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1. Abhidharma

Its Origin, Meaning and Function

- 1.1. Origin of the *abhidharma*
 - 1.1.1. Origin according to tradition
 - 1.1.2. Historical origin
- 1.2. Definitions of *abhidharma*
- 1.3. The soteriological function of the *abhidharma*

1.1. Origin of the *abhidharma*

1.1.1. Origin according to tradition

Traditionally, the *abhidharma-piṭaka* is given as the last of the *tripiṭaka*-s whose order is: *vinaya*, *sūtra*, *abhidharma* — or *sūtra*, *vinaya*, *abhidharma* in the northern tradition. This very probably reflects the historical fact that the *abhidharma* texts were evolved and compiled as a *piṭaka* later than the other two. This same fact is also discernible in the ancient triple designations given to the specialists of the Buddhist Canon — *vinaya-dhara*, *sūtra-dhara*, *māṭṛkā-dhara*. Significantly, the third term in the list has, instead of *abhidharma*, the term *māṭṛkā* (Pāli: *māṭikā*), meaning a matrix in the form of a list summarily enumerating topics to be elaborated upon. This suggests that at the earlier stage, the study of these *māṭṛkā*-s had served as a major basis for the development of the *abhidharma-piṭaka*. (See below).

It is possible that most of the so-called Hīnayāna schools in India possessed their own sets of *tripiṭaka*. Unfortunately, most of these *tripiṭaka* texts are no longer extant. As far as the canonical *abhidharma* texts are concerned, we are now in possession of only two complete sets: the seven texts of the Theravāda preserved in Pāli, and the seven Sarvāstivāda texts in Chinese translation. Of the latter, however, the *Prajñapti-śāstra* (PjŚ) is only a partial translation; a fuller version is

preserved in the Tibetan (see *infra*, § 4.1.1.3). It is in the *abhidharma* treatises — comprising commentaries, sub-commentaries and compendia besides the canonical texts — that these Hīnayāna schools gradually defined and articulated their distinctive doctrinal positions. While it is a fact that the extant *vinaya*- and *sūtra-piṭaka*-s can no longer claim to be the pristine words of the Buddha, much as we would like, the sectarian coloring within these two collections are by and large marginal compared to that in the *abhidharma* texts — a well-known fact borne out by comparative studies of the extant Pāli *nikāya* and the Chinese *āgama* texts.

According to the Theravāda tradition, Śāriputra transmitted the *abhidhamma* to the disciples. All of the seven canonical *abhidhamma* texts are said to be by the Buddha, the first *ābhidhammika*.¹ The Buddha first taught it to the gods in the Thirty-three (*tāva-tiṃsa*)-Heaven; and it was studied and transmitted through Śāriputra by a succession of teachers.²

The Sarvāstivāda tradition, on the other hand, accepts that their canonical *abhidharma* works were compiled by the disciples. Nevertheless, like the Theravāda, it too maintains that the Buddha is the real author; the compilers simply gathered up and re-arranged His dispersed teachings:

Without the exposition of the *abhidharma*, the pupil is unable to examine the *dharma*-s. However, it was spoken by the Fortunate One in a dispersed manner. The Venerable Kātyāyanīputra and others, having collected it, established it [as the *abhidharma*] — just as the Venerable Dharmatrāta made the *Udāna-varga* [by collecting the scattered sayings of the Buddha].
*(na hi vinābhidharmopadeśena śiṣyaḥ śakto dharmān pravacetum iti /
 sa tu prakīrṇa ukto bhagavatā / bhadantakātyāyanīputraprabhṛtibhiḥ
 piṇḍīkrtya sthāpito bhadanta-dharmatrātodāna-vargīya-karaṇavat //)*³

The *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā* (MVŚ) likewise speaks of Kātyāyanīputra compiling what the Buddha had spoken in the *sūtra*-s.

It further declares:

The *abhidharma* was originally the words of the Buddha; it is only the compilation of the Venerable [Kātyāyanīputra]. Moreover, whether they are the Buddha's or the disciples' words, [so long as] they do not contradict *dharmatā*, the Bhagavat allowed all of them to be studied (lit: upheld) by the *bhikṣu*-s. Accordingly, the Venerable made the compilation from what he had heard from the line of tradition or from his examination through the power of his resolution-knowledge (*prañidhi-jñāna*).

