

The *aśubhā* Meditation in the Sarvāstivāda

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1. Abhidharma and meditative praxis

While it is undeniable that there developed in the *Abhidharma* tradition distinctive elements of what is comparable to the Western tradition of scholasticism, it is no exaggeration that the whole of *Abhidharma* is fundamentally concerned with meditative praxis. The following distinction among the three divisions of the Buddhist canon, pertaining to their distinctive natures as teachings directed at the spiritual practitioners at different stages, spells out this fundamental concern:

Further, there is also a difference in respect of their stages (*avasthā*). That is: in terms of the stage of the beginner (*ādikarmika*), the *Sūtra* is taught; in respect of the stage of the mastery (*kṛtaparijaya*), the *Vinaya* is taught; in respect of the stage of absolute mastery (*atīkrānta-manaskāra*), the *Abhidharma* is taught.¹

As we shall see below, the three terms, *ādikarmika*, *kṛtaparijaya* and *atīkrānta-manaskāra*, refer, significantly, to the three levels of mastery in meditative praxis. Accordingly, we are justified in interpreting the above distinction thus: All the three divisions constituting the totality of the Buddhist canon are teachings meant for spiritual development, specifically, meditative attainment. And among them, *Abhidharma* is essentially meant for none other than the most advanced practitioners.

The importance of meditation in the *Abhidharma* is also underscored by the following definition of *abhidharma* in the MVŚ which directly links the two together:

The intrinsic nature of *abhidharma* from the standpoint of absolute truth (*paramārtha*) is none other than the outflow-free/ pure (*anāsrava*) *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 (*sambhāra*) sustain the outflow-free *prajñā* which [as a result] becomes more prominent; for this reason they are also known as *abhidharma*.²

Abhidharma, in its highest, absolute, sense, is the outflow-free *prajñā* which is insight into reality truly as it is. For an ordinary worldling (*prthagjana*), however, he must first begin by developing the withoutflow/impure (*sāsrava*) insight which is capable of leading finally to the acquisition of this pure insight. For the *Ābhidharmikas*, this first step in the path of spiritual progress, properly speaking, consists of the intellectual study of *Abhidharma* within the context of a life conducive to spiritual development. This is called the stage of “understanding derived from (lit., made of) listening” (*śruta-mayī prajñā*). Next, the practitioner enters the stage of “understanding derived from reflection” (*cintā-mayī prajñā*). It is important to note that here “reflection” does not refer to intellectual thinking, but is said to comprise meditative praxis such as the contemplation on the impure/loathsome (*aśubhā*) and mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasmṛti*). This in turn leads to the final preparatory stage for the development of the with-outflow insight, called “understanding derived from cultivation” (*bhāvanā-mayī prajñā*) which is again, meditation on the Four Noble Truths. It is at the end of this threefold stage of preparatory effort (*prayoga*) that he is finally able to sail into the stage of spiritual transformation called “the path of insight” (*darśana-mārga*) which, once again, is meditation on the Four Noble Truths; the outflow-free *prajñā*, now generated for the first time, sees directly the true nature of *dharma*-s. Through this process of meditative transformation, and necessarily through this process, also known as “direct realization” (*abhisamaya*), he becomes a Buddhist saint (an *ārya*). As a matter of fact, in the *Ābhidharmika* definition of *abhidharma*, “*abhi*” (‘facing’) clearly has the significance of *abhisamaya*, in as much as it is explained in the sense of “directly facing (i.e., directly realizing) the characteristics of *dharma*-s”.³

2. The various contexts of the application of the *aśubhā*

The meditation on the impure/loathsome is sometimes called *aśubhabhāvanā*, or very often, simply *aśubhā*. When we examine the meditative practices discussed in the *Sūtra* and the *Abhidharma*, we find that this meditation is very much emphasized, and is taught in numerous doctrinal contexts.

2.1. The *aśubhā* as a practice of *kāyānupaśyanā*

The *aśubhā* is often prescribed as a method of the first of the fourfold abode of mindfulness (*smṛtyupasthāna*), viz, the abode of mindfulness of the body (*kāya-smṛtyupasthāna*). The *Dharmaskandha-śāstra*, probably the earliest Sarvāstivāda canonical Abhidharma text, cites this context from the Sūtra as follows:

At one time, the Bhagavat was in Śrāvastī, residing in the Jetavana, the Ānātha-piṇḍada Park. Then the Bhagavat told the *bhikṣu-saṃgha*, “I shall expound in brief for you the cultivation of the fourfold abode of mindfulness: With regard to this body internally, a *bhikṣu* abides in sequential observation⁴ of the body (*kāya-anupaśyanā*). When he is accomplished in proper effort, proper awareness and proper mindfulness, covetousness (貪, *abhidhyā*) and dejection (憂, *daurmanasya*) concerning the worldly life are eradicated.⁵ With regard to that external body, he abides in sequential observation of the body. ... covetousness and dejection concerning the worldly life are eradicated. With regard to the internal and body, ... covetousness and dejection concerning the worldly life are eradicated.”⁶ ...

