

# *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*

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## 15. The Path of Spiritual Progress

- 15.1. Doctrine of gradual enlightenment
- 15.2. Preliminaries for the preparatory stage
- 15.3. Different stages of the path
  - 15.3.1. *Moṣa-bhāgīya*
  - 15.3.1.1. *Śamātha* and *vipaśyanā*
  - 15.3.2. *Nirveda-bhāgīya*
  - 15.3.2.1. Warm-up (*uśmagata*)
  - 15.3.2.2. Summits (*mārdhan*)
  - 15.3.2.3. Receptivity (*ksānti*)
  - 15.3.2.4. Worldly supreme *dharma*-s
  - 15.3.3. Summary
- 15.4. Direct realization (*abhisamaya*), path of insight (*darśana-mārga*) and stream entry (*śrotaṅgatti*)
  - 15.4.1. *Satyābhisamaya* as a gradual process
  - 15.4.2. Entry into the certitude of perfection (*samyakva-nīyamāvākṛānti*)
- 15.5. Non-retrogressibility of stream-entry
- 15.6. Path of cultivation (*bhāvanā-mārga*)
- 15.7. Attainment of the four fruits of the spiritual life
- 15.8. Out-of-sequence attainments
- 15.9. Retrogressibility of an *arhat*

### 15.1. Doctrine of gradual enlightenment

The sixth chapter of the AKB is devoted entirely to the discussion on the path and spiritual attainments and it enumerates and defines various paths.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the study of the nature and functions of the various paths is an integral part of *abhidharma*. One of the four great Sarvāstivāda masters, Ghoṣaka, underscores this in his definition of *abhidharma*:

For the seeker for liberation engaged in the proper practice, [*abhidharma*] can analyze what has not been 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 (*vimukti-mārga*); this is the path of advance (*viśeṣa-mārga*); this is the path of the candidate (*pratipannaka-mārga*); this is the acquisition of fruit. *Abhidharma* is so called because it can correctly analyze such meanings.<sup>2</sup> (See also, § 1.2).

For the Sarvāstivāda, the path of spiritual progress is a very long journey. It takes three *asaṃkhyeya-kalpa*-s for a practitioner to reach the state of perfect Buddhahood<sup>3</sup> practicing accumulatively the six perfections (*śīla*-, *dāna*-, *vīrya*-, *ksānti*-, *dhyaṇa*- and *prajñā-pāramitā*) and tens of thousands of difficult practices on the way.<sup>4</sup> This long period of practice pertains, in fact, only to the stage of preparatory effort (*prayoga*).<sup>5</sup> The whole process is one of gradual progress, and the Sarvāstivāda doctrine is definitely not one of sudden enlightenment. The MVŚ records the Buddha's own statements in this regard:

I remember that in the past, I have stated thus: 'There is no *śramaṇa* or *brāhmaṇa*, etc., in the past, present or future who can acquire knowledge and vision with regard to all *dharma*-s abruptly. If one says there is, [one is speaking of] an impossibility. One must first go through three *asaṃkhyeya-kalpa*-s, practicing tens of thousands of difficult practices, gradually perfecting the six *pāramitā*-s, in order that one can possess true knowledge and vision with regard to all *dharma*-s.'<sup>6</sup>

The MVŚ records the view of some, such as the 'abrupt-abandonment *śramaṇa*-s', that defilements are abandoned all at once at the stage of the arising of the *vajropama-samādhi*; at all the previous stages there only can be the temporary suppression of the active *pariyavasthāna*-s. Others, like the Dāśāntikas and the Bhadanta, assert that ordinary worldlings cannot abandon any defilements at all. This is because only the *ārya*-s possess the noble (i.e., pure) *prajñā* with which alone the defilements

can be abandoned (cf. § 12.9.3). For these various masters then one cannot properly speak of any spiritual progress through the worldly paths. The MVŚ states, in this connection, that it is in fact for the purpose of refuting such views that the two counteractions for the abandonment of defilements — the distinction between the path of insight (*darśana-mārga*) and the path of cultivation (*bhāvanā-mārga*) — are shown.<sup>7</sup> Each of the three spheres of existence has these two categories of defilements — *darśana-heya* and *bhāvanā-heya* — which must be totally eradicated, and this process takes place gradually. Like the Sarvāstivādins, these opponents also concede that there are four fruits of the spiritual life (*śrāmaṇya-phala*). However, they hold that the abandonment of the defilements can take place only at the time of *vajropama-samādhi*. The first three fruits can only suppress the defilements, inducing the *vajropama-samādhi*. Other opponents hold that direct insight into all four noble truths arises abruptly (see below, § 15.3.1). This view too is refuted in the same context by the Sarvāstivādins who argue that like the *bhāvanā-heya* defilements, the *darśana-heya* ones must also be abandoned gradually, not all at once.<sup>8</sup>

In brief, in the Sarvāstivāda system, the gradual path of spiritual progress begins at the stage when the practitioner is an ordinary worldling. When he becomes an *ārya*, he must continue to move up gradually. The gradual degrees of spiritual insight acquired on the whole path correspond to the gradual abandoning of defilements at the various stages. At the very final stage of the path of cultivation, the *vajropama-samādhi* arises and the practitioner cuts off whatever defilements remain. He then acquires a homogeneous acquisition of disjunction (*visamyoga-prāpti*) collectively with regard to the abandonment of all the defilements pertaining to the two categories in the three spheres, and he is said to have acquired the complete knowledge of the exhaustion of all fetters (*sarva-samyojana-paryādāna-parijñā*).<sup>9</sup> The end of the journey is when the knowledge of the absolute non-arising (*anutpāda-jñāna*) of all future defilements arises in him, and he is said to have attained *nirvāṇa*.

### 15.2. Preliminaries for the preparatory stage

The preparatory stage (*prayoga*), in the proper sense, comprises meditational practices. But, in keeping with the general Buddhist tradition, the whole spiritual path of the Sarvāstivāda is an integrated system of *śīla-samādhi-prajñā*. That is to say: meditational practices (*samādhi*) cannot be isolated from the total context of spiritual commitment and a life of ethical alignment that is, in general, in keeping with this commitment. Accordingly, there are preliminary preparations before one can even properly embark on those meditational practices.