The 5th century C.E. orthodox Vaibhāṣika master, Saṃghabhadra, speaks in the same vein:

...the Buddha first expounded the *abhidharma* Himself. Without the Buddha's exposition, the great disciples, Śāriputra and others, would not have been capable of the proper investigation into the characteristics of the *dharma*-s. ... [The compilation of the Buddha's dispersed *abhidharma* teachings] by Venerable Kātyāyanīputra and others ... was like the collective compilation (*saṃgīti*) of the *vinaya* and the *sūtra*-s by the Venerable Mahākāśyapa and others. The two *piṭaka*-s, *sūtra* and *vinaya*, were compiled in accordance with the words; it was only the *abhidharma-piṭaka* that was compiled in accordance with the meanings. ... The compilation of the *abhidharma* in accordance with the Buddha's noble teachings was permitted by the Buddha and can therefore be called the Buddha's words.⁴

1.1.2. Historical origin

In all probability, the *abhidharma* has its origin in the *sūtra*-s. However, the term *abhidharma* — although occurring, often alongside *abhivinaya*, in the *sūtra*-s — does not refer to the *abhidharma* texts constituting the third *piṭaka*, for in the *sūtra*-s the meaning of *abhidharma* seems to be 'about the *dhamma*', or 'the profound doctrines' (of the Buddha).

The following types of *sūtra*-s are particularly noteworthy as having features which contributed to the development of the *abhidhamma/abhidharma* in the later specialized sense, all aiming at unfolding and clarifying the Buddha's profound teachings:

(a) Those featuring *abhidharma-kathā* — a solemn dialogue between two *bhikṣu*-s concerning the spiritual path; others listening are not permitted to interrupt. An example is the *Mahāgosīṅga-sutta*.⁵ Sāriputta asks Ānanda, Anuruddha, Revata, Mahā Kassapa and finally Mahā Moggallāna in turn what kind of *bhikkhu* could enhance the brilliance of the Gosīṅga-sālavana-dāya which is delightful in the moon-lit night. Moggallāna replies: "Here, friend Sāriputta, two *bhikkhu*-s engage in an *abhidhamma-kathā*, and each, being questioned by the other, answers without floundering, and their discussion proceeds in accordance with the Dhamma. Such kind of *bhikkhu*-s could illuminate this Gosīṅga-sālavana-dāya." The 6th century Theravāda commentator, Buddhaghōṣa, in fact, links *dhammakathika* with *abhidhamma*. (*Atthasālinī*, 25)

(b) Those featuring *vedalla* (Skt. *vaidalya*): Derived from \sqrt{dal} meaning to 'crack'/'open', this feature signifies the extensive unraveling of the profound doctrinal meanings that have been hidden. In form, it consists of a question and answer session on doctrinal matters with a scope apparently broader than that in *abhidhamma-kathā* — either between the Buddha and the fourfold disciples (with others listening) or among the disciples themselves. *Vedalla-kathā* is also sometimes juxtaposed to *abhidhamma-kathā*;⁶ e.g., the *Mahā-vedalla-sutta*⁷ where Mahā-kotṭhila questions and Sāriputta answers; the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta*⁸ where Visākha questions, Dhammadinnā answers.

In the Theravāda classificatory scheme of the Buddha's nine-fold teachings (*navaṅga-satthu-sāsana*), *vedalla* occurs as the last member, which may suggest that it came to be incorporated into the scheme at the time of the evolution of *abhidharma* into the genre of which it was

considered to correspond. Both the Sarvāstivāda and the Yogācāra equate it with *vaitulya* and *vaipulya*. Saṃghabhadra's explanation is as follows:

Vaipulya refers to the extensive analytical clarification of *dharma*-s by means of logical reasoning (正理; **yukti*, **nyāya*); for, all *dharma*-s have numerous natures and characteristics which cannot be analytically clarified without extensive discussion. It is also known as extensive bursting (廣破; *vaidalaya* < *vi* + *dal*), for this extensive discussion is capable of bursting the extremely strong darkness of nescience (*ajñāna*). It is also known as unmatchability (無比; *vaitulya* < *vi* + *tul*), for this extensive discussion has subtle and profound principles which cannot be matched.⁹

The same equation of the three terms is also seen in the *Abhidharma-samuccaya* (under *Dharma-viniścaya*) and its *bhāṣya* which noteworthy gives a Mahāyānic stress in this context.¹⁰ It may well be that by Aśaṅga's time, if not earlier, this had become a common northern Buddhist tradition.¹¹

(c) Those featuring the *vibhaṅga* ('analysis/exposition') style — a brief, summarized teaching is elaborated by the Buddha or a competent disciple. The *vibhaṅga* methodology, however, is to be understood as originally representing a distinctive characteristic of the Buddha's teachings, and not just a feature characterizing an exposition on the brief teachings. The two terms, *abhidharma* and *abhivāyana* ('concerning the *dharma*', 'concerning the *vinaya*'), often juxtaposed in the *sūtra*-s, are indicative of the earliest development. The significance of being the elaboration on brief teachings, however, came to predominate at least by the time of formation of the *nikāya/āgama* collections. In the *Madhyamāgama*, we find some 35 *sūtra*-s grouped as **vibhaṅga* recitations (分別誦). Likewise, there are some 12 *sutta*-s grouped under the Pāli *Vibhaṅga-vagga*. Like *vedalla*, then, it also came to signify the explication of the profound meanings intended in the Buddha's

words, and the *vibhaṅga* method is to effect this through an analytical elaboration. Such a development was obviously connected with the emergence of the *abhidharma*. Indeed, the earliest *abhidharma* texts, such as the *Dharma-skandha-śāstra*, exhibit the feature of being a technical commentary on the *sūtra*-s, and one of the early Pāli canonical *abhidhamma* texts is noticeably named a *Vibhaṅgappakaraṇa*.

(d) Those featuring *māṭṛkā/māṭikā* — originally meaning a matrix or list of headings purporting to systematically summarize the Buddha’s teaching (see above), e.g., the list of 37 doctrinal topics often known as *bodhipakṣya-dharma*¹² — four *smṛtyupasthāna*-s, four *samyak pradhāna*-s, four *ṛddhipāda*-s, five *indriya*-s, five *bala*-s, seven *bodhyaṅga*-s, eight *āryaṣṭāṅgika-mārga*-s. In the *Kinti-sutta*¹³ these are given as the *dhamma* taught by the Buddha who has realized them directly (*ye vo mayā dhammā abhiññā desitā*), and the *bhikkhu*-s are exhorted to train themselves in them concordantly. It is noteworthy that, in this context, the term *abhidhamma* occurs: *tesañ ca vo bhikkhave samaggānaṃ ... sikhataṃ, siyaṃsu dve bhikkhū abhidhamme nānāvādā...* (“O *bhikkhu*-s, while you are training concordantly..., two *bhikkhu*-s might dispute as regards the *abhidhamma*...”). The same list of 37 are given in the *Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta* as a summary of the *Dhamma* taught by the Buddha throughout His whole career. The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (AKB) refers to them as constituting the Buddha’s *Saddharma* pertaining to realization (*adhigama*); that pertaining to teaching (*āgama*; lit. ‘tradition’) is said to comprise the *sūtra*, *vinaya* and *abhidharma*.¹⁴ In the northern tradition, however, it came to include as well the fundamental *abhidharma* texts and the truthful *abhidharmic* commentaries on the Buddha’s words. (See below).