The text proceeds to provide an exegesis of the various terms, including the following:

“With regard to this body internally, he abides in sequential observation of the body”

With regard to this internal body, a *bhikṣu* observes and reflects, from the feet to the head, as it is placed (**yathāvasthitam*), that it is full of the various kinds of impurity and loathsomeness. That is, within this body, there exist only various [impurities] — head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, dust, taint,⁷ skin, flesh, sinews, veins, bones, bone-marrow, spleen, kidney, heart, lung, liver, gallbladder, intestines, belly (? 胃, **udarya*), fat, grease (*vasā?*), brain, diaphragm, pus, blood, bile (*pitta?*, is possibly a corruption from 胆), phlegm (**śleṣmā?* 脂 possibly a corruption from 痰) tears, sweat, snot, saliva (唾, *kheṭa*), upper stomach (生臟, *āmāśaya*⁸), lower stomach (熟臟, *pakvāśaya*⁹) feces and urine.¹⁰

The discernment (簡擇; *vicaya*), the profound discernment (極簡擇; *pravicaaya*), utmost profound discernment (最極簡擇; **supravicaaya*/**parama-pravicaaya*), observation (解了; **upalakṣanā*), proper observation (等了; **samlakṣaṇa*, **saṃjānanā*), close

examination (近了; *upaparīkṣanā*), ... realization (覺明; *pāṇḍitya*), operation of understanding (慧行; *prajñā-cāra*, insight (*vipasyanā*)¹¹ — which are generated with regard to *dharma*-s when he is thus reflecting on the signs of the impurity — constitutes the sequential observation of the body internally. It is also called “the abode of mindfulness of the body”.

“[He] abides (*viharati*)”: “He is endowed with this observation, manifests it (*sam-ud-ā-√car*), pursues it (*anu-√car*), moves fully [with it] and pursues it fully, operates it and resolves on it (解行; **adhimukti-√car*).”

“Covetousness”

This includes various species of covetousness — the greed (*rāga*, *saṃrāga*) towards sensual object-domains, obstinate clinging towards them, being internally bound to them, longing for them, etc.

“Dejection”

This refers collectively to all mental dejectedness generated by contact which conduces to sensation of dejection. It is subsumed by uneven (unpleasant) sensation (*aśātā/asātā vedanā*).

“Covetousness and dejection concerning the worldly life are eradicated”

These two *dharma*-s are abandoned, fully known, utterly separated from, subdued and destroyed.¹²

The following is a more typical *sūtra* account, quoted in the *Arthaviniścaya-sūtra*, as the first of the fourfold cultivation of concentration (*samādhi-bhāvanā*):¹³

Here, O *bhikṣu*-s, a *bhikṣu* has gone to a hermitage, 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 (*yathāvasthitam yathāpranīhitam*), as full of various kinds of impurity thus: “There are in this body, [1] head-hairs, [2] body-hairs, [3] nails, [4] teeth, [5] dust, [6] taint, [7] skin, [8] flesh, [9] bones, [10] sinews; [11] veins (*śirā/sirā*); [12] kidney (*vrkkā*); [13] heart; [14] spleen; [15] lung; [16] intestines; [17] mesentery (small intestines); [18] upper stomach; [19] lower stomach; [20] bladder (*udarya*); [21] liver (*yakṛt*); [22] feces; [23] tears; [24]

sweat; [25] saliva; ,, [27] grease (*vaśā*); [28] synovial fluid (*lasikā*), [29] marrow (*majjā*); [30] fat (*meda*); [31] bile; [32] phlegm; [33] pus; [34] blood; [35] head; [36] brain.” 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 repeated, leads to the abandonment of sensual greed (*kāma-rāga*).¹⁴

Although this *sūtra* might not have been affiliated to the Sarvāstivāda, we see once again, that 36 parts are enumerated. Notice also that the enumeration of such items as dust and taint — not found in the Pāli list — agrees with the DSS enumeration.¹⁵