Commenting on what the *sūtra* refers to in speaking of the “profound Abhidharma”, the MVŚ states:

In the absolute sense (*paramārīka*), the intrinsic nature of Abhidharma can only be the outflow-free faculty of understanding (*prajñendriya*). From this very perspective, those which bring about the excellent (*viśiṣṭa*) worldly ‘understanding derived from cultivation’ (*bhāvanā-mayī prajñā*) — namely, ‘warmed-up’, ‘summits’, ‘receptivities’ and the ‘worldly supreme *dharma-s*’ — can also be called Abhidharma on account of their ability to discern the four noble truths separately.

Again from this very perspective, those that bring about the excellent ‘understanding derived from reflection’ (*cintāmayī prajñā*) — namely, contemplation on the impure, mindfulness of breathing, etc. — can also be called Abhidharma on account of their ability to discern the aggregates (*skandha*) separately and collectively.

Again from this very perspective, those that bring about the excellent ‘understanding derived from listening’ (*śrutamayī prajñā*) — [namely,] the analysis and establishment of the intrinsic and common characteristics of *dharma-s*, destroying the delusion with regard to existent entities and cognitive objects (*ālabhana*) — can also be called Abhidharma on account of the fact that they neither superimpose (*sam-ā-√ruh*) nor deny (*apa-√vad*) with regard to *dharma-s*.

Again from this very perspective, those that bring about the excellent 'understanding derived from the abode of birth' (*upapatti-sthāna-prātilambhikā prajñā*) can also be called Abhidharma on account of their ability to operate (√*vyt*) non-erroneously in receiving, bearing in mind, pondering and examining the 12-limb (*dvādaśāṅga*) teaching of the *tripiṭaka*. ...<sup>10</sup>

The above explanations are in fact a statement of preparatory stages that lead to the attainment of perfect *prajñā* (= Abhidharma in the absolute sense). These stages are as follows:

Studying the Buddha's teaching with the support of the understanding derived from birth (*upapatti-prātilambhikā-prajñā*)

⇓

Studying the Abhidharma — analyzing the characteristics of *dharma-ś* (*śrutamayī prajñā*)

⇓

Meditations such as contemplation on the impure and mindfulness of breathing (*cintāmayī prajñā*)

⇓

'Warmed-up', 'summits', 'receptivities' and the 'worldly supreme *dharma-s*' (*bhāvanāmayī prajñā*)

⇓

Attainment of outflow-free *prajñā* (final destination)

A more comprehensive, although succinct, prescription for the steps leading to stream entry is given in the MVŚ as follows:

These are the preliminary preparations for one [aiming at] the fruit of stream entry:

At the beginning, because of his aspiration for the fruit of liberation, he diligently practices [i] generosity (*dāna*) and the pure precepts (*sīla*); [ii] the understanding derived from listening, [comprising] the contemplation of the impure, mindfulness of breathing and the foundations of mindfulness

(*smṛtyupasthāna*); and [iii] warmed-up, summits, receptivities and the worldly supreme *dharma-s*; and [then he enters into] [iv] the 15 moments of the path of insight (*dāśāna-mārga*). This is collectively said to be 'firmly on one's feet'.

The above prescription clearly includes the practice of skillful acts such as giving and ethical alignment.

Elsewhere, the MVŚ explains why there is no retrogression from stream entry and speaks of the foundation of the path of insight:

Question: Why is there no one who retrogresses from stream entry?

Answer: Because of the firmness of its foundation.

What is the foundation?

This 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; proper mental application (*yoniso manaskāra*); the practice of the contemplation on the impure, mindfulness of breathing, the foundations of mindfulness, the contemplation of the three meanings (三義), skillfulness with regard to the seven abodes (七處善; \**sapta-sthāna-kausāla*), warmed-up, summits, receptivities and the worldly supreme *dharma-s*.<sup>11</sup>

We have here the prescription of not only more skillful activities, both social and religious, such as attending on the sick and expounding the *Dharma*, but also the following two additional contemplative practices:<sup>12</sup>

- (1) Contemplation of the three meanings, which refers to the sequential contemplation on the true meanings of the *skandha-s*, *āyatana-s* and *dhātu-s*.

(2) Skillfulness with regard to the seven abodes which is an examination of the five aggregates truly as they are, from seven perspectives. To take *rūpa* as an example: one examines *rūpa* itself as (i) fruit, and (ii) the causes from which it is generated. One further examines (iii) its cessation, (iv) the counteracting path leading to its cessation, (v) its enjoyable aspect (*āsvādana*) as an object of attachment, (vi) its loathsome aspect as a fault (*ādinava*) to be avoided, and finally (vii) the transcendence of its attachment.

These two practices are not mentioned in the AKB. But their occurrence is already attested in the *Samyuktaṅgama*.<sup>13</sup>

The AKB prescribes the preliminaries as follows:<sup>14</sup>

- (I) observance of the precepts (*śīlaṃ pālayati*);
- (II) development of the proper understanding derived from listening (*śrūta-mayī praññā*) — studying and receiving instructions from teachers.