This feature represents a tendency toward organization and systematization which is the essential characteristic of *abhidharma*. Many scholars believe that *abhidharma* evolved from *māṭṛkā*. The whole

of the *Saṅgīti-suttanta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya* may be considered a *māṭṛkā*, which in the Sarvāstivāda evolved into a fundamental *abhidharma* text entitled the *Saṅgīti-paryāya*. It is noteworthy that, as late as the 5th century C.E., we find Saṃghabhadra mentioning *māṭṛkā* unambiguously as being synonymous with *abhidharma* and *upadeśa* (see below), and cites as *māṭṛkā* the early Sarvāstivāda canonical texts: the *Saṅgītiparyāya*, the *Dharma-skandha* and the *Prajñapti-śāstra*. Similarly, in explaining the *abhidharma-piṭaka*, the *Mūla-sarvāstivāda-vinaya-kṣudraka-vastu* also says, “the four *smṛtyupasthāna*-s, the four *samyak-prahāṇa*-s, ... the *Dharma-saṃgīti* (= SgPŚ), the *Dharma-skandha* — these are collectively known as *māṭṛkā*-s”.¹⁵ The *Aśokāvadāna*, too, speaks of the *māṭṛkā-piṭaka*, giving similar contents.¹⁶

(e) Those featuring *upadeśa* — an expository or exegetical discourse. This is explained by Saṃghabhadra as follows, equating it with *māṭṛkā* and *abhidharma*:

Upadeśa refers to the non-erroneous (*aparyasta*, *aviparīta*) revealing, answering of objections and ascertainment, of the preceding [eleven] members. According to some, *upadeśa* also refers to analytical explanations, in accordance with reasoning, given by those who have seen the truth of the profound meanings of the *sūtra*-s, or by other wise ones.¹⁷ It is none other than what is called *māṭṛkā*, for, when the meaning of other *sūtra*-s is to be explained, this serves as the *māṭṛkā*. It is also called *abhidharma*, on account of its being face to face (*abhi*) with the characteristics of *dharma*-s, and of its being a non-erroneous unraveling of the characteristics of *dharma*-s.¹⁸

The Yogācāra tradition also equates likewise:

What is *upadeśa*? It refers to all the *māṭṛkā*-s, *abhidharma*-s. The investigation into the profound *sūtra-piṭaka* and the proclamation of all the essential tenets of the *sūtra*-s — this is known as *upadeśa*.¹⁹

Such equation points clearly to the definite connection that this last member (*aṅga*) of the *dvādaśāṅga* has with the evolution of the *abhidharma*. The 12 *aṅga*-s, as given by Saṃghabhadra,²⁰ are: 1. *sūtra*, 2. *geya*, 3. *vyākaraṇa*, 4. *gāthā*, 5. *udāna*, 6. *nidāna*, 7. *avadāna*, 8. *itivṛttaka/ityuktaka*, 9. *jātaka*, 10. *vaipula/vaitulya* (which also seems to be connected with *vaidalya* = Pāli *vedalla*), 11. *adbhuta-dharma*, 12. *upadeśa*.²¹ As we have seen above, Saṃghabhadra asserts that *upadeśa* is the non-erroneous revealing, unraveling of difficulties and ascertainment, of the meaning of all the preceding 11 parts of the *dvādaśāṅga*. This is in fact a Sarvāstivāda description of the nature and function of *abhidharma*.

Saṃghabhadra's assertion of *upadeśa* being the true criterion for the Buddha's words (*buddha-vacana*) is quite in line with the definition in the MVŚ:

What is *upadeśa* (議論)? It refers to those teachings within the *sūtra*-s which serve as criteria for the black-teachings (黑²²說), the great-teachings (大說), etc.

Furthermore, it is as in the case where once the Buddha, having briefly expounded on a *sūtra*, entered into his room remaining silent for a long time, [whereupon] the great disciples assembled together, each explaining the Buddha's words with different words and meanings.²³

In brief, three basic meanings of *upadeśa* are discernible in the northern tradition:

- (i) Those teachings within the *sūtra-piṭaka*, given by the Buddha Himself, which serve to ascertain what may or may not be accepted as the Buddha's true teachings. In Saṃghabhadra's terms, they are represented by the last of the Buddha's twelve-fold teachings, serving to ascertain the authenticity of all the other *aṅga*-s as *buddha-vacana*.