2.1.1. The *aśubhā* as *pratimukhī smṛti*

The beginning part of the version cited partially in the MVŚ is even closer to the Pāli version than the AVN:

A *bhikṣu* dwells in an *araṇya*, or under a tree or a secluded hut. Having seated cross-legged, with the body upright, vowing properly (正願) and abiding in face-to-face mindfulness (*pratimukhī smṛti* 對面念) ...¹⁶

Notice that Xuan Zang understands *praṇidhāya* as “vowing”. However, in some places, he also seems to understand it as “putting aside other (i.e., unskillful — see below) mental objects (捨異攀緣)”¹⁷

In both the Theravāda and Mahayāna traditions, 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 also in Mahāyāna *sūtra*. For instance, the *Vajracchedikā prajñāpāramitā* speaks of the Buddha after returning from His alms round thus:

*bhagavān ... prajñāpta evāsane paryāṅkam ābhujya rjuṃ kāyaṃ praṇidhāya pratimukhīm smṛtim upasthāpya ...*¹⁸ (Xuan Zang’s tr.: 時, 薄伽梵 ... 於食後時敷如常座, 結跏趺坐, 端身正願, 住對面念)¹⁹

Xuan Zang’s Chinese rendering (words underlined) of the MVŚ and *Vajracchedikā* sentences are identical.

The MVŚ records the various explanations on the key terms in the *sūtra* passage quoted above:²⁰

(1) “*paryāṅkam ābhujya* (‘bending [the legs] crosswise’)”

There are many reasons for which the Buddha is described as assuming this posture. These include (i) It is the usual deportment of the Noble Ones. All Buddha-s and their disciples in the past and future enter into *samādhi* while in this posture. (ii) This deportment is best for cultivation of the skilful mental state because it avoids the tiredness resulting from walking and standing and torpor from reclining. (iii) Other postures can also lead to unskilful *dharma*-s such as sensual desire. (v) It is most effective in leading various types of sentient beings into the True *Dharma* (vi) It is most capable of inspiring respect and faith men, gods, *asura*-s, hell beings, etc. (vii) It is with this posture alone that one can attain the supreme perfect enlightenment as a *buddha*; with other postures there can only be the attainment of the *bodhi* of the two *yāna*-s. (viii) It is in this posture that the Buddha subdued the *Māra*-s (*Īśvara* and the defilements). (ix) It is not found among the outsiders. (x) It is the posture most conducive to the development of *samādhi*.

(2) “With the body upright (*ṛjum kāyam*)”

This means being seated straight up.

(3) “*Pranīdhāya*” (‘putting [the body] upright’)

Xuan Zang seems here (and likewise in his translation of the *Vajracchedikā*) to take *pra-ṇi-√dhā* to mean ‘vow’, as in *pranīdhāna*/*pranīdhi* in a *bodhisattva*’s career; hence his rendering 正願, ‘properly vowing’ — “This means focusing the *citta* in conformity to the skilful categories [of *dharma*-s] (隨順善品而注心義).”

(4) “Abiding in face-to-face mindfulness”:

What is the meaning of abiding in *pratimukhī smṛti* ?

(i) *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.

(ii) *Mukha* refers to defilements; *prati* (‘opposing’) means to counteract. This *smṛti* counteracts the foremost defilement responsible for *samsāra* (i.e., greed), hence called *pratimukhī smṛti*.”

(iii) *Mukha* means one's own face; *prati* means towards. This mindfulness causes the *citta* to gaze towards one's own face to contemplate on another object, hence called *pratimukhī smṛti*.

Question: Why does one place mindfulness on one's own face?

Answer: From beginningless time, a male falls for the appearance of a female and *vice versa*, mostly on account of facial appearance. Hence one contemplates on one's face to subdue defilements. Moreover, the greedy *citta* of sentient beings arises mostly with the support of the eye-brows, eyes, lips, teeth, ears, nose, etc., on the face, and not other bodily parts. Hence one contemplates on one's face to overcome sensual greed. Furthermore, the face has seven cavities through which impurities flow out incessantly; it is more effective than other bodily parts for one to generate a *citta* of disgust. Hence, one contemplates on one's own face to cultivate dispassion. Furthermore, it is rare that one sees one's own face, and one gives rise to craving [on its account]. Hence one fixes mindfulness on the face and not elsewhere, for when one does not illuminate (? Or, 'is not reflexive' (?): 不照) one does not see oneself. Furthermore, meditators mostly delight in examining the characteristic of the twelve *āyatana*-s. There are always nine different *āyatana*-s on the face; thus they contemplate on the face.

