*; 界) are *dharma-*s, but only one is established as *dharma-dhātu*. All the twelve entrances (*āyatana*-s; 處) are *dharma-*s, but only one is established as *dharma-āyatana*.[23]

Others say that all conditional *dharma*-s are arisen by "production" (*jāti*; 生), and production is an object of that [mindfulness]; thus it is called the application of mindfulness of *dharma-*s.

Others say that all *dharma*-s are manifested by names (*nāma*; 名), and name is an object of that [mindfulness]; thus it is called the application of mindfulness of *dharma-*s.

Others say that the characteristics of the conditioned (*saṃskṛta-lakṣaṇa;* 有為相) are the marks of all conditioned *dharma-*s, and these characteristics are included among its objects, thus it is called the application of mindfulness of *dharma-*s.

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Others say that the gateway of liberation of emptiness (*śūnyatā-vimokṣa-mukha*; 空解脫門) comprehends the *dharma* characteristics of all *dharma-s*, and this emptiness is included among its objects, thus it is called the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s.

Question:  If it is so, the true-self view of (*satkāya-dṛsti*; 薩迦耶見) also comprehends the nature of the person (*pudgala*) of all *dharma*-s, why is it not named in accordance with that?

Answer:  That (true-self view) is not a comprehension of what is real, and this [application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s] is a comprehension of what is real, hence there is no fault.

Others say that understanding (*prajñā*; 慧) can examine the self-characteristics and common characteristics of all *dharma*-s and properly establish the self-characteristics and common characteristics of all *dharma*-s. It destroys the delusion with regard to existent things and cognitive objects, operating on all *dharma*-s without addition or reduction. This understanding is included among its objects, thus it is called the application of mindfulness of

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*dharma*-s.

Others say that the *nirodha-satya*, *nirvāṇa*, is the *dharma* in the ultimate sense; it is permanent and non-changing. This *dharma* is included among its objects, thus it is called the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s.

Others say that this application of mindfulness can take many *dharma*-s as objects, i.e., *rupa* or *non-rupa*, conjoined or disjoined, with support-basis or without support-basis, with mode of activities or without mode of activities, taking cognitive object or not taking object, with awareness or without awareness. Thus, it is called the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s.

Others say that the application of mindfulness of body takes the body as the cognitive object but not the "understanding which takes the body as the cognitive object (緣身慧)". The application of mindfulness of sensation takes sensation as the cognitive object but not the "understanding which takes the sensation as the cognitive object". The application of mindfulness of *citta* takes the *citta* as the cognitive object but not the "understanding which takes the *citta* as the cognitive object". The application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s takes the body as well as the "understanding which takes the body

as the object" as the cognitive object. [Likewise,] it takes sensation, *citta*, and *dharma*-s as well as the "understandings which take the sensation, the *citta* and the *dharma*-s as the objects" as the objects. Thus, this alone is called the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s.

Others say that the application of mindfulness of body takes the body as the cognitive object, but not the production, deterioration or impermance of the body. The application of mindfulness of sensation takes sensation as the object, but not the production, the deterioration or the impermance of the sensation, as the object. The application of mindfulness of *citta* takes *citta*, but not the production, deterioration or impermance of *citta*, as the object.

The application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s takes the body as well as the body's production, deterioration and impermance. [Likewise] it takes sensation, *citta* and *dharma*-s as the objects as well as their production, deterioration and impermance as the cognitive objects. Thus, it alone is called the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s.[24]

## 10.6.3 The special importance of the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s for spiritual attainment

For spiritual attainment through the process of meditation, the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s is of much greater importance than any other application because it can lead to true insight into the nature of reality. This point is brought out in the foregoing discussion. In this context, the MVŚ continues:

> Others say up to this extent [of the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s], the *yogacāra* (瑜伽師; i.e., the practitioner) is able to cease all ideations of the Self and of unity. He has perfected the cultivation of the ideations of *dharma*-s and of differentiation. Thus, it is called the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s.

> That is to say: the *yogācāra*, having investigated the body, comes to regard sensation as the Self; having investigated sensation, comes to regard the *citta* as the Self; having investigated the *citta*, comes to regard the the *dharma*-s as the Self. [Finally,] having investigated the *dharma*-s, comes to realize that all are without a Self *(anātman*; 非我)*; sentient beings are merely the agglomerations of empty conditionings. Thus, up to this extent, the ideation of *dharma*-s is perfected, and it is therefore called the application of mindfulness

of *dharma*-s.[25]

The importance of the fourfold application of mindfulness is also made clear in the Sarvāstivāda scheme of the path of spiritual progress. In the preliminary stages, one practices various types of meditation, of which the major ones are the four applications of mindfulness. It is only when mindfulness of *dharma*-s is fully accomplished that one acquires true insight into the nature of reality — impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, non-Selfness, at which time one is ready to enter the final stage of the path through which one may achieve ultimate vision, that is, spiritual attainment, including the various spiritual fruits.

## 10.7 The sequential order of the four applications of mindfulness

The MVŚ includes a lengthy discussion of the sequential order of the four applications of mindfulness, in which their nature, operation and inter-relationships are clarified from different perspectives. Most of the explanations offered share the view that the sequence is, in increasing order of importance, the application of mindfulness of the body, sensation, citta and dharmas.

One view presented in the MVŚ is as follows:

> Question: Why does the Bhagavant speak about the application of mindfulness of body first, and so on, finally the application of *dharma-s*?

> Answer: He shows that [the enumeration] follows the proper order. That is to say, if they are expounded in such a sequential order, then it accords with the order of verbal descriptions.[26]

Some contend that the order is based on the proper sequence of the teacher's instructions, whereas others argue that the order is in accordance with that of arising. Three types of order are distinguished: arising, elucidation and direct realization (*abhisamaya*). The order of arising is: the application of mindfulness → *dhyāna* → the immeasurable → . . . . The order of elucidation is: proper effort (*samyak-prahāna*; 正斷) → psychic power (*ṛdhipāda*; 神足) → the faculties (*indriya*; 根) . . . . It is because the *yogācāra* first gives rise to the application of mindfulness of the body and so on up to that of *dharma*-s that the four mindfulnesses are listed in this order.

The MVŚ addresses this issue as follows:

Question: Why do the practitioners first give rise to the mindfulness of application of body, then finally give rise to the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s?

Answer: Because it follows the sequential order of coarseness and subtleness. That is: the *rūpa skandha* is the coarsest among the five *skandha*-s; therefore, it is first contemplated, giving rise to the application of mindfulness of body. Sensation is the coarsest *skandha* of the four *arūpa skandha*-s; therefore, it is contemplated next, giving rise to the application of mindfulness of sensation.

Question: Sensation etc. (ideation, conditionings and *citta*) are non-spatialized, how can they be designated as coarse or subtle?

Answer: Though they do not have coarseness or subtleness in terms of spatialization, they have coarseness and subtleness in terms of modes of activity. Hence, they can be designated.

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Among them, the mode of activity of sensation is coarse as when one says: "My feet and arms are painful", or "I experience such and such pains." Therefore, the *skandha* of sensation, etc. though not being *rūpa*-s, can be designated as coarse or subtle as *rūpa*-s. The consciousness *skandha* is the subtlest of the four non-material *skandha*-s, and yet who first contemplates ideation and the *skandha* of conditionings (*saṃskāra*) to give rise to the application of mindfulness of *citta*, finally gives rise to the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s, because ideation and the conditioning skandhas are jointly designated with *nirvāṇa* which is the subtlest *dharma*.[27]

Alternative views of the sequential order include the following:

Others say that, since the beginningless past, men and women give rise to mutual attachment on account of each other's *rūpa*. Therefore, *rūpa* must first be contemplated to give rise to the application of mindfulness of body. [Next,] the attachment to this *rūpa* is because of the craving for the pleasurable sensation. Thus, sensation is contemplated next to give rise to the application of mindfulness of

sensation. The craving for pleasurable sensation of happiness is because of the *citta* being untamed. Thus, *citta* is contemplated next to give rise to the application of mindfulness of sensation. The *citta* is untamed because of the fact that the defilements (*kleśa*) have not been abandoned. Thus, *dharma*-s [which subsume the defilements] are contemplated finally to give rise to the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s.

Others say that *rūpa*-s can be designated, there is increase and decrease, taking up and relinguishing [among them], and can exist homogeneously and in serial continuity. Therefore, *rupa* is contemplated first to give rise to the application of mindfulness of body.

During the contemplation of *rupa*, there arise mental and physical lightness (*praśrabdhi*; 輕安). With this as the precondition, the pleasurable sensation is induced. Sensation is therefore contemplated next to give rise to the application of mindfulness of sensation.

During the contemplation of sensation, a cognition is induced which has the absolute (*paramārtha*; 勝義) as of the object. The *citta* is thus contemplated next to give rise to the application of mindfulness of *citta*.

He thinks thus: "Wherein a *citta* arises, the thought-concomitants (*caitasika*; 心所) too arise." Therefore, *dharma*-s [which subsume the thought-concomitants] are contemplated finally to rise to the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s.

Others say that the delusion with regard to the body sustains the delusion with regard to sensation, and so on up to the delusion with regard to the *citta* sustains the delusion with regard to *dharma*-s. It is not the case the delusion with regard to sensation can operate when the delusion with regard to the body does not operate; and so on up to *citta*: It is not the case the delusion with regard to the *dharma*-s can operate when the delusion with regard to the *citta* does not operate. Hence, the fourfold application of mindfulness has such a sequential order.

Others say the delusion with regard to the body can induce the delusion with regard to the sensation; and so on up to *citta*: the delusion with regard to the *citta* can induce the delusion with regard

to *dharma*-s. It is not true that the delusion with regard to sensation can arise without the arising of delusion with regard to the body; and so on up to *citta*. It is not true that the delusion with regard to *dharma*-s can arise without the arising of delusion with regard to *citta*. Hence, the fourfold application of mindfulness arises in such a sequential order.[28]

Another opinion is that the four contemplations can induce the arising of one another in the order described above.[29] This order is also said to be due to their sequential causation:

> The contemplation on the body is the cause, the faculty, the eye, the path, the gradual step (漸), the efficient cause (能作; *kāraṇa*), the condition of arising, the origin and the originating cause (*samutthāna*; 等起) for the contemplation on sensation. The same applies to the causal relationship between the contemplation on sensation and the contemplation on the *citta*, and that between the contemplation on the *citta* and the contemplation on the *dharma*-s. The other [explanations] are as given above.

> Others say that the contemplation on the body is the preparation, the gateway and the support basis for the contemplation on sensation. The same applies to the causal relationship between the

contemplation on the *citta* and the contemplation on the *dharma*-s.
The other [explanations] are as given above.

According to others, the contemplation on the body is the support basis and area of focus for the contemplation on sensation. The same applies to the causal relationship between the contemplation on the *citta* and the contemplation on the *dharma*-s. The other [explanations] are as given above.

Question:    If it is so, what is the support basis and area of focus for the contemplation on the body?

Answer:   The previously acquired mark of *śamatha* is its support basis and area of focus. As it is said, "As he has first acquired the unshakable *śamatha*, there arises the mark of bodily lightness accumulating from the feet to the head. Because of this, the application of mindfulness of the body and so on up to the application of mindfulness of the *dharma*-s can arise.[30]

An alternative order of the four applications is also proposed, body, sensation, *dharma*-s and *citta,* which depends on the approach taken by the practitioner in contemplation. It is explained in the MVŚ as follows:

Others say that with regard to the serial continuity (*santati*; 相續), he examines the [twelve] abodes/gateways (*āyatana*-s; 處) and gives rise to the fourfold application of mindfulness. That is, the practitioner (*yogācāra*) first desires to understand the *rūpa āyatana*-s, thus he first examines the ten *rūpa āyatana*-s and the *rūpa*-s subsumed under the *smṛtyupasthāna* (念處), and so gives rise to the application of mindfulness of body first. Immediately thereafter, he examines the sensations in the *dharma-āyatana*. Therefore, he gives rise to the application of mindfulness of sensation arises next. Immediately thereafter, he examines the *saṃjñā skandha* and the *saṃskāra skandha* as well as the three unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) with regard to the *dharma-āyatana*. Therefore, he gives rise to the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s. He then thinks thus: "Besides these, what else is there?" Thereupon, he understands truly: "The *mana-āyatana* remains." Thereupon, he examines "the *mana-āyatana*", and thus gives rise to the application of mindfulness of *citta* finally.