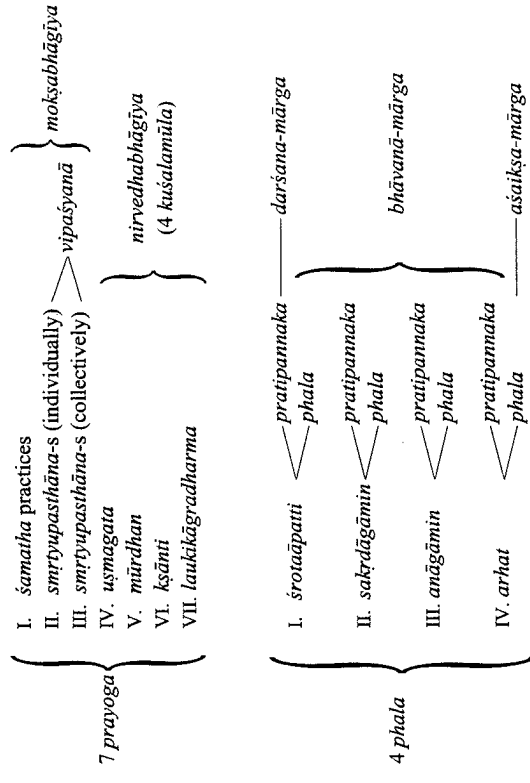
To ensure success in meditation, one must purify one's body and mind in three ways:

- (i) physical withdrawal or distancing (*vyapakarṣa*) by dissociating from evil friends and cutting off unfavorable conditions, and mental withdrawal by eradicating unskillful thoughts (*akuśāla-vitarka*);
- (ii) practicing contentment and having few desires (*saṃtuṣṭiś ca alpeccatā ca*);
- (iii) abiding in the four noble lineages (*ārya-varṇa*) — called thus because the noble ones are begotten from them (*āryāṇām ebhyaḥ prasavāt*) — which are non-greedy in nature (*alobha*): [they are] (a-c) contentment with clothing, food, bed and seat,

and (d) delight in the abandonment of defilements (= in the realization of cessation (*nirodha*)) and in the cultivation of the noble path (*prahāṇa-bhāvanā-ārāmata*).<sup>15</sup>

### 15.3. Different stages of the path

The whole path leading to this final perfection is divided by the Sarvāstivādins into the seven stages of preparatory effort and four stages of spiritual fruits, as shown in the following chart:



From the chart above, one sees that the preparatory path comprises two portions:

- (1) *mokṣa-bhāgiya*: those conducting, i.e., serving as causes, to liberation (= *nirvāṇa*);
- (2) *nirvedha-bhāgiya*: those conducting to decisive distinction, i.e., to the arising of outflow-free knowledge.

In the AKB, the *nirvedha-bhāgīya* is also collectively called the four skillful roots, as they lead to the fruition of stream entry (*śrotāpatti*) which is the point of no return in the spiritual journey — the practitioner is henceforth destined for perfect liberation. It is the critical point at which a *prthagjana* becomes an *ārya*, never to retrogress to be a mundane worldling again. The MVŚ, however, speaks of both portions equally as being skillful roots<sup>16</sup> — in the sense of being seeds, and explains the two terms as follows:

The *mokṣa-bhāgīya kuśāla-mūla*-s: [the practitioner] plants the seeds that are decisive for liberation. On account of this decisiveness, he can attain *parinirvāna*.

The *nirvedha-bhāgīya kuśāla-mūla*-s: i.e., *uṣmagata, mūrdhan, kṣānti, laukikāgra-dharma*.<sup>17</sup>

### 15.3.1. Mokṣa-bhāgīya

The MVŚ<sup>18</sup> proceeds here to analyze the *mokṣa-bhāgīya* articulately:

- (i) They have as their intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) the threefold *karma* — bodily, vocal and mental — with the predominance of the mental.
- (ii) They pertain to the mind ground (*mano-bhūmi*).
- (iii) They are acquired through effort, not innate.
- (iv) They are derived from *śrūta-mayī* and *cintā-mayī*, not *bhāvanā-mayī prajñā*.
- (v) They are produced only among human beings, only in those existing in *kāmadhātu* — not *rūpa-ārūpya-dhātu*-s; and only those in the three continents — not in the Uttarakuru-dvīpa.
- (vi) They are planted (as seeds) only where the *Buddha-dharma* exists, hence only when a Buddha appears.

- (vii) They are planted by both males and females.
- (viii) They may arise as a result of the practice of giving, or of ethical observance, or of hearing (learning) the *Dharma* from others: One may plant these seeds of liberation by the mere giving of one lump (*piṇḍa*) of food or by the mere observance of the eight precepts (*upavasthā-sīla*), etc., provided the motivation is genuinely for liberation.
- (ix) These can be planted only by those who have a strong aspiration for *nirvāna* and disgust for *samṣāra*.
- (x) Once they have been planted, it takes a minimum of three lives to attain liberation: in the first life the seeds are planted; in the second, they are matured; in the third, liberation is attained. But it may take many many *kalpa*-s (a) if the practitioner fails to give rise to the *nirvedha-bhāgīya*, or (b) if he, although having given rise to the *nirvedha-bhāgīya*, fails in the many *kalpa*-s that follow to give rise to *samyakva-niyāma-avakramaṇa* (i.e., attain stream entry — see *infra*, § 15.4).
- (xi) There are six progressively superior types (*gotra*) (see *infra* — on six types of *arhat*) of *mokṣa-bhāgīya*: (1) *parihāna-dharman* — those susceptible to retrogression; (2) *cetanā-dharman* — those capable of ending their existences at will; (3) *anurakṣanā-dharman* — those capable of protecting themselves from retrogression; (4) *śhītākampya* — those capable of abiding in their attainment without retrogressing, although they may not progress unless effort is exerted; (5) *prativedhanā-dharman* — those capable of penetrating the state of *arhat*; (6) *akopya-dharman* — those absolutely not susceptible to retrogression. Each preceding type is transformed progressively to the succeeding type.
- (xii) The *śrāvaka*-type (*śrāvaka-gotra*) of *mokṣa-bhāgīya* is transformed, giving rise to those of the *pratyeka-buddha* and Buddha. The *pratyeka-buddha* type is transformed, giving rise

to those of the *śrāvaka* and Buddha. The Buddha-type having been given rise to, there can be no further transformation as it is the strongest (*tikṣṇa*, *tivra*) type.