Some take the prefix *prati* to mean "against/opposing" and interpret "*pratimukhīm smṛtim upasthāpya*" to mean: "abiding in opposing mindfulness" (背面念; lit.: 'back-facing mindfulness'). The compilers do not object to it, and in fact explain this interpretation:

By the force of this mindfulness, one turns the back on pollution (*samkleśa*) and faces towards purification (*vyavadāna*), turns the back on *samsāra* and faces towards *nirvāna*, turns the back on procession (*pravṛtti*) and faces towards recession (*nivṛtti*), turns the back on the fivefold sensuality and faces towards the object of *samādhi*, turns the back on the existent-body view (*satkāya-dṛṣṭi*) and faces towards the liberation-gateway of emptiness (*sūnyatā-vimokṣa-mukha*), turns the back on Self-attachment and faces towards non-Self-ness, turns the back on the false *Dharma* and faces towards the True *Dharma*.

When the meditator abides in this mindfulness — whether in the sense of "facing" or "opposing" — he is said to be abiding in the *pratimukhī smṛti*.²¹

This term is further discussed more explicitly with reference to the *aśubhā* meditation:

Question: What is called “face-to-face mindfulness”?

Answer: The meditator fixes his mindfulness between the eye-brows. He contemplates [the corpse] as [1] turning black-blue (青瘀; *vinīlaka*) or [2] becoming bloated (臃脹; *vyādhmātaka*) or [3] putrefying (膿爛; *vipūyaka*) or [4] disintegrating/rotting (破壞; *vipadumaka/vipaṭumaka*) or [5] [turning] reddish/bloody (異赤; *vilohitaka*), or [6] being eaten [by worms, etc] (被食; *vikhādita*), or [7] being scattered apart (分離; *vikṣiptaka*); or [8] he contemplates the white bones (白骨; *śvetāsthi*), or a [9] chain of bones (骨鎖; *asthi*). These are called “face-to-face mindfulness.”²²

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 body. Likewise is the case here. ...

When the meditator in this way fixes his mindfulness between the eye-brows and contemplates on the corpse’s appearance as being bluish, etc., it is the contemplation on the loathsome. Herein, he is said “to abide in face-to-face mindfulness.”²³

It is further explained as to why here only the *aśubhā* is called a “face-to-face mindfulness”, not the *ānāpānasmṛti* or the *dhātu-bheda* contemplation. Various explanations are given. (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) Ghosaka states that “all mindfulness induced by systematic mental application (*yoniso manasikāra*) is *pratimukhī smṛti*.”²⁴ He further explains: Sensual desire is the foremost of the hindrances, when it is counteracted by the *aśubhā*, the other hindrances will be abandoned accordingly. The *aśubhā*, being thus the proximate counteraction, is called the “face-to-face mindfulness.”²⁵

Obviously, the *kāyānupaśyanā* includes other forms of practice besides the *aśubhā*. The DSS in this very context in fact goes on to prescribe two more practices of contemplation on the body. One is the contemplation on the different elements of the body (both internally and externally): Contemplating the body as comprising merely the six elements (*dhātu-bheda*) — the four Great Elements, the space-element and the consciousness-element. The other is the contemplation on its nature as being, impermanent, unsatisfactory, empty and without any Self, and being subject to destruction. The *kāyagatāsati-sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya* prescribes, additionally, the practices of the mindfulness of breathing, mindfulness of the postures (walking, standing, sitting and lying down) and full awareness (*sampajāna*) of all movements and actions.²⁶ Moreover, the MVŚ states that the practitioner is said to have accomplished the practice of *aśubhā* when finally, at the stage of absolute mastery (*atīkrānta-manaskāra*), focusing his mind between the eyebrows, he is able to proceed from *aśubhā* onto the four abodes of mindfulness sequentially from *kāyānupaśyanā* to *dharmānupaśyanā*.²⁷

2.2. As the specific antidote for sensual craving

The Pāli *kāyagatā-sati-sutta* also prescribes the *aśubhā* in the form of meditation on the different stages of decomposition of a corpse:

Moreover, O *bhikkhu*-s, just as a *bhikkhu* were to see a body thrown into the charnel ground, dead for one or two or three days, bloated (*uddhumātaka*), turned blue-black (*vinīlaka*), putrefying (*vipubbakajāta*). He compares this same body to it: “This body too is of such a nature, such a state of being, not exempted from being thus.”²⁸ ...