For the *yogācāra*s, if they contemplate on the basis of self characteristics, they first give rise to the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s, and subsequently give rise to the application of mindfulness of *citta*. If they contemplate on the basis of common characteristics, they first give rise to the application of mindfulness

of *citta*, and subsequently give rise to the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s.[31]

# 10.8  The internal and external objects of the fourfold application of mindfulness

There are two categories of objects of the fourfold application of mindfulness, internal and external. A detailed discussion is found in the MVŚ on the sequential order of contemplating internal and external objects, the classification of objects as internal or external and, most importantly, how internal and external objects function as antidotes.

## 10.8.1  The sequential order of the application of mindfulness related to internal and external objects

In the *sūtra*, the application of mindfulness of internal objects is discussed as occurring before that of external objects, and vice versa. Objections are raised in the MVŚ regarding this apparent inconsistency. The view of the compilers is that the application of mindfulness of internal objects should arise before that of external ones. They give various rationales for this view. For example,

where the application of mindfulness of external objects precedes that of internal ones, it is explained that such a case pertains to the stage of preparation for the application of mindfulness, and not to the fundamental stage of the application of mindfulness:

Question: Does the application of mindfulness to the internal objects arise first or does the application of mindfulness of the external objects arise first?

Is there anything wrong in either one of the cases?

If the application of mindfulness to the internal objects arises first, then how is one to understand the *sūtra* statement, such as: "The beginner monk, possessed of pure *śīla* and perfect in aspiration and desires to quickly abandon sensual desire and hatred, should travel on a simple road and go to the graveyard (lit: 'where the corpses are'). He should properly grasp the mark [of the corpse] turning bluish, trickling fluid, and so on". [However,] if the application of mindfulness to the external objects arises first, then how is one to understand other *sūtra* statements, such as: "One first abides on the contemplation of internal body all round,

and next on the external body", and so on.

Answer: It should be stated thus [the compilers' own view]: "The application of mindfulness to the internal objects arises first." Why? It is because there is the Self that there are what pertains to the Self. It is because there is the attachment that there comes to the attachment to what pertains to the Self. It is because there is the Self-view that there comes to be the view of what pertains to the Self . . .

Question: If it is so, how is one to understand the first *sūtra* statement?

Answer: [What is said] there pertains to the preparation to the application of mindfulness, but not the fundamental application of mindfulness.[32]

## 10.8.2 The internal and external objects of the application of mindfulness

Various views given in the MVŚ[33] about what things comprise the internal and

external objects of the application of mindfulness include the following.

i)   Internal objects are the body, sensations, and *dharma*-s that are included within one's own series. External objects are the bodies, sensations, and *dharma*-s that are included in other series. Those bodies and *dharma*-s that are included in the category of non-sentient beings are also regarded as external objects.

ii)  Bodies, sensations, and *dharma*-s that are included in the category of sentient beings are internal objects, whereas bodies and *dharma*-s that are included in the category of non-sentient beings are external objects.

iii) Those in the present are internal objects, whereas those in the past and future are external ones. This is because the present *dharma*-s, but not the future, past or unconditional *dharma*-s, can easily arouse the greed of sentient beings.

### 10.8.3   Different effects and counteractions produced by the contemplation of internal objects and the contemplation of external objects

The complete contemplation of either internal or external objects enables one to contemplate their individual characteristics, whereas the complete contemplation of both kinds of objects enables one to contemplate their

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common characteristics.

The complete contemplation of either internal or external objects enables one to contemplate them in extensive detail（廣觀）, whereas the complete contemplation of both kinds of objects enables one to contemplate them briefly (略觀).[34]

There are various views among the Sarvāstivāda masters concerning the counteracting functions of fourfold application of mindfulness. These may be summarized as follow:

(1) The complete contemplation of internal objects is an antidote against: i) the clinging to the Self, ii) the view of the Self, iii) the five-fold views of the Self, iv) the delusion regarding the Self (*ātma-moha*) and v) the attachment to the Self (*ātma-sneha*).

(2) The complete contemplation of external objects is an antidote against: i) clinging to what pertains to the Self, ii) View of the Self, iii) the fifteen views on what pertains to the Self , iv) the ignorance concerning what pertains to the Self and v) the attachment to objects of utilities (眾具愛; *pariṣkāra-sneha*).

The complete contemplation of both internal and external objects is

an antidote against: i) the clinging to both thed Self and what pertains to the Self, ii) the view of both the Self and what pertains to the Self; iii) the twenty views of the True-self (*satkāya-dṛṣṭi*); iv) the ignorance concerning both the Self and what pertains to the Self; v) the attachment to both the Self and the objects of utilities.[35]

## 10.8.4 The perfection of the fourfold application of mindfulness

In the systematic cultivation of the four applications of mindfulness, one eventually reaches the stage that is considered to be their complete fulfillment. Concerning this final stage, different opinions are given in the MVŚ:

Question: To what extent should we call the perfection of the application of mindfulness of body up to the application of mindfulness of *dharma*-s?

Answer: The perfection is to be understood in respect of two factors. First, in respect of the examination of the cognitive object; second, in respect of the growth of the skilful roots (*kuśala-mūla*; 善根). In respect of the examination of the cognitive object: [the practice is

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fulfilled] when the the cognitive object can be examined either in terms of both the moments (*kṣaṇa*) and the atoms, or merely in terms of the moments. In respect of the growth of the skilful roots: the arising of the medium from the lower [grade] and then the arising of the upper [grade] from the medium. To that extent, one should know that the application of mindfulness is perfected.

According to others: one should know the perfection basing on the change of the preparatory practice. That is, the practitioner (*yogācāra*) having examined the body, changes the understanding (*prajñā*) which cognizes the body to next examine the sensation. Having examined the sensation, he changes the understanding which cognizes the sensation to next examine the *citta*. Having examined the *citta*, he changes the understanding which cognizes the *citta* to next examine the *dharma*-s. This is similar to the farmer's conducting water into the field for irrigation. Having filled up the first plot of the field, he conducts the water to irrigate the second. Having filled up the second plot of the field, he conducts the water to irrigate the third. Having filled up the third plot of the

field, he conducts the water to irrigate the fourth. The same is true in this case.

According to others: one should know their perfection at the point when the mark (*nimitta*; 相) of disdain is accomplished. There are two types of mark of disdain: one causes dislike, the other causes hatefulness. In this case, the mark of disdain refers only to that which causes dislike. That is, having examined the body, the practitioner (*yogācāra*) does not delight in the body, but comes to be delighted in sensation, etc. Having examined sensation, he further does not delight in sensation, but comes to be delighted in the *citta*, etc. Having examined the *citta*, he further does not delight in the *citta*, but comes to be delighted in the *dharma*-s. Having examined the *dharma*-s, he then does not delight in any object-fields (境界; *viṣaya*). At the very time, one should know that the application of mindfulness has been perfected.[36]

## 10.9 Summary

The fourfold application of mindfulness has been a central teaching of meditative praxis in Buddhism since the beginning, and was undoubtedly a Buddhist innovation. In the *sūtra* of both the Theravāda and the northern traditions, it is emphasized as being the direct way leading to the purification of beings and the attainment of *Nirvāṇa*. The importance of this method was inherited by the Abhidharma tradition which repeats the same emphasis. The Abidharma also doctrinally develops considerably on the basis of the *sūtra*, discussing the topic in elabotrate details, analyzing each of the application in terms of its intrinsic nature, its function, its manner of operation its sequential attainment and its final perfection.

## NOTES

[1] MVŚ, 936c. Also see below.

[2] GM, 144-145.

[3] MVŚ, 724a1-2.

[4] GM, 145; cf. AKB VI, 343; AKB(E), 929; cf. also PPXXII 34.

[5] MVŚ, 724a2-11.

[6] E.g., *Dīgha-nikāya* 22; *Majjhima-nikāya* 10.

[7] MVŚ, 936c.

[8] The seven factors are: *smṛti*, *dharma-pravicaya*, *vīrya*, *pīti*, *praśrabdhi*, *samādhi* and *upekṣā*. Cf. *Saṃyutta*, XLVI. 5.

[9] MVŚ, 936c8-19.

[10] MVŚ, 937a4.

[11] MVŚ, 937a25ff.

[12] MVŚ, 937b12-18.

[13] MVŚ, 937b12ff.

[14] MVŚ, 937b18-21.

[15] MVŚ, 937b21-24.

[16] MVŚ, 937c5-15.

[17] MVŚ, c18-21.

[18] MVŚ, 938b5-20.

[19] MVŚ, 724a12-15.

[20] MVŚ, 938cff.

[21] MVŚ, 938c9-14.

[22] MVŚ, 938c19-24.

[23] MVŚ, 938c24-28.

[24] MVŚ, 939a3-26.

[25] MVŚ, 939a26-b3.

[26] MVŚ, 939b4-6.

[27] MVŚ, 939b14-25.

[28] MVŚ, 939b25-c13.

[29] MVŚ, 939c13-15.

[30] MVŚ, 939v14-25.

[31] MVŚ, 939c25-940a5.

[32] MVŚ, 940a6-18.

[33] *MVŚ*, 940b2-11.

[34] MVŚ, 940b11-17.

[35] MVŚ, 940b17-28.

[36] MVŚ, 940b28-c17.

# Chapter 11 — The nine sequential meditations (*nava- anupūrva-(vihāra)-samāpatti*-s)

## 11.1 Main *Abhidharma* terms referring to meditation

In the previous chapters, various aspects of meditation and meditative practices in the Sarvāstivāda tradition have been discussed. However, several Sanskrit terms are rendered in English as "meditation." In the *Abhidharma,* these terms are well defined and conceptually articulated, and the various meditative attainments are structured hierarchically. This chapter examines the main terms used to refer to meditation in the MVŚ, *dhyāna*, *samādhi* and *samāpatti*, and the doctrine of the "nine sequential meditations," which represents an attempt to give an overall structure to the meditative attainments taught in the *sūtra*-s.

### 11.1.1 *Dhyāna*

The Sanskrit word "*dhyāna*" is derived from $\sqrt{dhyai}$, meaning "to contemplate." There are a number of English renderings of this term by modern scholars, including "absorption," "ecstasy," "trance," "mystic trance," "meditation" and "contemplation," among others. An analysis of its meanings

given in Abhidharma texts reveals that the abovementioned renderings, excepting meditation and contemplation, are undesirable. I believe that the most appropriate is contemplation. However, the significance of any doctrinal term must be determined by its usage(s) in the tradition concerned, in addition to its etymological meaning.

Xuan Zang renders *dhyāna* as "quiescent contemplation/reflection" based on the following analysis given in the MVŚ[1]: only the first four *samāpatti*-s (attainments) pertaining to the *rūpa-dhātu*-s can be called *dhyāna*-s because an attainment can be called a *dhyāna* only when two requirements are satisfied: proper seeing (*sam-anu-√paś*) and the abandonment of fetters. Neither *kāmāvacara samādhi* nor *ārūpya samādhi*-s are *dhyāna*-s because in the former, one is capable of proper seeing but not abandoning fetters, whereas in the latter, one is capable of abandoning fetters but not proper seeing.