Those who have not planted the *kuśala-mūla*-s of *mokṣa-bhāgīya* are said to be stream-accordants (*anu-srota*); those who have done so, stream-discordants (*prati-srota*). "Stream" here refers to *saṃsāra*. For even if one should perform great meritorious actions, or master the *triptaka*, or practice and have various meditational attainments and supernormal powers, etc., and obtain favorable states of rebirth, one would still have to experience *duḥkha* in *saṃsāra*. On the other hand, as a result of having planted the *kuśala-mūla*-s of *mokṣa-bhāgīya* at the preparatory stage,

a person can be said to be abiding on the shore of *nirvāna*. [This is so] even if he should, on account of his defilements, subsequently commit various bodily, vocal or mental actions, or the *ānantarya-karma*-s, or cut off all *kuśala-mūla*-s to the extent that there exists in him not the slightest seed of white *dharma*-s, [even if he should] fall into the Avīci hells, undergoing various forms of suffering. This is on account of this person being destined to attain *parinirvāna*.<sup>19</sup> (However, he is not said to have entered *samyaktva-niyāna*).

Such being the spiritual significance of the *mokṣa-bhāgīya*, the meaning of the term should become obvious. It is said that it is better to be Devadatta who fell into the Avīci hell than to be Udraka-rāmaputra who was born into the *naiva-saṃjñā-nāsaṃjñā* heaven. For, although the former committed three of the *ānantarya-karma*-s and thereby cut off the *kuśala-mūla*-s, he will — on account of having acquired the *mokṣa-bhāgīya* — attain *pratyekabuddha-bodhi* at the time when human life can last 84,000 years, becoming a *tikṣṇendriya* excellent even Śāriputra, etc. The latter did not plant the *mokṣa-bhāgīya*. Accordingly, in spite of his rebirth in the *bhaviḅra*, he ended up in the evil planes of existence unable to gain liberation.<sup>20</sup>

### 15.3.1.1. *Śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*

The above emphasis on the critical importance of the *mokṣa-bhāgīya* for liberation also spells out the great significance of tranquility (*śamatha*) and insight (*vipaśyanā*) — of which the *mokṣa-bhāgīya* is comprised — as spiritual praxis.

The practitioner begins with the two *śamatha* practices of contemplation on the impure (*aśubha-bhāvanā*) and mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasmr̥ti*) which constitute the entrance<sup>21</sup> into spiritual cultivation proper. The former practice is the contemplation on the progressive deterioration of the body, and has the counteraction of greed as its aim. The latter comprises six aspects: counting, following, fixing, observing, modifying and purifying.<sup>22</sup> The MVŚ<sup>23</sup> calls these two meditational practices the two gateways of immortality (*amṛta-dvāra*), i.e., *nirvāna*.

In the Chinese commentary, the tranquility meditations are often collectively spoken of as the 'five-fold mental stilling' (五停心).<sup>24</sup> This is also the term that had been used in the various works of the great Tian Tai master, Zhi Yi (智顛; ca. 538–597).<sup>25</sup>

The corresponding Sanskrit term cannot be traced in the AKB or other related Indian Abhidharma texts in their original. In the MVŚ, the meditations under this group are mentioned in some places, but are not explicitly grouped together.<sup>26</sup> At one place in this text, it is stressed that "meditators rely mostly on the contemplation of the impurities as the gateway for entering into the noble path".<sup>27</sup> There, this contemplation is discussed at very great length,<sup>28</sup> and it is shown how, immediately after completing this contemplation, the meditator can sail into the *vipaśyanā* practice of the mindfulness on the body, etc.

But, as a specific group of tranquility practices, the five methods had probably developed at a fairly early stage. An early Chinese translation of the *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* (菩薩地持經; T 30, no. 1581) enumerates them as the five "gateways (methods) for transcendence" (度門):

1. contemplation on the impure. 2. meditation on loving kindness (*mettā*),  
 3. contemplation on conditioned co-arising, 4. contemplation on the  
 division of the *dhātu*-s, 5. mindfulness of breathing.<sup>29</sup> In Buddhāmitra's  
*Essential Methods of the Five-gateway Dhyaṇa-sūtra* (T 15, no. 619, 五  
 門禪經要用法; 325c), the contemplation on the *dhātu*-s is replaced by  
 the 'recollection on the Buddha' (*buddhānusmṛiti*). These meditations  
 are said to have been taught in consideration of the different personality  
 types — those of the predominantly greedy type (*adhi-rāga*), those of  
 the predominantly distracted type (*adhi-vitarka*), etc..<sup>30</sup>

- (1) contemplation on the impure — greedy type
- (2) meditation on loving kindness — hateful type
- (3) contemplation on conditioned co-arising — deluded type
- (4) contemplation on the *dhātu*-s — conceited type
- (5i) mindfulness of breathing — distracted type
- (5ii) (recollection on the Buddha — those who are drowsy, have  
 unwholesome thoughts, and are oppressed by object domains)

Having achieved tranquility, the practitioner then proceeds to the practice  
 of insight comprising the fourfold application of mindfulness<sup>31</sup> on body  
 (*kāya*), sensation (*vedanā*), ideations (*saṃjñā*) and *dharmā*-s.<sup>32</sup> This is  
 done in two ways: First, he contemplates the specific characteristics<sup>33</sup>  
 of each of the four — the body is impure; sensations are unsatisfactory  
 (*duḥkha*); ideations are impermanent; all *dharmā*-s are without a Self.<sup>34</sup>  
 He must also contemplate generally that the body, sensations, ideations  
 and *dharmā*-s are — in each case — like all conditioned *dharmā*-s in  
 being impure, unsatisfactory, impermanent and without a Self. Next,  
 he contemplates collectively that all four — body, sensations, ideations  
 and *dharmā*-s — are equally impure, unsatisfactory, impermanent and  
 without a Self.

It is to be noted that for the Sarvāstivādins, *śamatha* and *vipāśyanā*  
 are not mutually exclusive practices, nor are they to be too sharply  
 differentiated. It is an *abhidharma* doctrine that within one and the same

thought there exists both *śamatha* and *vipāśyanā*.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, according  
 to the Sarvāstivāda, *samādhi* and *prajñā* necessarily co-exist as two of  
 the ten universal thought concomitants (see *supra*, § 9.3.4.1). The two  
 types of practitioners are to be distinguished from the point of view of  
 their preparatory stages:

Those who mostly cultivate the provisions (*sambhāra*) of *śamatha* are  
 those who, at the stage of preparatory effort, always delight in solitude  
 and shun noisiness. They see the faults of socializing and constantly dwell  
 in quiet places. When they enter into the noble path, they are called the  
*śamatha*-type of practitioner (*śamatha-carita*).