More generally, however, this form is prescribed specifically as the antidote for sensual craving.²⁹ In the Sarvāstivāda tradition, it is one of the two “gateways for Immortality (*amṛta-dvāra*)”, namely, *Nirvāna*. In the scheme of the fivefold character-rectification, it is specifically recommended for the character type in whom greed predominates (*adhirāga-carita*).

Tradition says that at one stage, some sixty *bhikṣu*-s within a single day committed suicide after practicing this meditation, and it is at that stage that the Buddha began to emphasize the practice of the mindfulness of breathing.³⁰ The *Vinaya* account relates a sham recluse named Migalaṇḍika who at the request of some of these *bhikkhu* meditators, went around

asking who would like to be slain by him. It is stated that “fear arose in those *bhikkhu*-s who had not been detached (*avītarāga*) ... But fear did not arise in those *bhikkhu*-s who had been detached (*vītarāga*) ...”³¹ We know, of course, that *vītarāga* is an epithet of an *arahant*. This would imply that at least some *arahat*-s were among those who were slain. The *Mahīśāsaka-vinaya* in fact states very clearly thus:

That *caṇḍāla* (i.e. Mṛgalaṇḍika) understood well the signs of those who had or had not developed disgust with regard to their bodies: “If a *bhikkhu*, who is an ordinary worldling, generates fear when the knife is being held facing him, then he has not developed disgust with regard to the body. If I kill him, I shall acquire little merit (*punya*). I must seek out those who have attained the fruit of the path³² and do not generate fear.”³³

This tradition seems to have contributed to the later doctrinal classification of a type of *arhats* called *cetanā-dharman*.³⁴ They are usually explained as those of the nature of capable of ending their lives at will in the fear of losing their spiritual attainment.³⁵ However, some Abhidharma manuals, both early and later, have also explicitly indicated the link with the *aśubhā*. The **Amṛta-rasa-śāstra* explains these *arhat*-s as being “weak in understanding (**mṛdu-prajñā*) and effort, diligent in contemplating the body as *aśubha*, intending (generating the will) to destroy the body themselves.”³⁶ The **Abhidharmahr̥daya* explains likewise.³⁷ In the **Nyāyānusāra*, Saṃghabhadra too, states that this type of *arhat*-s, when abiding in their attainments, are capable of being greatly disgusted with sensual desires; and being thus disgusted they generate the volition to end their own lives. Though being weak faculties (*mṛdv-indriya*), in their preparatory stage they have accomplished a strong power of mindfulness, abiding mostly in the contemplation of loathsomeness. Worrying that such adverse factors as sicknesses, etc., would result in their being slack in effort and hence eventually retrogression, they generate the volition to kill themselves.³⁸ In the Sarvāstivāda, the *cetanā-dharman* type is not confined to the *arhat*-s; it is also found among practitioners who are not yet *ārya*-s but have reached the sub-stages of progress known as *mokṣa-bhāgīya* (‘pertaining to [the stage] conducive to emancipation’) and *nirvedha-bhāgīya* (‘pertaining to [the stage] conducive to penetration’) — both subsumed under the preparatory stage (*prayoga*) preceding the entry into the path of vision.³⁹

2.2.1. *aśubhā* as meditation on the nine or ten stages of decomposition of a corpse

We have above (§ 2.1.1.(4)) that the MVŚ describes *aśubhā* as a contemplation of nine stages of the decomposition of a corpse: 1, turning black-blue; 2, becoming bloated; 3, putrefying; 4, disintegrating/rottening; 5, [turned] reddish; 6, being eaten (by worms); 7, being scattered apart; 8, white bones; 9 a chain of bones. This is the standard description in the Sarvāstivāda texts.

Yaśomitra, in the context of expounding the five “abodes of liberation” (*vimukty-āyatanāni*), cites a virtually identical list of nine (with only 3 and 4 apparently interchanged): 1, *vinīlaka*; 2, *vipūyaka*; 3, *vyādhmātaka*; 4, *vipatumaka*; 5, *vilohitaka*; 6, *vikhāditaka*; 7, *vikṣiptaka*; 8, *asthi*; 9, *asthi-saṅkalikā*.⁴⁰

The passage cited above (§2.2) from the *Kāyagatāsati-sutta* mentions the first three of these stages. The *Dhammasaṅgani*⁴¹ enumerates 10 stages. This is adhered to in the *Vism*:⁴²

1, bloated (*uddhumātaka*); 2, black-blue (*vinīlaka*); 3, putrefying (*vipubbaka*); 4, disintegrating/fissured (*vicchiddaka*); 5, being eaten up (*vikkhāyitaka*); 6, scattered (*vikkhittaka*); 7, destroyed and scattered (*hatavikkhittaka*); 8, reddish/bleeding (*lohitaka*); 9, worm-infested (*pūlavaka*); 10, bones (*aṭṭhika*).