Furthermore, the capability to quash (靜息) all defilements and contemplate (思慮) all *ālambana*-s (objects) is required. Only in *rūpa-samādhi*-s does one have both types of capability and thus they are called *dhyāna*-s. *Kāmāvacara samādhi* involves contemplation but not quiescence, whereas *ārūpya samādhi*-s involve quiescence but not contemplation. In addition, *kāmāvacara samādhi* involves the contemplation of all *ālambana*-s but not all defilements are subdued, whereas in *ārūpya samādhi*-s neither is achieved. Hence, neither are *dhyāna*-s.[2]

In the AKB, *dhyāna* is defined as contemplation (*dhyāyanty aneneti*). Although it is not necessarily true that there is perfect wisdom in any state of *dhyāna*, the term is said to convey the sense of "understanding truly" on the basis of the Buddha's teaching that "a concentrated mind understands truly (*samāhitacittasya yathābhūtaprajñānāt*). Vasubandhu, the author of the AKB, explains that the root, √*dhyai*, pertains to reflection (*cintana*), which the Sarvāstivāda refer to as *prajñā*. This would mean that although *dhyāna* is not *prajñā* per se, it is a state wherein, in addition to the force of concentration, the force of "understanding" — and hence, *vipaśyanā* — also functions. Vasubandhu goes on to explain that a *dhyāna* is a preeminent *samādhi*, being endowed with the *dhyāna-aṅga*-s, in which *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* are equipoised (*śamatha-vipaśyanābhyāṃ yuganaddhaḥ*; "yoked together"). The four *dhyāna*-s are subsumed under the "path of ease" (*sukha-pratipad*), and called the "dwelling of happiness in the present life" (*dṛṣṭidharma-sukha-vihāra*; 現法樂住).[3]

Regarding this last term, the MVŚ relates: "The Buddha has said, 'If you seek great happiness, you should leave behind sensual pleasure and cultivate the four *dhyāna*-s'. Furthermore, when the four *dhyāna*-s manifest, there is necessarily the experience of happiness in the present."[4]

We find that explanations and definitions in the *Arthaviniścaya Nibandhana* (AVN) are close to those in the MVŚ and other Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma texts.

For example, the AVN explains *dhyāna*, in a manner similar to that in the AKB, as "to know or comprehend (*prajānanti*), for true knowledge (*yathābhūtaprajñāna*) arises in one whose mind is concentrated (*samāhita*). [Meditation is] one-pointedness of wholesome mind . . . because meditation has the innate nature of concentration (*samādhisvabhāva*)."[5]

To summarize, *dhyāna* means contemplation. It is applied only to the first four *samāpatti*-s, that is, the four *rūpa-dhyāna*-s. Abhidharma texts make it clear that *dhyāna* means not just concentration or absorption; rather, it comprises — in equal proportion — both *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*.

## 11.1.2 *Samādhi*

The Sanskrit term *samādhi* is derived from *sam + ā + √ dhā*. The two prefixes convey the sense of "complete" or "full," while the root, *dhā*, means "to hold/sustain." The term therefore gives the sense of the unification of the mind, that is, "concentration." The past participle form, *samāhita*, means "concentrated." The Chinese rendering, 定, reflects the sense of s*amādhi* as equipoise. This term can thus be rendered as "equipoise," "concentration" or "meditation." It can even be said that, at the highest level, it conveys the sense of the full integration of a person's psychic energy such that wisdom may shine forth. This hearkens back to the Buddha's statement that a concentrated

mind sees things truly as they are. Hence, this "highest sense" in the scheme of the Noble Eightfold Path, of which the last stage is *samyak-samādhi*, obviously must mean more than concentration.

*Samādhi* is one of the ten universal thought-concomitants (*mahābhūmika-dharma*-s). In the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, it is said to be a distinct mental force, a thought-concomitant (*caitta*), which necessarily coarises with any thought and thought-concomitant, enabling the mind to concentrate on an object. It is defined as the one-pointedness of thought (*cittasyaikāgratā*). The MVŚ explains this *caitta* as follows: "It sustains (*ā-√dhā*) various types of *kuśala citta-caitta-s* making them continue evenly as a series; hence called *samādhi* . . . Further . . . it is *samādhi* because it holds . . . various excellent even *dharma*-s."[6]

Older, canonical texts [7] generally define *samādhi* as the proper abiding (staying; *√sthā, upa-√sthā, ava-√sthā, saṃ-√sthā*), non-dispersion, sustaining and one-pointedness of thought. The four courses are explicated as follows:

> i) Now, monks, what is the way of cultivating concentration that when practiced, developed, and repeatedly followed, leads to destroying sensual lust?

Monks, a monk goes into the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty, uninhabited, sheltered place and reflects rightly and with wisdom on the body as it really is, well placed and situated, enclosed in skin and full of various impurities from the soles of feet upward and from the top of the head downward, [reflecting thus:] "Here in this body there are the hairs of the head, hairs of the body, nails, teeth, dirt, filth, skin, flesh, bones, sinews, nerves, kidneys, heart, spleen, pleura, intestines, mesentery, upper and lower stomach, bladder, liver, excrement, tears, sweat, saliva, snot, grease, synovic fluid, marrow, fat, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, head, and brain."

Monks, just as a man with keen eyes looking into an open storehouse full of various grains such as rice, sesame seeds, mustard seeds, beans, barley, and māsa recognizes these as the grains of barley, these as the grains to be plowed, [and so on] so, monks, the monk [engaged in reflection] sees his body as it is, situated and well placed. Thus he reflects on the body as it is, [full of impurities].

ii) This, monks, is the way of cultivating concentration that is practiced, developed, and repeatedly followed to destroy sensual lust.

Now, what, monks, is the way of cultivating concentrating that is practiced, developed, and repeatedly followed to live happily in this very life?

Monks, a monk goes into the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty, uninhabited, sheltered place, and drenches, saturates, permeates, and suffuses the inner body with rapture and joy, born of aloofness and concentration. There is not a single part of his body that is not suffused and permeated with rapture and joy, born from inner aloofness and concentration.

Monks, just as in a pond, lotuses of various colors are born in water, grow up in water, and are sunk in water, all of them drenched, saturated, permeated, and suffused by cool water, so a monk goes into the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty, uninhabited, sheltered place and drenches, saturates, permeates, and suffuses the inner body with rapture and joy born of aloofness and concentration. There is not a single part of his whole body that is not suffused with rapture and joy, born of inner aloofness.

This is the way of cultivating concentration practiced, developed and repeatedly followed for living happily in this very life.

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iii) What is the way of cultivating concentration that is practiced, developed and repeatedly followed to acquire knowledge and vision?

Herein, Monks, a monk develops well a perception of light. He attends to it mentally, sees it and penetrates into it. Sustaining the perception of daylight, he develops the luminous mind: as by day, so by night; as by night, so by day; as in front, so behind; as behind, so in the front; as below, so above; as above, so below. Thus with an open and unhampered mind, a monk sustains the perception of daylight and develops a mind that is evenly luminous, pervading the whole world.

Monks, as in the last month of summer on a clear, cloudless day, at high noon, when the clouds in the sky have disappeared and light is pure, radiant, and bright, with no darkness, so monks, a monk develops well a perception of daylight. He attends to it mentally, sees it, and penetrates into it. He develops a mind that is evenly luminous: as by day, so by night; as in front, so behind; as behind, so in front; as below, so above; as above, so below. With an open and unhampered mind, a monk sustains the perception of daylight and develops a mind that is evenly luminous.

This is the way of cultivating concentration that is practiced, developed, and repeatedly followed to acquire knowledge and vision.

iv) Now what, monks, is the way of cultivating concentration that is practiced, developed, and repeatedly followed to acquire wisdom?

Monks, a monk goes to a forest or the root of a tree or an empty uninhabited sheltered place, giving up [bodily] pleasure and pain, and with the disappearance of previous feelings of mental pleasure he attains and abides in the fourth *dhyāna,* which is devoid of pleasure and pain and is purified through equanimity and mindfulness.

This is the way of cultivating concentration that is practiced, developed, and repeatedly followed to acquire wisdom.

### 11.1.3 *Samāpatti*

*Samāpatti* means "attainment" or "attainment of evenness." In the present context, it signifies "meditative attainment." It is one of the key terms related

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to meditation, and can refer to any of the *dhyāna*-s, the four *ārūpya*-s and the two *acittaka samāpatti*-s. The verb form, *sam-ā-√pad*, means "enter into meditation." It is often used synonymously with *samādhi*. Bhadanta Dharmatrāta, together with other ancient masters, says the two terms mean the same in the context of meditation — but is aware that *samāpatti* has a broader connotation, including *dvaya-dvaya-samāpatti*, referring to sexual copulation.[8]

In the Sarvāstivāda system, *samāpatti*-s are either superior or inferior based on the family (*gotra*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) of the meditator. There is therefore a hierarchy in terms of the quality of the different types of practitioners: *śrāvaka*-s and *pratyeka-buddha*-s cannot know even the names of the Buddha's *samāpatti*-s; those of Śāriputra cannot be known by other *śrāvaka*-s; and so forth. There is also a difference among these various types of *ārya*-s with respect to attaining *parinirvāṇa*: the Buddha entered into *\*acala-prabhā* (不動 明) *samāpatti*, whereas Śāriputra entered into *siṃha-vijṛṃbhita-samāpatti*; and so forth.

## 11.2 The sequential attainment of the nine *samāpatti*-s

Abhidharma texts enumerate nine meditative attainments (*samāpatti*-s) that must be attained sequentially. Their classification is based on the progressively

subtle mental states of the meditator to the point at which mental activity is transcended. That is, the meditator cannot attain a higher *samāpatti* without having first attained the previous one. Finally, to attain the ninth, *nirodha-samāpatti*, the meditator must first have achieved the previous eight, and be sufficiently skilled such that the mental process can be transcended altogether.

The nine sequential attainments are:

**(a) *rūpa samāpatti*-s**

1. first *dhyāna*
2. second *dhyāna*
3. third *dhyāna*
4. fourth *dhyāna*

**(b) *ārūpya samāpatti*-s**

5. the state of infinity of space
6. the state of infinity of consciousness
7. the state of nothingness
8. the state of neither-perception-nor-nonperception
9. *nirodha-samāpatti*

## 11.2.1   First *dhyāna*

The *Arthaviniścaya sūtra* describes the attainment of the first *dhyāna* as
follows:

> Here, monks, a monk aloof from sense desires and aloof from evil
> and unwholesome thoughts attains the first meditation born of
> aloofness and accompanied by initial thought and sustained thought,
> and he attains the first meditation with rapture and joy and abides
> there.[9]

The above description indicates that the first *dhyāna* is attained by keeping
oneself aloof (*vivikta*) from "sense desires" and "evil and unwholesome
thoughts" (*pāpaka*-s and *akuśaladharma*-s, respectively). This suggests that
the meditator who is in the realm of sensuality (*kāma-dhātu*), being free from
the latent defilements (*anuśaya*-s) such as lust generated in this realm, can
attain the first *dhyāna*. He is also free from thoughts that are *akuśala*, such as
malice (*pratighādi*).[10]

The first meditation is born from aloofness, which requires subduing the five
hindrances (*nīvarana*-s). The meditator still has initial (*savitarka*) and
sustained (*savicāra*) thought. In addition, he has rapture (*prīti*), that is, mental
pleasure and joy, specifically, joy of tranquility (*praśrabdhi-sukha*). The ASC
notes that both rapture and joy signify only lightness of the mind, which is not

the joy of feeling (*vedanā-sukha*) or joy of mentality, because bodily joy is not possible owing to the absence of the five categories of consciousness in the meditation, and mental joy is not possible owing to the fact that rapture cannot coexist with joy.

To summarize, the first *dhyāna* comprises: initial thought (reasoning), sustained thought (investigation), rapture, joy and concentration.

## 11.2.2   Second *dhyāna*

The *Arthaviniścaya sūtra* describes the attainment of the second *dhyāna* as follows: "Putting to rest initial and sustained thought, with mind made inwardly tranquil and absorbed in a single object, [the meditator] attains the second meditation, devoid of initial and sustained thought, and he abides there."[11]

In the second *dhyāna*, initial and sustained thought disappear together with their inherent disturbance (*kṣobha*); therefore, the meditator's mind becomes calm (*praśāta*). Inward tranquility born of conviction arises. The mind is absorbed in a single object, signifying that there is a single objective support of the mind or singleness of function. In addition, whereas initial and sustained thought disappear, rapture and joy remain.