Those who mostly cultivate the provisions of *vipāśyanā* 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 *dharmā*-s. When they enter into the noble path, they  
 are called the *vipāśyanā*-type of practitioner (*vipāśyanā-carita*).<sup>36</sup>

Their mutual non-exclusiveness is also underscored in the various  
 opinions given in the MVŚ<sup>37</sup> by different Ābhidharmika masters as to  
 how many of the six aspects of mindfulness of breathing (§ 15.3.1.1)  
 come under either *śamatha* or *vipāśyanā*: Some say the first three are  
*śamatha*, the last three *vipāśyanā*; others say the opposite. The compilers  
 of the MVŚ remark that "there is no fixed rule here — all may come  
 under *śamatha* or all may come under *vipāśyanā*".

One question here arises: Does one need to attain the *dhyāna*-s in order  
 to acquire the pure *prajñā* which liberates us from *samsāra*? Does one  
 in fact need to practice meditation at all?

From the Sarvāstivāda Ābhidharmika perspective, the answer is clearly  
 'yes'. It is stated that the four roots of skillfulness (i.e., the *moḥṣabhāgya*)  
 can only be produced from the understanding derived from cultivation,  
 not from those derived from reflection and listening.<sup>38</sup> In other words,



at the preparatory stage leading to the actual attainment of warmed-up, etc., the practitioner necessarily depends on meditational practices.

It is further stated that the practitioner can acquire these roots only at the stages of the 'not-yet-arrived' (*anāgāmya*), the intermediate meditation (*dhyānāntara*) and the four meditations (*dhyāna*).<sup>39</sup> This means that he must have acquired the degree of concentration of the 'not-yet arrived' stage. This stage is a 'neighborhood' (*sāmantaka*), i.e., a meditational state bordering the *dhyāna* stage proper into which its power of concentration is strong enough to lead. There is one such 'neighborhood' stage bordering each of the meditational attainments (*samāpatti*). Since there are eight meditational attainments — four *dhyāna*-s (also called the four 'fundamental or principal meditations', *maula-dhyāna*) of the fine-material sphere and four meditational attainments of the non-material sphere (*ārūpya*) — there are corresponding eight 'neighborhood' stages, the first of which, bordering the first *dhyāna*, is called the 'not-yet-arrived' stage.<sup>40</sup>

### 15.3.2. Nirvedha-bhāgīya

Penetration (*nirvedha*) here refers to insight — that is, the *ārya-mārga*. The AKB explains the term as follows:

Penetrating (*vidha*) is in the sense of distinction (*vibhāga*). *Nir-vedhaḥ* means decisive distinction which is the noble path. For through it [— the noble path —] there is the abandonment of doubt and the distinction of the truths: '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.<sup>41</sup>

The *nirvedha-bhāgīya*-s comprise the warmed-up (*usmagata*), the summits (*nīr-dhan*), the receptivities (*kṣānti*), and the worldly

supreme *dharma*-s (*laukikāgra-dharma*); each serves as the *samanantara-pratyaya* for the succeeding one.<sup>42</sup> These four are also called

- (1) "truth-coursing" (*satya-cāra* ?),
- (2) "counteraction-cultivation" (*pratipakṣa-bhāvanā* ?),
- (3) roots of skillfulness (*kuśala-mūla*):

(1) because they course through the four truths by means of the 16 modes of activities (*ākāra*); (2) because "for the sake of the *ārya-mārga*, one cultivates the body as a receptacle (*kāya-bhājana*), removing the impurities and inducing the *ārya-mārgā*"; (3) because "these four constitute the very foundation and footing for the *ārya-mārga* and *nirvāna* which are the truly good (*paramārthena kuśala*)."<sup>43</sup> In terms of the threefold *prajñā* — *śruta-mayī*, *cintā-mayī* and *bhāvanā-mayī* — the *moṁṣa-bhāgīya*-s are subsumed under *cintā-mayī prajñā*, while the *nirvedha-bhāgīya*-s under *bhāvanā-mayī prajñā*; both being induced by the *abhidharma* which, in its intrinsic nature, in the highest sense (*paramārthataḥ*) is the outflow-free *prajñā*.<sup>44</sup>

As to whether a *bodhisattva*, in the course of his previous existences has given rise to the *nirvedha-bhāgīya*-s, opinions differ among the Sarvāstivāda masters. The Vaibhāsika view (*evaṃ tu varṇayanti*) is that within the one sitting of the fourth *dhyāna* of the present life, the *bodhisattva* gives rise to all the excellent *kuśala-mūla*-s from *aśuci-bhāvanā* up to *anuipāda-jñāna*.<sup>45</sup>

As in the case of the *moṁṣa-bhāgīya*-s (*supra*, § 15.2.1), there are also six *gotra*-s of *nirvedha-bhāgīya*-s, each being progressively transformed into the succeeding superior type.<sup>46</sup> These are produced among humans of the three continents, excepting Uṭṭarakuru-dvīpa, and among gods — of both sexes — of the sphere of sensuality, but not among beings of the three evil planes of existence. They can only be produced where one can enter into *samyaktva-niyāma*, and this is possible only where:

- (i) both receptivity (*kṣānti*) and knowledge (*jñāna*) can be produced,
- (ii) both the *dharma-jñāna* as well as the *anvaya-jñāna* can be produced,
- (iii) there exist both the superior bodily basis (*āśraya*) and the experience of *duḥkha*.

In the other two spheres, only *kṣānti* and *anvaya-jñāna* can arise and there is no experience of *duḥkha*. Accordingly, the *nirvedha-bhāgīya*-s are not produced in the two upper spheres.<sup>47</sup>

### 15.3.2.1. Warmed-up (*uśmagata*)

This is the first indication or the anticipation of the *anāsrava-jñāna*.

As a result of the operation of knowledge on an object, there arises the warmth of the noble knowledge capable of burning the fuels of defilements. Hence, it is called 'warmed up'. This is like rubbing [two stones] to get fire — as a result of the mutual dependence of the lower and upper [stones], there arises the warmth of fire capable of burning fuels.