- (ii) The collective elaborate discussion by the great disciples on the brief discourses of the Buddha.²⁴
- (iii) Since, as Saṃghabhadra states, *upadeśa* also refers to truthful expositions by “those who have seen the truth” of the *sūtra*-s or “other wise ones”, it can then subsume not only the canonical *abhidharma* texts but also certain authoritative post-canonical commentaries satisfying the Sarvāstivādin conditions.²⁵

1.2. Definitions of *abhidharma*

In the Pāli tradition, two main meanings are given: (i) supplementary (*atireka*) doctrines, (ii) special/superior (*visesa/visiṭṭha*) doctrines.²⁶ There are also other meanings, notably ‘supreme (*uttama*) doctrines’.²⁷ These meanings are based on the interpretation of the prefix, *abhi*, as ‘supreme’ or ‘excellent’, and of *dhamma* as ‘doctrine’. The other interpretation of *abhi*, which seems to be historically earlier,²⁸ is ‘pertaining to’, or ‘facing/envisaging’; *abhidhamma* accordingly means ‘pertaining to the doctrine’ or ‘concerning the doctrine’.

In the northern tradition, the second foregoing interpretation is the predominant one, and Xuan Zang consistently renders *abhidharma* as ‘facing/envisaging *dharma*’ (對法). However, the two components, ‘facing/pertaining’ and ‘*dharma*’, are further elaborated differently. Thus, the MVŚ gives numerous explanatory definitions of the term *abhidharma* as follows:

- (I) According to the Ābhidharmikas, it is so called because (1) it can properly and utterly determine (*vi-niś-√ci*) the characteristics of all *dharma*-s; (2) it can properly examine and penetrate the *dharma*-s, (3) it can directly realize (*abhi-sam-√i*) and realize (*sākṣāt-√kr*) with regard to all *dharma*-s; (4) it can get to the very bottom of the profound nature of *dharma*-s; (5) through it, the wisdom-eye of the noble ones comes to be

purified; (6) it is only through it that the nature of the *dharmas*, subtle from beginningless time, comes to be revealed; (7) what it expounds is not contradictory to the nature of the *dharmas* — one who is extremely well-versed with regard to the specific and common characteristics in the *abhidharma* cannot be faulted in any way and made to contradict the nature of the *dharmas*; (8) it can refute and defeat all the heretical views.

- (II) According to the Venerable Vasumitra, it is so called because (9) it can always ascertain the nature of the *dharmas* given in the *sūtra*-s; (10) it can properly understand the nature of the twelve-link conditioned co-arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*); (11) it can directly realize the *dharmas* of the four noble truths; (12) it skillfully expounds on the practice of the noble eightfold path; (13) it can realize *nirvāṇa*; (14) it repeatedly analyses the *dharmas* from innumerable doctrinal perspectives.
- (III) According to the Bhadanta (Dharmatrāta), it is so called because (15) — by means of words, phrases and sentences — it systematically compiles, organizes and analyses the *dharmas* pertaining to defilement, purification, bondage, liberation, and to the saṃsāric process (*pravṛtti*) and its cessation (*nivṛtti*).
- (IV) According to Venerable Parśva, because (16) it is the final, judgmental, absolute and non-erroneous *prajñā*.
- (V) According to Venerable Ghoṣaka, because (17) it can properly explain, to a seeker of liberation engaged in the proper practice, what he has not understood: “this is *duḥkha*; this is 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 (*vimokṣa-mārga*); this is the path of progress/advancement/distinction (*viśeṣa-mārga*);²⁹ this is the path of the candidate (*pratipannaka*); this is the acquisition of the spiritual fruit.”

- (VI) According to the Dharmaguptas, because this *dharma* is predominant.
- (VII) According to the Mahīśāsakas, because (18) *prajñā* can illuminate the *dharma*-s.
- (VIII) According to the Dārṣṭāntikas, because (19) it is next to *nirvāṇa*, the supreme among all *dharma*-s.
- (IX) According to the Grammarians (Śābdika, Śābdavāda), because (20) it can abandon the fetters, bondages, proclivities, secondary defilements and envelopments; and it can ascertain the aggregates (*skandha*), abodes (*āyatana*), elements (*dhātu*), conditioned co-arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*), truths (*satya*), foods (*āhāra*), spiritual fruits (*śrāmaṇya-phala*), factors conducive to enlightenment (*bodhipakṣya-dharma*), etc. — *a* means to abandon, and *bhi* means to ascertain.
- (X) According to Venerable Buddhapālita, because (21) the prefix *abhi* means ‘face to face’, and this *dharma* can induce all the skillful *dharma*-s — the *bodhi-pakṣya-dharma*-s, etc. — to appear face to face.
- (XI) According to Venerable Buddhadeva, because (22) *abhi* means ‘predominant’, and this *dharma* is predominant.
- (XII) According to Vāmalabdha, because (23) *abhi* means ‘veneration’, and this *dharma* is honorable and venerable.³⁰