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To summarize, the second *dhyāna* comprises: rapture, joy, one-pointedness of mind and inward tranquility.


## 11.2.3   Third *dhyāna*

Of the third *dhyāna*, the *Arthaviniścaya sūtra* says:

> Being detached from rapture, [the meditator] abides in equanimity, mindful and clearly conscious, experiencing in his person that joy of which the Noble Ones say: "Joyful abides a person who has equanimity and is mindful." Thus he attains and abides in the third meditation.[12]

The third *dhyāna* is produced through detachment from rapture. In this state, the meditator abides in: i) equanimity of the conditioned states (*saṁskāra*-s); ii) mindfulness, which is the non-loss of the marks of equanimity (*upekṣānimitta*); and iii) clear consciousness, which is wisdom (*prajñā*).

In summary, the third *dhyāna* comprises: equanimity, mindfulness, clear awareness, mental joy and concentration.

## 11.2.4  Fourth *dhyāna*

The *Arthaviniścaya sūtra* describes the attainment of the fourth *dhyāna* as follows: "Giving up pleasure as well as pain, with disappearance of previous feelings of mental pleasure, [the meditator] attains and abides in the fourth meditation, which is devoid of pleasure and pain and is purified by equanimity and mindfulness."[13]

Upon entering the first *dhyāna*, bodily and mental pain disappear; in the second, bodily pleasure disappears; and in the third, mental pleasure disappears. Then, one attains the fourth *dhyāna*, in which neither pleasure nor pain is felt. It is important to note that this does not imply the absence of feeling; rather, one feels that which is other than pleasure or pain.

After the disappearance of the eight types of faults (*apakṣāla*-s), including initial thought, sustained thought, breathing in, breathing out, bodily happiness, bodily pain, mental happiness and mental pain, from the lower stages, purification of the equanimity of the conditioned states and that of mindfulness is attained.

In summary, the fourth *dhyāna* comprises: feeling neither pleasure nor pain, purification of equanimity, purification of mindfulness and purification of concentration.

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## 11.3   The four *ārūpya* attainments

In a manner similar to that of other *sutra*-s, the *Arthaviniścaya sūtra* describes the four *ārūpya samāpatti*-s as follows: "Monks, a monk passes wholly beyond the perception of form by eliminating all perception of resistance and paying no attention to different perceptions."[14]

That is, one who passes wholly beyond the perception of form enters into the four formless attainments. The word "wholly" implies that both gross and subtle forms cease to exist. This is done through:

i)   eliminating all perception of resistance (*pratighasaṁjñā*), which is the characteristic of form and shows up when one form hinders another; and

ii)  paying no attention to different perceptions that arise through taking form or formless states as the object.

### 11.3.1   The sphere of infinity of space (*ākāśānantyāyatana*)

The *Arthaviniścaya sūtra* says: "[Being aware that] space is infinite, [the practitioner] attains and abides in the state of infinity of space."[15]

He who practices formless meditation by taking space as the object without paying attention to different perceptions achieves his resolution by unbounded space. This state is called "infinity of space."

## 11.3.2 The sphere of infinity of consciousness (*vijñānānantyāyatana*)

The *Arthaviniścaya sūtra* says: "Having fully transcended the state of infinity of space, [the practitioner] becomes aware as follows: 'Consciousness is infinite'. Thus he attains and abides in the state of infinity of consciousness."[16]

He who has no delight in experiencing infinite coarse materiality (*anantaudārika*) has achieved his resolution to be detached from perception with equanimity: he is in a state of nothingness. He does not direct his mind towards anything because he does not experience forms.

## 11.3.3 The state of nothingness (*ākiṃcanyāyatana*)

The *Arthaviniścaya sūtra* says: "Having fully transcended the state of infinity of consciousness, [the practitioner is aware:] 'There is nothing'. Thus he attains and abides in the state of nothingness." [17]

He who desires to go beyond the state of infinity of space must grasp the characteristics of pure consciousness; then, his resolution is achieved by the attainment of infinite consciousness. This state is called "infinity of consciousness."

## 11.3.4 The sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*naiva-saṃjñā-nāsaṃjñāyatana*)

The *Arthaviniścaya sūtra* says: "Having fully transcended the state of nothingness, [the practitioner] attains and abides in the state of neither perception nor non-perception."[18]

In this state, the functional application in meditation is so weak that there is neither perception as sharp as that in the seven previous states nor an absolute absence of perception. That is, although the meditator has perception, because of its weakness, he abides in a state in which it is as though he possessed no perception.

### 11.3.5   Cessation attainment (*nirodha-samāpatti*)

N*irodha-samāpatti* is also called *saṃjña-vedita-nirodha-samāpatti*, because in the prayoga stage, the practitioner makes a special effort to suppress *saṃjñā* and *vedanā*, which constitute the root of all *saṃsāras*.   This meditation can be attained only by an *ārya*; hence, it is sometimes called "*ārya samāpatti*." In the Theravāda tradition, it is stated explicitly that only an *anāgāmin* or an *arhat* can attain this *samāpatti*.

The *ārya* enters into this state with the clear understanding that it is only a temporary refuge from worldly disturbance, and especially when he feels the need for spiritual inspiration. The result of successfully suppressing *saṃjñā* and *vedanā* is that neither *citta*-s nor *caitta*-s can arise. Hence, an *acittaka* state, in which there is no mental activity whatsoever, is achieved. This is the Sarvāstivāda position. However, the Sautrāntika and Dārṣṭāntika traditions generally maintain that there is still some subtle form of mental activity in this state.

The phenomenon of *nirodha-samāpatti* is doctrinally interesting. Various systemic problems arise, including: How can a *citta* rearise after a period during which the meditator's mental flow has been totally interrupted? In what way is a meditator in such a state different from a dead person? It is in connection with such controversies that several important Buddhist doctrines

came to be expounded. One such doctrine is that of the ancient masters (*pūrvācārya*), which maintains that the body and mind are mutually seeded (*anyonyaṃ bījaka*); that is, the potentiality for the arising of one is stored/subsumed in the other. Another is the Sautrāntika doctrine of the seventh consciousness, called the *vipāka-phala* or *ālaya-vijñāna*, which is the fundamental consciousness on which the six forms of traditional consciousness arise. This became one of the Mahāyāna Yogācāra doctrines.

It should be noted that according to the Sarvāstivāda, although the nine meditational attainments are to be practiced and attained sequentially, once a meditator has mastered them one by one, he can enter any of them at will.

## 11.4 Summary

Various Sanskrit terms, including *dhyāna*, *samādhi* and *samāpatti*, rendered in English as "meditation" are defined and discussed in Sarvāstivada Abhidharma texts. *Dhyāna* primarily means "contemplation," and is a state in which *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* are equipoised. *Samādhi* primarily means "concentration" or "meditation," but at the highest level, it conveys the sense of the perfect integration of the practitioner's psychic energies, which enables the mind to see things truly as they are. *Samāpatti* primarily means meditative

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attainment, and as a term for meditation has a more general connotation than has *dhyāna*. Only the *rūpa* meditations can be called *dhyāna*-s, whereas nine meditations — the four *rūpa dhyāna*-s, four *ārūpya* meditations and cessation meditation — constitute the nine sequential *samāpatti*-s (attainments). Those who have not fully mastered these meditative attainments must enter them sequentially.

## NOTES

1 MVŚ, 412a.

2 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 80：「要具二義方名靜慮。謂能斷結及能正觀。欲界三摩地雖能正觀而不能斷結。諸無色定雖能斷結。而不能正觀故非靜慮。復次若能遍觀遍斷結者名爲靜慮。欲界三摩地雖能遍觀而不能遍斷結。諸無色定二義俱無故非靜慮。復次若能靜息一切煩惱。及能思慮一切所緣名爲靜慮。欲界三摩地雖能思慮一切所緣。不能靜息一切煩惱。諸無色定兩義都無故非靜慮。復次諸無色定有靜無慮。欲界三摩地有慮無靜。色定俱有故名靜慮。靜謂等引。慮謂遍觀。故名靜慮。」(T27, no. 1545, 412a9-20).

3 Cf. AKB, 433: *Dhyānam iti ko'rthaḥ | dhyāyanty anena | prajānantīty arthaḥ | samāhitacittasya yathābhūtaprajñānāt | cintanārtho hy eṣa dhātuḥ | cintanaṃ ca prajñā siddhāntaḥ | . . .* prakarṣayuktetannāmavidhānādbhāskaravat *| kaś ca prakarṣayuktaḥ |yo'ṅgasamāyktaḥ samādhiḥ | s hi śamathavipaśyanābhyāṃ yuganaddhavāhitvād dṛṣṭadharma-sukha-vihāra uktaḥ | sukhā ca pratpad iti.*

4 MVŚ, 417c-418a.

5 AVN, 121.

6 MVŚ, 539a.

7 For example, DSŚ, 471c, and so forth.

8 MVŚ, 539a.

9 AVN, 120.

[10] AVN, 121.

[11] AVN, 120.

[12] AVN, 120.

[13] AVN, 120-121.

[14] AVN, 126.

[15] AVN, 126.

[16] AVN, 126.

[17] AVN, 126.

[18] AVN, 126.

# Chapter 12 — The four *dhyāna*-s as the Buddhist mediations

## 12.1 The centrality of the four *dhyāna*-s in the Buddha's teachings

In the previous chapter on the nine sequential meditative attainments, I have discussed the meaning and significance of the *dhyāna*. Since the four *dhyāna*-s are of central importance to the Buddhist system of meditation, I shall in this chapter discuss other important aspects of these four *dhyāna*-s which are yet to be discussed.

In Chapter 8, in the course of discussing the term samādhi, I have quoted fully NH Samtani's description of the fourfold *samādhi-bhāvanā* (which he renders as "the four courses [of meditation]". Those description, of course are given by the author of the *Arthaviniścaya-sūtra*, whose commentary (i.e. the *Nibandhana*), according to Saṃtani was probably a Sautrāntika.[1] Although the the *sūtra* is very likely to have been affiliated to the Sautrāntika school, its description on meditation are on the whole similar to those of other Buddhist schools, and it was for this reason that I have quoted them in full from Santani's English translation.

These fourfold *samādhi-bhāvanā* are firstly summarized as follows:

I. Meditation development leading to the *dhyāna*-s, for the sake of bliss in the present life.

II. Meditation development leading to superior knowledge and vision.

III.Meditational development leading to distinguishing understanding of phenomenal processes.

IV. Meditational development leading to the complete destruction of the outflows (defilements).[2]

I shall translate below, the description on them given in the *Dharma-skandha-śāstra* of the Sarvāstivāda:[3]

At one time, the Bhagavat ... told the *bhikṣu*-s: "There are four cultivation of samādhi. What are the four? [I] There is a cultivation of samādhi which, when practiced and developed and repeated much, leads to the realization of the state of happiness in the present life (*dṛṣṭadharma-sukhavihārāya* 現法樂住) ... [II] There is also a cultivation of *samādhi* ... leads to the realization of superior knowledge and vision (*jñāna-darśana-pratilambhāya*, 殊勝知見). [III] ... excellent distinguishing understanding (*prajñāprabheda*, 勝分別慧,) ... [IV] ... the complete exhaustion of the outflows

(*āsrava-kṣaya*, 諸漏永斷):

[I] ... a *bhikṣu* moistens, fully moistens his body with the joy and happiness born of separation/detachment (*viveka*, 離); suffuses, fully suffuses; soothes/gladdens (適悅, prīṇayati), fully soothes — in such a way that there is not a single part of his body that is not fully suffused.