Venerable Ghoṣaka explains: On account of seeking liberation, there arise the *kuśala-mūla*-s. They are the foresign for the arising of the sun of the noble path ... [and] of the fire of the noble path; hence the name 'warmed-up'. This is like the case of smoke as the foresign preceding the arising of fire.<sup>48</sup>

This is a lengthy stage the practice of which is characterized by the three *prajñā*-s — *śruta-mayī*, *cintā-mayī* and *bhāvanā-mayī*. First, one begins with the cultivation of the *śruta-mayī prajñā* by learning from a teacher or studying the *tripiṭaka*. Then one realizes that all the *tripiṭaka* teachings can be summarized into the 18 *dhātu*-s, the 12 *āyatana*-s and the five *skandha*-s. One then proceeds — progressively seeking more and more concise teachings — to examine each of them, understanding in terms of terminology, specific characteristics and common characteristics. In this

manner, one progresses to the practice of the four *smṛtyupasthāna*-s, and finally the repeated contemplation of the 16 *ākāra*-s of the four truths, pertaining to both the sphere of sensuality and the two upper spheres. *Ākāra* here means the mode of comprehending activity of the mind. This activity on an object results in a resemblance or reflection of the object in the mind — the 'mode'. The 16 *ākāra*-s are as follows:

- (I) *duḥkha-satya* — impermanent (*anitya*), unsatisfactory (*duḥkha*), empty (*sūnya*) and soulless (*anāman*);
- (II) *samudaya-satya* — cause (*hetu*), origin (*samudaya*), successive causation (*prabhava*) and condition (*pratyaya*);
- (III) *nirodha-satya* — cessation (*nirodha*), calm (*sānta*), excellence (*prañīta*) and escape (*niḥsaraṇa*);
- (IV) *mārga-satya* — path (*mārga*), right method (*nyāya*), course of practice (*pratipatti*), conducive to exit (*nairyāṇika*).

This examination of the four noble truths, however, does not constitute direct spiritual insight; "it is like examining pictures through the veil of a silk-cloth". It is only up to this point that the practitioner has perfected the *śruta-mayī prajñā*.

With this as the basis, he produces the *cintā-mayī prajñā*. Having perfected this, he next produces the *bhāvanā-mayī prajñā*. This is also called the 'warmed-up'. From warmed-up, the summits are produced. From summits, receptivity. From receptivity, the worldly supreme *dharma*-s. From worldly supreme *dharma*-s, the *darśana-mārga*. From *darśana-mārga*, the *bhāvanā-mārga*. From *bhāvanā-mārga*, the *śaikṣa-mārga*. In this way, the *kuśala-mūla*-s are gradually fulfilled.<sup>49</sup>

The warmed-up may be lost through retrogression, or transcendence of sphere or stage, or loss of the *nikāya-sabhāga*. As a result, one may commit the *ānantarya-karma*-s, cut off the *kuśala-mūla*-s, and fall

into the bad planes of existence. Nevertheless, it can serve as the decisive cause for the attainment of *nirvāṇa*. “One who has acquired the warmed-up is like a fish that has swallowed the fisherman’s hook — [destined to be caught]; he is destined for the *nirvāṇa-dharma*.”<sup>50</sup>

### 15.3.2.2. Summits (*mūrdhan*)

At this stage the practitioner continues to contemplate the 16 modes of activities of the four noble truths. But these roots receive another name on account of their excellence.<sup>51</sup> They are called summits/peaks because:

- (i) They are the highest of the shakable skillful roots. At this stage, one can either proceed to the next stage or fall back to commit evils and be born in the *durgati*.<sup>52</sup>
- (ii) They are like peaks, between the previous and the subsequent stages. This is like a person situated at the peak of a mountain: He does not remain for long — either, in the absence of any obstacle, he passes over this mountain to another mountain, or, in the presence of obstacles, he has to descend. The *nirvedha-bhāgīya-s* are twofold: retrogressible and non-retrogressible. Among the former, the inferior one is called “warmed up”; the superior, “summits”. Among the latter, the inferior, “receptivity”; the superior, “worldly supreme dharma-s”. It is also because these excel among the retrogressible *nirvedha-bhāgīya-s* that they are called ‘summits’.<sup>53</sup>

Like the warmed-up, the summits may be lost through the same causes. As a result, one may commit the *ānantarya-karma-s* and fall into the bad planes of existence. However, these skillful roots excel the previous one in that even when the practitioner should fall to commit evil, he will never fall to the extent of having the skillful roots cut off.<sup>54</sup>

### 15.3.2.3. Receptivity (*kṣāntī*)

Although all four *nirvedha-bhāgīya-s* are conducive to insight into the truth, receptivity accords with *satyābhīsamaya* more so than the other three, hence this alone is said to be truth-accordant.<sup>55</sup> It is called receptivity “because of the greatest receptivity to the truths — on account of the non-regressibility [of this stage]”:<sup>56</sup>

At the stage of warmed-up, the truth is acceptable to one and pleases (*kṣamate rocate*) one weakly; at the stage 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 regress, whereas there is the possibility of retrogression from the summits.<sup>57</sup>

Like the warmed-up and the summits, receptivity can be lost through the transcendence of sphere and stage or loss of the *nikāya-sābhāga*, not through retrogression. In fact, one who has acquired it can never regress from it, nor can he commit the *ānantarya-karma-s* or fall into the bad planes of existence.<sup>58</sup>

Receptivity is also threefold: weak, medium and strong. As in the case of the warmed-up and the summits, the weak and medium receptivities contemplate fully all 16 modes of activity of the four truths — four pertaining to the sphere of sensuality and four to the two higher spheres; in all, eight truths and 32 modes of activity. However, the strong receptivity contemplates only the truth of unsatisfactoriness pertaining to the sphere of sensuality. This is because, at the stage of contemplation of the medium receptivity, there begins a successive reduction of the higher modes of activity and spheres until finally, in the last two moments of the stage, the practitioner applies his mind to only two modes of activity — impermanence and unsatisfactoriness — of the sphere of sensuality.<sup>59</sup> The reason for being successively more restrictive in contemplation is so as to make the contemplation progressively more focused and thus more effective in inducing the outflow-free knowledge. The MVS<sup>60</sup>

explains this with a simile: A wealthy man, unable to bring along all his possession to another country, changed them into money. Unhappy that the money was too much, he changed them into gold. Still unhappy that the gold pieces were too heavy, he changed them into expensive jewels. In this way, he was finally able to carry his possessions with him and travel freely.