Among the various meanings given above, some are more or less overlapping, and some find correspondence in the Theravāda. They may be subsumed into two broad senses: (i) that of clear, decisive discernment and ascertainment; (ii) that of being direct, face to face.³¹ The first, while bringing out the characteristic concern of *abhidharma* articulated by the Ābhidharmika tradition, emphasizes its intellectual function; the second, the spiritual or soteriological function. In these explanations, *dharma* is explicitly interpreted as either the fundamental constituents of existence or as *nirvāṇa* qua the supreme Dharma, and implicitly, in some cases, as doctrine.

Both aspects — the traditional understanding of *abhi* as ‘excellent’ and ‘pertaining’, on the one hand, and the essential characteristic of the ābhidharmic exegesis, on the other — are brought out in the following definition of Saṃghabhadra:

All those profound (*gambhīra*) exegetical discourses (論道) associated with the nature and characteristics of *dharma*-s are called *abhidharma* on account of the fact that they are capable of being face to face with the nature and characteristics of *dharma*-s.³²

AKB explains the term as follows:

A *dharma* is so called because it sustains its own characteristic. This *dharma* faces (*abhi*) toward the *dharma* in the highest sense, i.e., *nirvāṇa*, or toward the characteristics of *dharma*-s,³³ thus it is *abhidharma*.³⁴

Abhidharma in the highest, real, sense is none other than the pure *prajñā* defined as the examination of *dharma*-s (*dharma-pravicaya*). Secondly or conventionally, it also refers to the with-outflow (*sāsrava*) *prajñā* — derived from listening, reflection and cultivation (*śruta-cintā-bhāvanā-mayī prajñā*) — innate or acquired, which helps to bring about the pure (i.e., outflow-free) *prajñā*. The *abhidharma śāstra*-s, too, inasmuch as they serve as a means or as requisites (*saṃbhāra*) to its acquisition, are also to be considered as *abhidharma*.³⁵ Saṃghabhadra states:

All the best discourses associated with *adhiśīla* are called *abhivinaya*, as they are capable of being face to face with the *vinaya*. All the profound discourses associated with the characteristics of *dharma*-s are called *abhidharma*, as they are capable of being face to face with the nature and characteristics of *dharma*-s.³⁶

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

The *sūtra-piṭaka* 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, answering questions and ascertaining fearlessly.³⁷

1.3. The soteriological function of the *abhidharma*

The above discussion (§ 1.1.2, § 1.2) should suffice to indicate that *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 (ca. 5th century C.E.) 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 worldlings to get out of *saṃsāra*:

Since apart from the examination of *dharma*-s (= *prajñā* = *abhidharma*), there is no excellent means for the appeasement of the 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 is taught by the Master.³⁸

The Ābhidharmika distinction in terms of the functions of the three *piṭaka*-s is also indicative of the spiritual function of the *abhidharma*: the *sūtra-piṭaka* is taught so that those who have not planted the roots of skillfulness (*kuśala-mūla*) and become delighted therein will plant them and be delighted; the *vinaya*, so that those who have planted and become delighted in the roots of skillfulness will mature their series, practicing

what should be practiced; the *abhidharma*, so that those who have so matured and practiced will have the proper means to be enlightened and liberated.³⁹

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 *tripitaka*. 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*).⁴⁰

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 to acquire the seeds similar to the gateway of liberation of emptiness (*śūnyatā*).

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Examining that conditioned *dharmas* 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.⁴¹

NOTES

¹ DhsA, 17.