[II]  ... The light-ideation (*āloka-saṃjñā*, 光明想) is properly grasped (*sādhu ca suṣṭhu ca sugṛhītā*) by a *bhikṣu*, well mentally attended to, well practised, well penetrated (*supratividdhā*, 善通達). He develops the citta which is accompanied with luminosity(*samaprabhāsaṃ cittam*), opened and unhampered (*vivṛta*, *aparyavanaddha*) — as by day, so by night, as in front, so behind, as below, so above. He removes the dull citta and cultivates a samādhi of infinite [luminosity].

[III] ... A *bhikṣu* knows when the arising of a sensation, knows well the staying of a sensation, knows well the disappearance of a sensation. With regard to this, he is mindful, not unmindful. He also knows well an ideation, knows well a reasoning. With regard to this, he is mindful, not unmindful. ...

[IV]  ... A *bhikṣu* fixes [his *citta*] repeatedly observing the arising

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and ceasing of the five aggregates of grasping: "This is *rūpa*; "this is origination of *rūpa*"; "this is the cessation of *rūpa*"; "these are sensation, ideation, conditionings and consciousness"; "this is the origination of sensation, ideation, conditionings and consciousness"; "this is the cessation of sensation, ideation, conditionings and consciousness". ...[4]

From the above description on the first *samādhi-bhāvanā* and from the early *sūtra* (E.g., *Majjhima-nikāya*, I, *mahāsaccaka-sutta*), we see that with respect to meditation praxis, it is the four *dhyāna*-s that are emphasized in the Buddhist tradition. We may in fact understand that these four *dhyāna-s* constituted the original meditational praxis innovated by the historical Buddha. Johannes Bronkhorst concludes that these four *dhyāna*-s constituted the authentic Buddhist meditation.[5] Other modern scholars, such as Yin Shun,[6] have also highlighted them as being the meditations stressed by the Buddha himself.

In the biographical description of the Buddha that we find in the Buddhist Canon, the Buddha, before his enlightenment, was said to have learned meditations from the religious teachers at the time. In particular, He was said to have learned the meditational attainment of the Sphere of Nothingness (*ākiṃcanyāyatana;* 空無邊處) from *Ārāḍa Kālāma*, and that of Sphere of Neither ideation nor Non-ideation from *Udraka Rāmaputra*.[7] (These form the

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last 2 of 4 formless meditational attainments in the traditional Buddhist list) However, although he had mastered such meditational attainments, He realized that they could not lead to liberation, and he struggled on with the practice of the *dhyāna*-s and finally attained enlightenment.[8]

The following passage from the *Pali Mahāsaccaka-sutta* describes how, after realizing the futility of various extreme forms of ascetic practices, the Buddha recalled his childhood experience of the first *dhyāna*: ——

> Then, to me, O Aggivessana, this occurred: "I remember that ... while seated in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, detached from sensual pleasure, detached from unskillful *dhamma*-s, I entered upon and abided in the first *jhāna* (*dhyāna*) which is accompanied by reasoning and investigation, with joy and happiness born of detachment. Could this be the path to enlightenment?" Then, Aggivessana, following this recollection, I had this cognition: "This is indeed the path to enlightenment." This, Aggivessana, occurred to me "Why am I afraid of that happiness which is happiness definitely apart from sensuality, apart from unskillful *dhamma*-s?". This, then, Aggivessana, occurred to me: "I am indeed not afraid of that happiness which is happiness definitely apart from sensuality, apart from unskillful *dhamma*-s."[9]

The account goes on to relate how he, having given up fasting and extreme asceticism, began to practice the four *dhyāna*-s, attaining one after another. When his mind had thus become fully purified, He directed his thought to the knowledge of recollecting his own past lives, to the knowledge of the passing away and re-arising of beings, and to the knowledge of the exhaustion of His outflows. He then attained enlightenment with the direct insight into the Four Noble Truths.[10] The MVŚ in fact goes so far as to state that all buddhas, more numerous than the sands of river *Gangā*, without exception, relied on the fourth *dhyāna* to attain the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment (*anuttarā samyaksaṃbodhi*).[11]

In the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, too, it was after he emerged from the fourth *dhyāna* that he passed away.[12] It is noteworthy that the *parinirvāṇa* of the great disciples such as Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana are also described in the same manner.[13]

It is also to be noted that "proper *samādhi*" (s*amyak samādhi;* 正定) as one of the limbs of the Noble Eight-fold Path is generally defined in terms of the four *dhyāna*-s,[14] and not all the eight or nine *samāpatti*-s. Thus, we have in the *Saccavibhaṅga-sutta*: ——

> And what, friend, is proper *samādhi*? Here, friend, a *bhikkhu*, quite separated from sensuality, separated from unskillful *dhamma-s*,

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fully attains and abides in the first *jhāna* (*dhyana*) accompanied by reasoning and investigation , born of separation. ... in the second *jhāna* ... in   the third *jhāna* ... in the fourth *jhāna* ... This, friend, is called proper *samādhi*.[15]

Likewise, in the explaination of the threefold training (*śikṣā*) —— *adhiśīla*, *adhicitta* and *adhiprajñā* —— in the Sūtra, the Buddh also defines *adhicitta* primarily in terms of the full attainment of the four *dhyāna*-s.[16]

Furthermore, from the perspective of spiritual attainment, it is through the four *dhyāna*-s that the practitioner acquires progressively higher degrees of calm/pliability/workability (*praśrabdhi;* 輕安) which is the psycho-physical transformation that he should aspire —— in contrast to   the   psycho-physical state of heaviness/stiffness/non-workability (*dauṣṭhulya;* 粗重) that characterizes the unenlightened and untrained mind. All the 4 *dhyāna-s* progressively accord with the nature of *praśrabdhi* (順輕安相): In the first *dhyāna*, there is the quiescence of language, and hence of all other *dharma*-s; in the second, of reasoning and investigation (which are the source of language[17]), and hence of all other *dharma*-s; in the third, of joy, and hence of all other *dharma*-s; in the fourth, of breathing altogether, and hence of all other *dharma*-s. It is the fourth *dhyāna* that brings about the most excellent *praśrabdhi-sukha* (輕安樂[18]).[19]

The *Gopaka-moggallāna-sutta* states that the Buddha neither praised nor condemned all *jhāna*-s (*dhyāna*). It is these very four *dhyāna*-s that were praised by him.[20]

## 12.2  The *dhyāna* as experience of bliss

The four *dhyāna*-s are also called *adhi-caitasika* (增上心所), *caitasika* here referring to *samādhi* (one of the 10 universal thought-concomitants). When it pertains to the four *dhyāna*-s, the *sūtra* speaks of the four "*ādhicaitasika*-s as dwelling in happiness" (*sukhavihāra*),[21] a term we have already come across above.

> There is no *samādhi* like the four fundamental *dhyāna*-s which, possessing great power and greatly efficacious, can accomplish great things. For this reason, they alone are called *adhi-caitasika*-s. Moreover, in the four *dhyāna-s* there are immeasurable kinds of excellent qualities (殊勝功德) of the *adhi-caitasika* ... Moreover, on the basis of the four *dhyāna*-s, the *yogācāra*-s experience the *caitasika* bliss (心所樂) through immeasurable ways. ... Furthermore the four *dhyāna*-s are included as "Paths of bliss/ease"

(*sukhā pratipat*; 樂 通 行 ), hence they alone are called "*adhicaitasika*".[22]

The *praśrabdhi* mentioned above is in fact an experience of happiness/bliss. It is for this reason that the *dhyāna*-s alone are described as "dwelling of happiness", not the *ārūpya*-s（無色定）and the the states known as "neighboring attainment" *sāmantaka*-s (近分定). There are eight *sāmantaka*, each being an intermediary stage of concentration between two fundamental *dhyāna*-s. The first, before the first *dhyāna* proper, is called *anāgamya* (未至定). It is a stage of preparatory effort (*prayoga;* 加行 ) and therefore necessarily involving hard effort:

> Question:   It is also not difficult for one, having been detached from the lower (fine-materiality spheres), to generate a fine-materiality meditational attainment , isn't [the latter] a "dwelling in happiness"?

> Answer :  Although one has been detached from the lower [sphere], it is still difficult to generate a non-materiality meditational attainment because it is extremely subtle. When one generates a fine-materiality *dhyāna*, it is easier that. ...

Moreover, it is easy to be detached on the basis of the four *dhyāna*-s, not of the *sāmantaka*-s, etc. It is like the case of two persons who both travel to the same destination: one travels on land, the other by boat. Although both will arrive at the same place, it is the one who travels by boat that does not experience difficulty; not the one on land. Likewise, sentient beings can become detached either by relying on the *dhyāna*-s, or on the *sāmantaka*-s, or on the *ārūpya*-s; but it is those who rely on the *dhyāna*-s who do not experience difficulties, not those on the *sāmantaka*-s, etc. Thus, it is only the *dhyāna*-s that receive the name "dwelling in happiness".

Moreover, It is only in the *dhyāna*-s that the meditator is endowed with two types of happiness: 1. happiness in the form of happy sensation, 2. happiness in the form of *praśrabdhi*. The first three *dhyāna*-s possess both kinds of happiness. Although in the 4th *dhyāna*, happiness in the form of sensation is lacking, the strength of the happiness in the form of *praśrabdhi* is extensive and [in fact] excels the two types of happiness in the former. Although *praśrabdhi* also exists in the *sāmantaka*-s and the *ārūpya*-s, it is not extensive; hence they are not called "[dwelling in] happiness". ...[23]

# 12.3 The minimum meditative attainment for spiritual realization

As we have seen above (chapter 3), the four roots of skillfulness (i.e. *nirvedhabhāgīya*) in the preparatory stage (prayoga) can only be produced from the understanding derived from cultivation. This means that one must have meditative attainment at the preparatory stage for the acquisition of the four noble roots. In other words, for acquiring the pure *prajñā* to liberate one from *saṃsāra*, one must rely on meditational practices. The Sarvāstivāśda teaches that the practitioner can acquire the four noble roots only at the stages of "not-yet-arrived" meditation (*anāgamya;* 未至定), the intermediate meditation (*dhyānāntara;* 中間定) and the four meditations (*dhyāna;* 四禪).

This implies that the minimum concentration required for acquiring the four skillful roots which finally leads to *nirvāṇa* is the degree of concentration of the "not-yet arrived" concentration. "Not-yet arrived" is the neighborhood stage bordering or before the first *dhyāna.* As for the attainment of the *dhyāna*-s, it is not an absolute necessity. This point is clearly brought out in the story of Susīma (蘇尸摩), cited in the MVŚ: Susīma, the heretic, asks the *bhikṣu*-s as to what are the meditative attainments, "from the first *dhyāna* up to the sphere of neither-ideation-nor-non-ideation", on the basis of which they have attained arhathood. Those *arhat bhikṣu*-s reply that they relied on none of

the meditative attainments, because they are the type of practitioners called the "doctrine-pursuers" (*dharmānusārin*) who have now become *ārya*-s known as "those liberated through wisdom (*prajñā-vimukta*)." It is explained in that connection that in the case of those *arhat bhikṣu*-s, it was after they have acquired the exhaustion of all outflows relying on the "not-yet-reached" attainment that they were able to give rise to the four *dhyāna*-s.[24]

## 12.4   The Abhidharma analysis of the four *dhyāna*-s

According to Abhidharma analysis, *dhyāna* is a process involving the operation of mental activities called contemplation factors (*dhyānānga*). There are five of them, namely: *vitarka* (reasoning), *vicāra* (investigation), *prīti* (joy), *sukha* (happiness) and *cittaikāgratā* (one-pointedness of mind). The first *dhyāna* has all the five factors.   The second *dhyāna* has *prīti, sukha* and *cittaikāgratā*.   The third *dhyāna* has *sukha* and *cittaikāgratā*.   The fourth *dhyāna* has only *cittaikāgratā*.   Thus, the number of contemplation factors decreses in number as the meditator advances in the *dhyāna*-s, until in the fourth dhyāna, only one-pointed ness of mind —— which characterizes all *dhyāna* states, and is in fact synonymous with *dhyāna* —— remains. The meditator therefore progressively experiences greater and greater subtlety as he advances upwards.