In the very next moment when the strong receptivity comes into operation, the practitioner, in a single thought, contemplates only the unsatisfactoriness pertaining to the sphere of sensuality. At this stage, although the *darśana-heya* defilements are not yet abandoned, they are already successfully suppressed.

#### 15.3.2.4. Worldly supreme *dharma*-s

Immediately following the last moment of the strong receptivity, the worldly supreme *dharma*-s arise, contemplating — like the strong receptivity — in one moment only the unsatisfactoriness pertaining to the sphere of sensuality. These *dharma*-s have as their intrinsic nature those *citta-caitta*-s which serve as the *samanantara-pratyaya* for the entrance into *samyaktva-niyāma* (i.e., *darśana-mārga*).<sup>61</sup> That is, with these as the *samanantara-pratyaya*, the practitioner relinquishes the nature of an ordinary worldling (*prthagjanarva* — see below, § 15.3.2) and acquires the nature of the noble (*āryarva*).

In the JPŚ<sup>62</sup> these are the first of the four *nirvedha-bhāgīya*-s to be discussed. The MVŚ attempts to justify this choice of order, giving elaborate explanations.

These *citta-caitta*-s — [the last of an ordinary worldling] — in comparison to the other worldly *dharma*-s, are the best, the excellent, the senior, the chief, the superior, the wonderful; hence they are called the worldly supreme *dharma*-s.<sup>63</sup>

They are said to be excellent since they alone can open up the door of the noble path.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, they are said to be the best in comparison to the *śrūta-mayī*; excellent, in comparison to the *śrūta-mayī*; senior, in comparison to the *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* practices; chief, in comparison to *uśmagata*; superior, in comparison to *mūrdhani*; wonderful, in comparison to *ksānti*. Various other explanations for these six attributes are given in the MVŚ.<sup>65</sup>

There is another view that the worldly supreme *dharma*-s have the five outflow-free faculties (*indriya*) — *śraddhā*, *vīrya*, *smṛti*, *samādhi*, *prajñā* — as their intrinsic nature. This view is attributed to either the old Ābhīdharmika masters or the Vātsīputriyas. The former in this way in order to refute the view of the Vibhājyavādins that these five faculties are necessarily outflow-free. By asserting in this way, the old Ābhīdharmikas intend to show that these five faculties can also be with-outflow since they exist in an ordinary worldling. The Vātsīputriyas hold that these five faculties are *kuśala* in their intrinsic nature (*svabhāvataḥ*), and all differences pertaining to the *ārya* are to be established on the basis of these five.<sup>66</sup>

The two Dārṣāntika masters, Dharmatrāta and Buddhadeva, also hold different views in this regard. For the former, all *citta-caitta*-s are simply specific states of *cetanā*; accordingly, the worldly supreme *dharma*-s have *cetanā* as their intrinsic nature. For the latter, the *citta-caitta*-s are none other than the *citta* itself; accordingly, the worldly supreme *dharma*-s have *citta* as their intrinsic nature.<sup>67</sup>

#### 15.3.3. Summary

To sum up: the *nirvedha-bhāgīya* constitutes the *prajñā* derived from cultivation, and the *mokṣa-bhāgīya*, the *prajñā* derived from reflection. These two *prajñā*-s, together with that derived from hearing — which, in *abhīdharmā*, refers specifically to the study of the specific and common characteristics of *dharma*-s — in the preliminary stage,

constitute the threefold impure or with-outflow *prajñā*. They are considered as *abhidharma* in the conventional sense, and we can discern here the reason for the Ābhidharmikas to be concerned with spiritual practices. These conventional *abhidharma*-s serve as the instruments for bringing about the out-flow-free *prajñā* which is *abhidharma* in the absolute sense<sup>68</sup> (see *supra*, § 1.2).

#### 15.4 Direct realization (*abhisamaya*), path of insight (*darśana-mārga*) and stream entry (*śrotaāpatti*)

In the stages of preparatory effort, contemplations on the truths were carried out with knowledges that are with-outflow (*sāsrava*). Immediately following the moment of the worldly supreme *dharmā*-s, the practitioner is able to give rise to the outflow-free knowledges (*anāsrava-jñāna*) with which he again contemplates the 16 modes of activity of the four truths — those pertaining to the sphere of sensuality followed by those pertaining to the two upper spheres. The MVŚ explains why, for each of the modes of activity (*dukkha*, etc.), the practitioner must first contemplate that pertaining to the sphere of sensuality, and then collectively that pertaining to the upper spheres:

- (i) the former is grosser and more easily observed than the latter;
- (ii) the sphere of sensuality is a non-concentrated stage, whereas the two upper spheres are both concentrated (*samāhīta*) stages;

hence the practitioner must do the two contemplations separately.<sup>69</sup>

This contemplation is termed *abhisamaya* — direct realization — which is the direct spiritual insight into the truths. One of the Ābhidharmika definitions of *abhidharma* is that “it is that which directly realizes (*abhi-sam-√i*) and realizes (*sāksāt-√kr*) the *dharmā*-s”. And Vasumitra explains that “*abhidharma* is that which can directly realize the four noble truths”.<sup>70</sup> This process takes 16 thought moments the first 15 of

which constitute the path of insight (*darśana-mārga*) and the 16<sup>th</sup> the beginning of the path of cultivation (*bhāvanā-mārga*).