² DhsA, 3, 5, 21.

³ AKB, 3.

⁴ Ny, 779c.

⁵ M, i, 212 ff.

⁶ E.g., A, ii, 107.

⁷ M, i, 293 ff.

⁸ M, i, 299 ff.

⁹ T 29, 595a–b.

¹⁰ AsmB, 96: *vaipulyaṃ vaidalyaṃ vaitulyam ity ete mahāyānasya paryāyāḥ / tad etat saptavidha-mahattva-yogān mahattva-yānam ity ucyate / saptavidhaṃ mahattvam ālaṃbana-mahattvaṃ ... pratipatti-mahattvaṃ ... jñāna-mahattvaṃ ... vīrya-mahattvaṃ ... upāyakaūśalya-mahattvaṃ ... prāpti-mahattvaṃ ... karma-mahattvaṃ...*

¹¹ See also: Dhammajoti, KL, ‘Abhidharma and *Upadeśa*’, in *Journal of Buddhist Studies*, Vol. 3, 112 f., (Colombo, 2005).

¹² MVŚ, 496, equates *bodhi* here with the knowledge of exhaustion (*kṣaya-jñāna*) and the knowledge of non-arising (*anutpāda-jñāna*).

¹³ M, ii, 238 f.

¹⁴ AKB, 459. Also *cf.* MVŚ, 917c, where the *Saddharma* is subdivided into the conventional and the absolute (*paramārtha*) ones. The former comprises the verbal teachings of the *tripiṭaka*; the latter is the noble path, i.e., the outflow-free *indriya*, *bala*, *bodhyaṅga* and the *mārgāṅga*.

¹⁵ T 24, 408b.

¹⁶ T 50, 113c.

¹⁷ See also **Satyasiddhi-śāstra*, T 32, 245b.

¹⁸ T 29, 595b.

¹⁹ T 30, 419a.

²⁰ Ny, 595a–b.

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- ²¹ This enumeration agrees with that in the MVŚ, 2a.
- ²² 默 in MVŚ. But as Yin Shun (*Study*, 24) points out, it clearly is an error for 黑.
- ²³ MVŚ, 660b.
- ²⁴ MVŚ, 660b. See Yin Shun, 原始佛教聖典之集成 (*Compilation of the Canon of Primitive Buddhism*), (Taipei, 1971), 617 ff.
- ²⁵ See also, Dhammajoti, KL, *op. cit.*, 113 ff.
- ²⁶ DhsA, 2: *kenat̐thena abhidhammo / dhammāṭireka-dhamma-visesaṭṭhena / atireka-visesaṭṭhadīpako hi ettha abhisaddo //*
- ²⁷ *Āṅguttara-nikāya Aṭṭhakathā*, iii, 271
- ²⁸ See Sakurabe, H, 俱舍論の研究 (Kyoto, 1969), 14 ff.
- ²⁹ For these paths, see *infra*, § 15.
- ³⁰ MVŚ, 4a–c.
- ³¹ Cf. *Study*, 38.
- ³² Ny, 330b.
- ³³ TA(U-J), 139, states more specifically that the *dharma*-s here exclude *ākāśa* and *apratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*.
- ³⁴ AKB, 2: *svalakṣaṇa-dhāraṇād dharmah / tad ayaṃ paramārtha-dharmaṃ vā nīrvāṇaṃ dharma-lakṣaṇaṃ vā praty abhimukho dharma ity abhidharmaḥ //*
- ³⁵ MVŚ, 3b–4a; AKB, 2.
- ³⁶ Ny, 330b.
- ³⁷ MVŚ, 1c; Ny, 595b.
- ³⁸ AKB, 2: *dharmāṇāṃ pravacayam antareṇa nāsti kleśānāṃ yata upasāntaye 'bhyupāyaḥ / kleśaiś ca bhramati bhavārṇave 'tra lokas taddhetor ata uditah kilaiṣa śāstrā //*
- ³⁹ MVŚ, 2a; Ny, 595b.
- ⁴⁰ MVŚ, 148b.
- ⁴¹ MVŚ, 307a.