## 12.4.1 First *Dhyāna* (*prathama-dhyāna*)

A typical *sūtra* description of the first *dhyāna*, cited in the Abhidharma texts is as folows:

> Here, *bhikṣus*, a *bhikṣu*, separated from sensual desires, detached from evil unskillful *dharma*-s, he fully attains and abides in the first *dhyāna* which is accompanied by *vitarka* and *vicāra*, born of separation and filled with *prīti* and *sukha*.[25] (Cf. AVN, 17: *iha bhikṣavo bhikṣuḥ viviktaṃ kāmaiḥ viviktaṃ pāpakair akuśalair dharmaiḥ savitakaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajaṃ prīti-sukhaṃ prathamaṃ dhvānam upasamphadya viharati*)

The DDŚ goes on to define the various terms in the above passage as follows:—

i)  "sensual desire" are the 5 *kāma-guṇa*-s; but the true kāma is the *rāga* which take them as *ālambana*.  As the *Bhagavta* said, "The beautiful objects in the world are not real *kāma*.  Real *kāma* is the human conceptualization — greed".  (cf. *gāthā* cited in the AKB, 113: *na te kamā yāni citrāni loke / saṃkalparāgaḥ kāmaḥ* … Also cited in DSŚ,);

ii) "Separation" is the separation from sensual desires. etc. are all separation; but here it refers to the first *dhyāna;*

iii) "*Prīti*" is the great joy for one separated from evil, the excited delight, the pliability;

iv) "*Sukha*" is for one detached from evil, the physical and mental *dauṣṭhulya* is abandoned; *sukha* consists of the physical and mental softness and *praśrabdhi*. This *prīti* and *sukha* arise by virtue of separation, hence "born of separation";

v) "*Dhyāna*" —— it is called the first *dhyāna* because it is possesses of all the 5 *dhyānāṅga*. The *citta* and all the conjoined *caitta-s* in this meditation are called the first *dhyāna*;

vi) "Fully attains (*upasaṃpadya*, 'having fully attained/accomplished)" — this can only be fully accomplished by leaving home (*pravrayjā*) and incessantly cultivating the skillful *dharma*-s born of detachment;

vii) "Abides" —— being continuously in possession of the manifestation of this *dhyāna*.

The Theravāda scriptures give various inspiring similes for the experience of these *dhyāna*-s (Pāli: *jhāna*). For the first *dhyāna*, we have the following simile[26]:

> Just as a skilled bath man or a bath man's apprentice heaps bath powder in a mental basin and, sprinkling it gradually with water, kneads it until the moisture wets his ball of bath powder, soaks it, and pervades it inside and out, yet the ball itself does not ooze. So

too, a *bhikkhu* (the practitioner) makes the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion.

## 12.4.2 Second *dhyāna (dvitīya-dhyāna)*

The DDŚ cites a typical *sūtra* description of the second *dhyāna* as follows:

As a result of the quiescence of *vitarka* and *vicāra*, of complete internal tranquility and of a unified state (*ekotī-bhāva*) of mind, he fully attains and abides in the second *dhyāna* which is without *vitarka* and *vicāra*, born of *samākhi* and filled with *prīti* and *sukha*.[27] (cf. AVN, 17: … sa *vitarka-vicārāṇāṃ vyupaśamād adhyāma-saṃprasādāc cetasa ekotī-hbāvād avitarka-vicāraṃ samādhijaṃ prīti-sukha dvitīyaṃ dhyānam upasaṃpadya viharati*).

The terms used in the above are elaborated as follows: —

i)  "Qusicience of *vitarka* and *vicāra*" — there is complete quiescence and total absence of the two;

ii) "Complete internal tranquility" — as a result of this quiescence, there is

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direct conviction, conforming, affirmation (印可; *avadhāraṇa*), inclination and mental clarity;

iii) "Unified state of mind" — the citta is not scattered and is fixed on a single object;

iv) "Born of *samākhi*" — *samādhi* is the complete abiding, non-scattering, non-dispersion, stilling, complete sustaining (等持; XZ's usual rendering for *sam-ā√dhā*) and one-pointedness (*ekāgratā*) of the *citta*; it is *samādhi*-born because it is originated by virtue of *samādhi*.

The Theravāda simile for the second *dhyāna* is as follows[28]:

> Just as though there were a lake whose waters welled up from below and it had no inflow from east, west, north, or south, and would not be replenished from time to time by showers of rain, then the cool fount of water welling up in the lake would make the cool water drench, steep, fill, and pervade the lake, so that there would be no part of the whole lake unpervaded by cool water." So too, a *bhikkhu* makes the rapture and pleasure born of concentration drench, steep fill and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of concentration.

## 12.4.3 Third *dhyāna (tṛtīya-dhyāna)*

DSŚ cites the *sūtra* description on the third *dhyāna* is as follows:

> As a result of detachment (*virāga*) from *prīti*, he abides in equanimous,
> mindful and well aware.  And he experiences that *sukha* through the
> body which the *ārya-s* declare, 'equanimous and mindful is one abiding
> in *dhyāna*.[29]  (Cf. AVN, 17: *sa prīter virāgād upekṣako viharati │smṛtaḥ
> samprajānan sukhaṃ ca kāyena pratisaṃvedayati │yat tad āryā ācakṣate
> upekṣaḥ smṛtimān sukhavihārīti tṛtīyaṃ dhyānam upasaṃpadya
> viharati│*)

The various terms are elaborated as follows: ——

i) "Detached from *prīti*" —— the *citta* is freed from attachment and liberated
   from *prīti*;

ii) "Abides equanimous, mindful and well aware" —— being detached from
   *prīti*, he remains in equanimity which is the mental evenness, uprightness
   and quiescence; he has proper mindfulness which is the mindfulness,
   recollection and clear remembering (明記; *abhilapana*: → *smṛti*); he has
   proper awareness which is all that is discernment (*pravicaya*) with regard to
   *dharma*-s and *vipaśyanā*;

iii) "Experiences *sukha* through the body" —— body here means the mental

body (*manas-kāya*),　the body is said to experience *sukha* because, owing to the *sukha-vedanāin* the mental body, there comes to be ease in the body comprising the Great Elements; the *sukha* here is the physical and mental softness and pliability, but it is *sukha* as a *vedanā*, not the *sukha* as *praśrabdhi*;

iv) "The *ārya*-s declare that [this *sukha*] should be abandoned", he should abide in equaminty alone, and be mindful and well aware.

For the third *dhyāna*, the Theravāda simile is as follows[30]:

> Just as, in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses that are born and grow in the water thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it, and cool water drenches, steeps, fills, and pervades them to their tips and their roots, so that there is no part of all those lotuses unpervaded by cool water.　So too, a *bhikkhu* makes the pleasure divested of rapture drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pleasure divested of rapture.

## 12.4.4 Fourth *dhyāna (caturtha-dhyāna)*

The DSŚ cites the *sutra* description on the fourth *dhyāna* as follows:

As a result of abandoning *sukha* and *duḥka*, and of the disappearance of the previous gladness (*saumanasya*) and grief (*dauramanasya*), he fully attains and abides in the fourth *dhyāna* which is neither *duḥkha* nor *sukkha* and purified in respect of equanimity and mindfulness.[31]

The various terms are alaborated as follows: —

i) "abandoning *sukha* and *duḥkha*" —— at that time, he acquires the *prahāṇa-parijñā* of both *sukha* and *duḥkha*; they are separated, subdued and ceased;

ii) "Disappearance of the previous gladness and grief" —— when entering the first *dhyāna*, he has acquired the *prahāṇa-parijñā* of grief; when entering the second, that of *duḥkha*, when entering the third, that of gladness; on entering the fourth, that of *sukha*, *duḥkha*, gladness and grief; they are all separated, subdued and ceased. This is to indicate that there is herein no *duḥkha* or *sukha vedanā*, only the neutral *vedanā* which is neither-*duḥkha*-nor-*sukha*; gladness, grief, *vitarka*, *vicāra* are all ceased.

The Therevāda simile for fourth *dhyāna* is as follows:[32]

Just as though a man were sitting covered from the head down with a white cloth, so that there would be no part of his whole body

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unpervaded by the white cloth; so too, a *bhikkhu* sits pervading this body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pure bright mind.

## 12.5 Summary

Although various meditation techniques are taught in the Buddhist canonical and Abhidharma texts, it is probable that the four *dhyāna*-s, together with such related methods as the fourfold applications of mindfulness, etc., are the authentic teachings of the Buddha himself. The elaborate canonical descriptions — with vivid similes — of these four *dhyāna*-s, as well as their further elaborations in the Abhidharma texts, indicate that they are the preferred methods of meditative praxis, particularly since they lead to calmness of body and mind, and experiences which are progressively blissful in nature. In this connection, it may be stated that  from this perspective, the goal of Buddhist mediatation consists essentially of the tyranformation from the state of psycho-physical inaptitude (represented by the notion of *dauṣṭhulya*) to the state of total spiritual ease and freedom (represented by the notion of *praśrabdhi*). It is to be noted that the final step of the Buddhist Eightfold Path of spiritual praxis culminates in Proper Meditation (*samyak-samādhi*) which is explained in terms of the practice and attainment

of the four *dhyāna*-s. In order to attain the spiritual fruit, it is not that the practitioner attains any of the four *dhyāna*-s. But the Sarvāstivāda stresses that he must at least develop the degree of mental concentration attained in the "not-yet-reached" *dhyāna* which is verging on the attainment of the first *dhyāna*.

1 See AVN, 133 *ff.*

2 法蘊足論 (T26, 489 ff): 有四修定。何等爲四?

I. 謂有修定。若習若修。若多所作。能令證得現法樂住。...

II. 復有修定。若習若修。若多所作。能令證得殊勝智見。

III. 復有修定。若習若修。若多所作。能令證得勝分別慧。

IV. 復有修定。若習若修。若多所作。能令證得諸漏永盡。

I. [修四靜慮] 謂有苾芻。即於自身。離生喜樂 (從離欲惡不善法所生)。滋
潤遍滋潤。充滿遍充滿。適悅遍適悅。故離生喜樂。於自身中。

II. 謂有苾芻。於光明想。善攝受。善思惟。善修習。善通達。若晝若夜。
無有差別。若前若後。無有差別。若下若上。無有差別。開心 離蓋。修
照俱心。除闇昧心。修無量定。

III. 謂有苾芻。善知受生。善知受住。善知受滅盡沒。於此住念非不住念。
及善知想善知尋。於此住念非不住念。

IV. 謂有苾芻。於五取蘊。數數隨觀。生滅而住。謂此是色。此是色集。此
是色滅。此是受想行識。此是受想行識集。此是受想行識滅。

Dīgha, iii.222; Aṅguttara, ii.44: *atth'āvuso samādhibhāvanā bhāvitā*

*bahulīkatā diṭṭhadhamma-sukhavihārāya saṃvattati ....*

*ñāṇadassana-patilābhāya ... satisaṃpajaññāya ... āsavānaṃ khayāya*

*saṃvattati* |

AKB, 451: *punaś catasraḥ samādhi-bhāvanā ucyante* | *asti samādhibhāvanā āsevitā bhāvitā bahulīkṛtā dṛṣṭadharma-sukhavihārāya saṃvartate* | *iti vitaraḥ* | *tatra*

**samādhibhāvanā dhyānaṃ śubham ādyaṃ sukhāya hi ‖27‖**

*kuśalaṃ prathamaṃ śuddhakam anāsravaṃ vā dṛṣṭadharma-sukhavihārāya samādhibhāvanā* | *tadādikatvād anyāny api jñeyāni* | ...