Complete insight into each of the truths is achieved in two moments, called ‘paths’ on account of their having to be gone through. In the first moment, called the unhindered path (*ānantarya-mārga*), the outflow-free understanding that arises is called a receptivity (*ksānti*) to knowledge, and with this, the defilements abandonable by insight into the particular truth are abandoned. In the following moment, called the path of liberation (*vimukti-mārga*), knowledge proper arises through the induction of which the acquisition (*prāpti*) of the cessation through deliberation (*pratisamkhyā-nirodha*) of the defilements arises.<sup>71</sup> In this way, for the whole contemplative process covering the sphere of sensuality followed by the two upper spheres, there arise eight receptivities and eight knowledges, all being *prajñā* in their intrinsic nature. This doctrine can be understood as follows: The abandoning of a defilement requires a sufficient degree of insight, represented by the notion of receptivity, into the true nature of things — unsatisfactory, impermanent, etc. When in the next moment the defilement which disturbs and sullies (two connotations of *√kṛis*) the mind is no more, wisdom proper — a higher degree than receptivity — ‘shines forth’ as it were. Put differently, this can be seen as a corollary of the general Buddhist position that insight is the means as well as that which necessarily arises at the end — and in this sense the virtue *par excellence* — of spiritual praxis. In the Sarvāstivāda conception, the insight, designated as *jñāna*, that constitutes the very path of liberation is not just a mere state of mental clarity or cognitive perfection. It is a positive force having the efficacy of inducing the *prāpti* of *pratisamkhyā-nirodha*; which is to say, it serves as the necessary causal factor for the acquisition of the *nirodha*. The latter, being unconditioned, is not directly caused or directly produced by it; it is, however, acquired (*prāpti*) by virtue of the *prāpti* so induced by it. (See *infra*, § 16).

That the unhindered path and the path of liberation represent the indispensable functioning of insight in overcoming defilements and attaining cessation is also underscored by the doctrine of the three outflow-free cognitive faculties: *anāññātam-āññāsyāmīndriya*, *ājñēndriya* and *ājñātāvīndriya*. These three faculties, in their essential nature, are constituted of *manas*, *sukha*, *saumanasya*, *upekṣā*, *śradhā*, *vīrya*, *smṛti*, *saṃādhī* and *prajñā*. These nine are said to be differentiated as the three distinctive faculties on account of the predominance that they exercise in the *darśana-mārga*, *bhāvanā-mārga* and *asaikṣa-mārga*, respectively: the *anāññātam-āññāsyāmīndriya*, with regard to the cessation of the *darśana-heya* defilements; the *ājñēndriya*, with regard to the cessation of the *bhāvanā-heya* defilements; the *ājñātāvīndriya*, with regard to the state of bliss in the present life (*dr̥ṣṭadharmā-sukha-vihāra*) of an *arhat*.<sup>72</sup> In the acquisition of the fruit of stream entry, the *anāññātam-āññāsyāmīndriya* functions as the inductor (*āvāhaka*) of the *visamyoga-prāpti*, and the *ājñēndriya* functions as the support of this *prāpti*. The first constitutes the unhindered path; the second, the path of liberation. In the acquisition of the fruit of arhatood, the *ājñēndriya* constitutes the unhindered path; the *ājñātāvīndriya*, the path of liberation.<sup>73</sup>

Vasubandhu explains that the *ksānti-s* are called the *ānatarya-mārga-s* as they cannot be obstructed in the cutting of the *prāpti* of the *kleśa* (*kleśa-prāpti-icchhedam pratyantarayitum asakyatvāt*). The *jñāna-s* are called *vimukti-mārga-s* because in those who are thus liberated from the *prāpti-s* of these *kleśa-s*, they co-arise with the *visamyoga-prāpti*.<sup>74</sup> Saṃghabhadra criticizes:

If so, the *vimukti-mārga* should also be named *ānatarya*, inasmuch as its co-nascent also cannot be obstructed. Rather, one should explain thus: it is called *ānatarya* because there exists no *antara* (nothing in between); *ānatarya* itself is the *mārga*, hence the name *ānatarya-mārga*. The meaning is that there is no *mārga* of the same species which can come in between, preventing it from becoming the condition for the [arising] of

the *vimukti-mārga*; for the *ānatarya-mārga* all last only one *ksāna*, while the *vimukti-mārga* may continue as a series...<sup>75</sup>

In the contemplation of the four truths pertaining to the sphere of sensuality, the receptivities and knowledges are called *dharma-jñāna-ksānti* and *dharma-jñāna* — the term *dharma* signifying the fact that the nature of *dharma-s* subsumable under the particular truth is seen for the first time.<sup>76</sup> Those pertaining to the two upper spheres are called *anvaya-jñāna-ksānti* and *anvaya-jñāna*, the term *anvaya* — ‘subsequent’ or ‘following’ — signifying the fact that these truths are realized subsequently and in a similar manner to those pertaining to the sphere of sensuality.<sup>77</sup> Saṃghabhadra<sup>78</sup> insists that the *anvaya-jñāna* is not an inferential knowledge, but rather a direct one like *dharma-jñāna*.<sup>79</sup> The following chart summarizes the 16 moments of insight.<sup>80</sup>

#### The process of the direct insight into the four truths

##### *darśana mārga* (15 moments)

1. *duḥkhe dharmajñānaksānti*
2. *duḥkhe dharmajñāna*
3. *duḥkhe anvaya-jñānaksānti*
4. *duḥkhe anvaya-jñāna*
5. *samuđaye dharmajñānaksānti*
6. *samuđaye dharmajñāna*
7. *samuđaye anvaya-jñānaksānti*
8. *samuđaye anvaya-jñāna*
9. *duḥkhanirōdhe dharmajñānaksānti*
10. *duḥkhanirōdhe dharmajñāna*
11. *duḥkhanirōdhe anvaya-jñānaksānti*
12. *duḥkhanirōdhe anvaya-jñāna*
13. *duḥkhapratipakṣamārge dharmajñānaksānti*
14. *duḥkhapratipakṣamārge dharmajñāna*
15. *duḥkhapratipakṣamārge anvaya-jñānaksānti*

##### *bhāvanā-mārga*

16. *duḥkhapratipakṣamārge anvaya-jñāna*

(Cf. AKB. 350 f.)