**darśanāyākṣayabhijñeṣṭā**

*divyacakṣur abhijñā jñānadarśanāya samādhi-bhāvanā* |

**dhī bhedāya prayogajāḥ** |

*prayogajāḥ sarve guṇāstraidhātukā anāsravāḥ prajñāprabhedāya samādhi-bhāvanā* |

**vajropamo'ntye dhyāne sāsravakṣaya-bhāvanā ‖28‖**

*yaś caturthadhyāne vajropamaḥ samādhiḥ sa āsravakṣayāya samādhi-bhāvanā* | *ātmopanāyikī kilaiṣā bhagavato dharma-deśanā* | *ataś catur(thadhyāna) evāha* |

[3] My English translation here is based on that by Professor KL Dhammajoti in the lecture notes given in the hand-outs of his course on Abhidhrama in 2008–9.

[4] DSŚ, 489b f

[5] Bronkhorst, Johannes (1993). The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India. Reprint. Delhi, 95.

[6] Yin Shun, (1989). 修定力— 修心與唯心.秘密乘. Taipei, 18.

[7] Cf. *Ariyapariyesana-sutta*, M i.163 ff; *Mahāsaccaka-sutta*, M i.240; 中阿含經, 776 f; etc.

[8] It is possible that several meditational praxis that prevailed in the Buddha's time came to be incorporated into the Buddhist scheme. Eventually, the following nine meditations came to be accepted by the Buddhist tradition as forming nine sequential meditational attainments. See *supra*, Chapter 9, for explanations on these attainments.

[9] M i.246 f: *tassa mayhaṃ aggivessana etad ahosi│abhijānāmi kho panāhaṃ ... sītāya jambucchāyāya nisinno vivicc 'eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajaṃ pīti-sukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharitā │ siyā nu kho eso maggo bodhāyā ti │ tassa mayhaṃ aggivessana satānusāri viññāṇaṃ ahosi│eso va maggo bodhāyā ti │tassa mayhaṃ a kin nu kho ahaṃ tassa sukhassa bhāyāmi yan taṃ sukhaṃ aññatr 'eva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehī ti ggivessana etad ahosi │ tassa mayhaṃ aggivessana etad ahosi │ na kho ahaṃ tassa sukhassa bhāyāmi yan taṃ sukhaṃ aññatr 'eva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehī ti│Cf.* 增一阿含經, T no.125, 671b, which speaks of the child bodhisattva entering successively into the 4 *dhyāna*-s.

[10] ibid, 248 f.

[11] MVŚ, 881b.

[12] Cf. D ii. *Mahāparinirvāṇa-suttanta*, 156: *catutthajjhānā vuṭṭhahitvā samanantarā bhagavā parinibbāyi* |

[13] E.g. *Ekottarāgama*, T no.125, 640a, 641c.

[14] E.g., *Saccavibhanga-sutta*, M iii.252;

[15] M iii.252: *katamo c' āvuso sammā-samādhi* | *idh' āvuso bhikkhu vivicc 'eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhama-jjhānaṃ upasampajja viharati* | *vitakkavicārānaṃ vūpasamā ajjhattaṃ sampasādanaṃ cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ samādhijaṃ pītisukhaṃ dutiya-jjhānaṃ ... pe ...* | *tatiya-jjhānaṃ ... pe ...* | *catuttha-jjhānaṃ upasampajja viharati* | *ayaṃ vuccat 'āvuso sammā-samādhi* |

[16] Cf. 《雜阿含經》卷 30：「爾時。世尊告諸比丘。有三學。何等為三。謂增上戒學・增上意學・增上慧學。何等為增上戒學。若比丘住於戒波羅提木叉。具足威儀行處。見微細罪則生怖畏。受持學戒。是名增上戒學。何等為增上意學。若比丘離諸惡不善法。有覺有觀。離生喜樂。初禪具足住。乃至第四禪具足住。是名增上意學。何等為增上慧學。若比丘此苦聖諦如實知。此苦集聖諦・此苦滅聖諦・此苦滅道跡聖諦如實知。是名增上慧學。」(T02, no. 99, p. 213, c9-18).

[17] MVŚ, 416b: 語言本.

[18] MVŚ, 881b.

[19] DSŚ, 493c. The text is here explaining *praśrabdhi* as an

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Enlightenment-factor. It is the physical and mental *praśrabdhi* conjoined with the outflow-free mental application on six characteristics which accord with *praśrabdhi* — in addition to the four which characterize the four dhyāna: the 6th is the quiescence of ideation and sensation in the meditational attainment of cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti;* 滅想受定); the 7th, the liberation of *citta* from greed, hatred and ignorance. Cf. *Saṅgītyi-suttanta*, D iii.266 which describes all the nine *anupubba-nirodha*; also *Poṭṭhapāda-sutta*, 182 f.

[20] M, iii.13 f: *na kho brāhmaṇa so gotamo bhagavā sabbaṃ jhānaṃ vaṇṇesi │ nāpi so bhagavā sabbaṃ jhānaṃ na vaṇṇesi │ ... kathaṃ-rūpañ ca brāhmaṇa so bhagavā jhānaṃ vaṇṇesi │ idha brāhmaṇa bhikkhu vivicc' eva kāmehi ... paṭhamajjhānaṃ upasampajja viharati │ ... dutiyajjhānaṃ tatiyajjhānaṃ catutthajjhānaṃ upasampajja viharati│ eva(ṃ)-rūpaṃ kho brāhmaṇa so bhagavā jhānaṃ va(ṇṇ)esīti*

[21] The form of the term in the *sūtra* could have been *ādhicaitasika* or *ābhicaitasika*, meaning "pertaining higher thought" (?) Cf. M iii.11: *ābhicetasikānaṃ diṭṭhadhamma-sukhavihāraṃ nikāmalābhī hoti ...*

[22] MVŚ, 417c–418a.

[23] MVŚ, 419c–420a.

[24] MVŚ, 572c. Cf. *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, ii, 119 *ff.*

[25] E.g., DSŚ, 428a-b, JPŚ, 1028b; etc.

[26] For the similes given for the four *jhāna*-s, I have adopted the translations

given by Vajirañāṇa (1975). For this first *jhāna*, see MDB, 367-368.

27 DSŚ, 482b.

28 MDB, 368

29 DSŚ, 482b.

30 MDB, 368

31 DSŚ, 482b.

32 MDB, 369.

# Chapter 13 — The Eight Liberations (*vimokṣa*; 解脫）and Eight Spheres of Conquest （勝處; *abhibhvāyatana*)

In this chapter, I shall discuss the remaining major topics that are related to the nine sequential meditative attainments: the eight liberations (*vimokṣa*-s) and eight spheres of conquest (*abhibhvāyatana*-s).

Liberation is a topic of central importance in Buddhist philosphy, and refers to complete transcendence of existential unsatisfactoriness and samsaric existence. Unconditioned liberation is *nirodha* of the *kleśa*-s; that is, cessation through deliberation (*pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*). In the present context, however, liberation refers to certain states of spiritual attainment that are characterized by freedom from a lower or inferior state. These are conditioned liberations, which are *adhimukti* in nature. In the Abhidharma, they constitute the eightfold path to enlightenment.

The eight liberations correspond to the nine sequential *samāpatti*-s as follows:

| Eight liberations | Nine sequential *samāpattis* |
|---|---|
| First liberation | First *dhyāna* |
| Second liberation | Second *dhyāna* |

| Third liberation | Fourth *dhyāna* |
| Fourth liberation | Sphere of infinity of space |
| Fifth liberation | Sphere of infinity of consciousness |
| Sixth liberation | State of nothingness |
| Seventh liberation | Sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception |
| Eighth liberation | Cessation attainment |

It can be seen from the above that the third *dhyāna* does not constitute a liberation. The reason for this is given in section 11.2.

## 13.1 What are the eight liberations?

The MVŚ describes the eight liberations as follows:

> The eight liberations are:
>
> First: possessing matter, [the practitioner] sees matter.
>
> Second: internally without the ideation of matter [he] sees matter externally.
>
> Third: having realized through the body and fully attained the beautiful liberation, he abides in it.

Fourth: transcending all ideations of matter and ceasing the ideation of the resistant (*sapratigha*; 有對), without contemplating on the ideation of variegation, one enters into infinite space, and abides fully in the liberation of the sphere of infinity of space.

Fifth: transcending the whole of the space of infinity of space, one enters into infinite consciousness, and abides fully in the liberation of the sphere of infinity of consciousness.

Sixth: transcending the whole of the space of infinity of consciousness, one enters into nothingness, and abides fully in the liberation of the sphere of nothingness.

Seventh: transcending the whole of the sphere of nothingness, one enters into the abode of neither ideation nor non-ideation, and abides fully in the liberation.

Eighth: transcending the whole of the sphere of neither ideation nor non-ideation, one enters into the cessation of ideation (*saṃjñā*) and sensation (*vedanā*) and realizes through the body, and fully abides in the liberation.[1]

The description of the eight liberations in the AKB is similar, differing only slightly in wording:

(i)     "Possessing matter, he sees [external] matter." (*rūpī rūpāṇi*

*paśyati*; 內有色想, 觀外色);

(ii) "Internally without the ideation of matter, he sees matter externally." (*adhyātmam arūpasaṃjñī bahirdhā rūpāṇi paśyati*; 內無色想, 觀外色);

(iii) "Having realized through the body and fully attained the beautiful liberation, he abides therein" (*śubhaṃ vimokṣaṃ kāyena sākṣātkṛtvopasaṃpadya viharati*; 淨解脫身作證具足住);

(iv) — (vii) "The four non-material meditational attainments. (*ākāśānantyāyatana,* etc.)" (*catvāraārūpyāḥ*);

(viii) "The [meditational attainment of] the cessation of ideation and sensation." (*saṃjñāvedita-nirodha[-samāpatti*; 滅盡定/滅受想定).[2]

## 13.2 The path of progress of the eight liberations

The attainment of *vimokṣa*-s constitutes a sequential path of progress. Having attained the first *vimokṣa*, the practitioner gradually eliminates ideations that have internal *rūpa*-s as objects. Through *adhimukti*, he visualizes his body after his death, totally destroyed by being ravaged by animals or burned to ashes. This is the second *vimokṣa*. Freed from ideations of internal *rūpa*-s, his

*citta* continues with the spontaneous manifestation of superior *prasrabdhi*. Although in the previous practice, he has already become detached from sensual greed, which takes visible objects, self-attachment (*ātma-sneha*) from beginningless time may still arise if he sees that the body exists; hence, the further practice to eliminate ideations of internal *rūpa*-s. They are cultivated in the first two *dhyāna*-s. When cultivated in the first *dhyāna*, they counteract attachment to *rūpa*-s in the sensuality sphere. When cultivated in the second one, they counteract attachment to *rūpa*-s of the first *dhyāna*.

Next, the practitioner enters into the third *dhyāna*. However, being immersed in subtle *sukha*, he can only generate *kuśala-mūla*-s similar to the *vimokṣa*-s, and falls short of being able to cultivate them. This is in fact the nature of things (*dharmatā*): this *bhūmi* cannot bring about the successful contemplation of delight (*prāmodya*; 欣) or disgust (*nirveda*; 厭). For this reason, the third *dhyāna* does not constitute a liberation.

The practitioner then enters into the fourth *dhyāna*, in which equanimity (*upekṣā*) predominates; as a result, his *citta* is gradually clarified (*prasanna*) and the ideation of loathsomeness does not predominate. The yogācāra's *citta* has sunk after operating in the mode of disgust for so long. To stimulate and gladden it and relieve it from the fatigue of long-time practice, or rather, to test his own aptitude in loathsomeness practice, he generates the pure/beautiful (*śubha*) *vimokṣa* with the support of the fourth *dhyāna*. Starting with a *śubha*

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object such as a flower, he extends his contemplation through *adhimukti* to all beautiful cognitive objects (*śubha-ākāras*; 淨行相). This stimulates the *citta* without causing restlessness/excitement (*auddhatya*), and the *śubha* aspect can be seen without greed arising. When the yogācāra is aware of the predominance of the force of the *kuśala-mūla*-s, he then narrows his scope to focus on a single object, contemplating it as *śubha*, and abides therein. This is the accomplishment of *śubha vimokṣa*. Similar to the second *vimokṣa*, this one involves not the ideation of internal *rūpa*-s but rather the contemplation of external *rūpa*-s. However, there are differences in terms of the *bhūmi* depended upon, the *ākāra* to be counteracted and so forth. Moreover, the *śubha vimokṣa* concerns the contemplation of that which corresponds with greed without generating greed, whereas the second one concerns the contemplation of that which opposes greed to achieve the non-arising of greed.[3]

For the other five *vimokṣas*, the process is identical to that for the attainment of the four *ārūpya*-s and *nirodha-samāpatti*-s (see Chapter 9 for details).

The AKB also offers an explanation as to why the third *dhyāna* is not counted among the eight liberations:

> Can it be the case that there is no liberation in the third *dhyāna*?

> [Yes], because there is no greed fo *rūpa* in the third *dhyāna*, and

because it is perturbed by the subtle joy which pertains to its own stage.[4]

The AKB then explains an issue that is of considerable psychological and spiritual significance: in the process of Buddhist meditative practice, there needs to be dispassion regarding undesirable and negative emotions. At the same time, one should not abide continuously in such a state. Hence, a negative contemplative state has to be counteracted at times by a positive one. In the context of the eight liberations, the contemplation of the impure is succeeded by the contemplation of the pure for yet another reason: to test whether one has indeed mastered the preceding contemplation. These points are highlighted in the following passage:

Why does the *yogācāra* practice the liberation of the pure?

This is because (the *yogācāra*) desires to make the mind to be joyful temporarily. The preceding contemplation on the impure makes the mind sunken and distressed. By practising the contemplation on the pure now, he can arouse the feeling of joy. Or rather, it is in order to test his ability [acquired in the previous contemplation]: has he indeed accomplished the preceding contemplation on the impure? That is, the previous practice of the liberation from the impure is accomplished only if there is no arising of defilement from

contemplating the appearance of the pure.[5]

## 13.3 The intrinsic nature and nomenclature of the eight liberations

The intrinsic nature of the eight liberations is analyzed in the MVŚ as follows:

Question: What is the intrinsic nature of these eight liberations?

Answer: The first three liberations have the root of skillfulness of non-greed as their intrinsic nature, because they all counteract greed. If one takes into consideration the [*dharma*-s with which] they are conjoined (*saṃprayukta*) and [the *dharma*-s with which] they co-arise (*anuvartaka*) — then, for those in the sensual sphere, they have four *skandha*-s (five *skanda*-s minus *rūpa* because they do not have *rūpa* for attachment) as their intrinsic nature; for those in the sphere of *rūpa*, they have five *skandha*-s (though they do not have informative *rūpa* for attachment, they have non-informative *rūpa*) as their intrinsic nature. All the four liberations of the sphere

*ārūpya* have the four *skandha*-s as their intrinsic nature. The liberation of the cessation of *samjña* and *vedanā* has the *skandha* of *cittaviprayukta saṃskāra* as its intrinsic nature.[6]

These eight are called liberations in the sense of "leaving behind" (背棄). According to the MVŚ, the first two leave behind greed for visible things; the third leaves behind the *citta* contemplating loathsomeness; the four *ārūpyas* each leave the *citta* of the previous lower stage; and the eighth leaves behind all *citta*-s having cognitive objects. According to Vasumitra, they are liberations because the *citta* is freed with regard to the *kleśa*-s; according to Bhadanta, they are liberations because one is freed through the force of *adhimukti*; and according to Parśva, they are liberations because something is relinquished (背捨).[7] Elsewhere in the MVŚ it is explained that they are so named because they free one from all that constitutes obstruction.[8]

## 13.4 The significance of the third and the eighth liberations

All eight liberations are called a "realization through the body" (*kāya-sākṣātkriyā*; 身作證) because they are directly realized with the body.

However, the third and the eighth are so named because in them both the term itself and its signification are prominent: they pertain to the two extremities. Of the material *vimokṣa*-s, the third (i.e., the fourth *dhyāna*) is the last, and of the non-material ones, the eighth is the last; hence, by highlighting them, the rest of the same kind are also indicated. Also, the third is the perfect case of liberation taking the body as the object, accomplished by first grasping the *śubha* aspect and then gradually leaving it behind and becoming liberated therefrom; hence, the label "realization through the body"; in the eighth, only the body exists, and the sense of realization through the body is therefore prominent.[9]

Saṃghabhadra summarizes the twofold purpose of the cultivation of these liberations: (i) to render defilements more indistinct; and (ii) to gain mastery over the *samāpatti*-s. Then, the practitioner can attain such qualities as *araṇā*, and psychic power for such activities as prolonging and shortening the lifespan.[10]

## 13.5 The eight spheres of conquest (*abhibhvāyatanas*; 八勝處)

The eight spheres of conquest are as follows:

1. Internally, there is the ideation of *rūpa*; externally, one sees a small amount of *rūpa*. (The thought arises: "I've become victorious (*abhibhūya*) in knowing all *rūpa*-s. I've become victorious in seeing all *rūpa*-s);

2. Internally, there is the ideation of *rūpa*; externally, one sees a large amount of *rūpa*;

3. Internally, there is no ideation of *rūpa*; externally, one sees a small amount of *rūpa*; and

5-8: Internally, there is no ideation of *rūpa*; externally, one sees blue, yellow, red and white.

It can be seen that 1 and 2 are the same as the first *vimokṣa*; 3 and 4 are the same as the second *vimokṣa*; and 5–8 are the same as the third *vimokṣa*.

However, there is a difference. In cultivating *vimokṣa*-s, one is able only to "turn one's back" (棄背) on the defilements — one is only "liberated" (in this sense). Subsequently, in cultivating the spheres of conquest, one is able to conquer the cognitive object: one can view it in any manner in which one delights, without any defilement being provoked.

Saṃghabhadra offers various explanations for the naming of the spheres of conquests, or conquest spheres, as such:

They are called spheres of conquest because they can subdue the object-domains (*viṣaya*). That is to say: even though all visible object-domains qua cognitive objects may be fully endowed with clarity, brightness and beauty, the power of the skillful roots are capable of eclipsing all of them. This is like the case that even though the slaves and servants may be wonderfully dressed, they are eclipsed by their master.

Or rather: It is called a sphere of conquest wherein [the mind] operates freely without generating defilements in accordance with [the object-domain] —— it is a conquest-sphere in as much as it conquers the sphere (勝於處故，立勝處名).

. . .

Or rather: these skillful roots themselves are called the spheres; because these spheres can conquer, they are called conquest-spheres.

The liberations [discussed] above can only turn their back on sensual craving and the contemplation on the impure. These eight spheres of conquests can analyse and subdue the object-domains, and make them accord with the mind (令隨心轉).[11]

## 13.6 Summary

The eight liberations and eight spheres of conquest are related to the *samāpatti*-s. They describe the mental states through which the practitioner progresses in the course of achieving the various meditative attainments. In the case of achieving the liberations, the mind moves from a lower or inferior state to a higher one. In the case of attaining the conquest spheres, the mind acquires further freedom from object domains, and in this sense, conquer them.

# NOTES

[1] MVŚ, 434b15-23.

[2] AKB, 455ff.

[3] Ny, 72b-733a.

[4] AKB, T29, 151b28-c1.

[5] AKB, T29, 151c1-5.

[6] MVŚ, 434b23-28.

[7] MVŚ, 434b.

[8] MVŚ, 727a.

[9] MVŚ, 776a.

[10] Ny, 773c.

[11] Ny, 773c-774b: 能制伏境。故名勝處。謂雖一切所緣色境。清淨光華美妙
具足。而善根力悉能映蔽。譬如僕隸雖服珍奇。而爲其主之所映蔽。或於
是處轉變自在。不隨起惑故名勝處。勝於處故立勝處名。或此善根即名爲
處處能勝。故立勝處名。 ... 前解脫但於色中。棄背欲貪及不淨想。今八
勝處能於所緣。分折制伏令隨心轉。

# Chapter 14 — Conclusion

Abhidharma has often been described as a form of scholasticism. In the foregoing pages, I have endeavoured to demonstrate that, contrary to this assertion, Abhidharma is essentially and intrinsically concerned with spiritual praxis and realization. We saw that the very definition of the term Abhidharma itself spells out this concern: Abhidharma is that which envisages, or is that which face to face with, *Nirvāṇa*. At the absolute level (*paramārthatas*), it is none other than pure wisdom (*amalā prajñā*). I hope my thesis has provided yet another vindication of the position of Edward Conze and others that doctrinal elaboration in the Buddhist system is fundamentally based on spiritual praxis and realization.

I have chosen the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā* as the main source of my investigation because this is the fundamnental Sarvāstivāda text held as the supreme authourity by the orthodox Sarvāstivādins. This text is in effect an encyclopaedia of ancient Buddhist doctrines held by the various Abhidharma schools and masters. Unfortunately, it has largely been neglected by most modern scholars, not least because of the fact that it is extant now only in Classical Chinese. For this reason, I have taken the pain to carefully translate numerous lengthy passages from it, which in itself is hopefully a humble contribution of this thesis. It is for the same reason that I have also translated many important passages — some for the very first time — from the *Nyāyānusāra* (順正理論) authored by the staunch Sarvāstivāda master, Saṃghabhadra. My analysis of the very rich content in these two texts pertaining to meditative praxis serves to confirm my hypothesis that Abhidharma is intertwined with meditative praxis for

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an investigation into which the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā* in particular — as well as other Abhidharma texts such as the *Nyāyānusāra* — is an extremely valuable source book.

It is my belief that the meditation methods and doctrines pertaining to the path of spiritual progress that I have examined in this study are derived from a joint contribution coming from a community of meditation masters known as the *yogācāra*-s and the Sarvāstivāda Ābhidharmika-s. I have endeavoured to explain the nature of these *yogācāra*-s as a community of monks primarily concerned with spiritual praxis and the manner in which they are held in high esteem by the Ābhidharmika-s. The same kind of esteem is still vividly attested in the orthodox Abhidharma texts of the 5th century, such as the *Nyāyānusāra* and the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*.

In a gist, the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā* not only defines each and every important term occurring in the various doctrines of meditative praxis, but also provides articulate explanations on the motive and rationale for the particular prescriptions of the method concerned. My study shows that the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma tradition has faithfully inherited the emphases and methods of spiritual praxis from the Sūtra. At the same time, there are evidently important development and doctrinal elaboration in the text. These development and elaborations at times show elements of what might be called "abhidharmization of spiritual praxis". Nevertheless, they must have been primarily based on the actual experiences and realization of the members of the Sarvāstivāda tradition as a whole, particularly those of the *yogācāra*-s.

Concerning the actual methods of meditation, in view of the huge volume of discussion on spiritual praxis in the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā*, my analysis and choice of material can hardly be exhaustive. This, in any case, is not the aim of the present study. I believe I have selected and discussed the most important doctrines representative of the major emphases of the Sarvāstivāda tradition in this regard, and sufficiently clarified the principles and doctrines involved. This selection includes: the doctrine of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* which together constitute the very foundation of the whole system of Buddhist meditation; the *dhyāna*-s which embody the equilibriumization of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* and which may be regarded as the authentic Buddhist meditations; the different stages of the path of spiritual progress; the five hindrances which are of psycho-spiritual significance for the understanding of personality-type and of what constitutes obstruction to successful meditation; the four application of mindfulness stressed in both the Sūtra and the Abhidharma as the "direct way" leading to the purification and emancipation of sentient beings; the methods of "mindfulness of breathing" and "contemplation on the impure" which are highlighted in the tradition as the "two gateways to immortality (*Nirvāṇa*)".

It is hoped that this study could serve to encourage others to appreciate the Abhidharma teachings as primarily a soteriology — just like teachings in the Sūtra and the Vinaya. This should enable us to acquire a correct perspective in the understanding of the development of Abhidharma in Buddhist history. It is further hoped that my humble attempt in this thesis could inspire other more competent scholars to pay more attention to the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā* and research more deeply into it for a better understanding of the ancient doctrines and methods of spiritual praxis preserved in the tradition of Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma.

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