The **Vimuktimārga* enumerates exactly the same 10, in the same order.⁴³

The *Vism* states that each of these nine forms of contemplations counteracts a specific type of greed: 1 counteracts greed for shapes (*saṅṭhāna-rāga*); 2, bodily beauty (*sarīravanna-rāga*); 3, bodily odour originated from scents, etc (*mālāgandhādivasena samutthāpitasarīragandha-rāga*); 4, solidity in the body (*sarīre ghanabhāva-rāga*); 5, accumulation of the flesh in such bodily parts as the breasts, etc (*mamsūpacaya-rāga*); 6, grace of the limbs (*aṅgapacaṅgalīlā-rāga*); 7, perfection of the body as an agglomeration (*sarīrasaṅghātasampatti-rāga*); 8, beauty produced by adornments (*alaṅkārajanitasobha-rāga*); 9, the notion of [the body] being “mine” (*mamatta-rāga*).⁴⁴

The AKB explains the counteractions of four forms of greed: (1) greed for colour (*varṇa-rāga*) is counteracted by the *aśubhā* of turning

black-blue, etc (*vinīlakādi*); (2) greed for shapes (*saṁsthāna-rāga*), of being eaten and being scattered (*vikhādita-vikṣipta*); (3) greed for touch (*sparsā-rāga*), of bones bound by rotting [flesh] and pus (*vipaḍumaka-pūyanibaddhāsthi*); (4) greed for being served upon (*upacāra-rāga*), of a motionless dead body (*niśceṣṭa-mṛtakāya*). The *aśubhā* in the form of a skeleton (*asthi-saṁkalā*) can counteract all the fourfold greed since these four objects of greed are absent in it.⁴⁵

Samghabhadra's explanations on this fourfold counteraction are more elaborate:

The four forms of greed are counteracted by resorting to two types of profound reflection (思擇; **nidhyāna*): 1, observation of the corpse internally; 2, observation on the corpse externally. One with sharp faculties resorts to the former; one with blunt faculties resorts to the latter:

One with sharp faculties first observes all around the internal body bounded by the skin, up from the toes and down from the head, making the *citta* become disgusted.

For one intending to subdue greed for colour, he should be focused and mindful (*anu-√smṛ*) of the changing colours within the body — pus, blood, fat, semen, saliva, snot, marrow, brain, feces, urine, etc.,. He should also be mindful of the changing colours on the skin of the internal body caused by diseases — yellow, white, blue, black like clouds and smokes, motley, dark, blurred and unclean. When as a result great disgust is generated in the mind, he is able to subdue the greed that takes colour as cognitive objects. By becoming aware that this body, being as such, is not the basis (*adhiṣṭhāna*) of desired colours, he can become detached from all [colours].

For one intending to subdue greed for shapes, he should individually observe that the bodily parts of the internal body are made of an aggregation, arrangement and combination of 36 things, headhairs, body-hairs, etc.,; apart from these, there exist no shapes as hairs, etc.,. Through resolve (*adhimokṣa*), he further dissects the body into two or more parts, scattered on the ground, eaten by birds and animals which compete with one another, bones and flesh dropping in random, bodily parts being torn apart. When as a result great disgust is generated in the mind, he is able to subdue the greed that takes shapes as cognitive objects.

For one intending to subdue greed for pleasant contact, he should remove the skin and flesh through resolve and contemplate on only the bones as being coarse like broken tiles. ...

For one intending to subdue greed for being served (/honour), he should, through resolve, contemplate on the internal body, as if he is at sleep, drunk, has fainted or suffering from epilepsy (*apasmāra*), being unable to mobilize the limbs, as if when one is old and sick — whether such a time has or has not actually arrived, one's body is entangled with such things. He further contemplates the activities within the body as being without freedom; all are generated in dependence on conditions; there is not the slightest bodily part that can serve as the support-base for the deportment of serving(/honouring) — they are falsely clung on to as the agent of honouring. There is definitely the act of honouring; but by "honouring", what is supposed to signify is that: with certain bodily parts as conditions, there can definitely be the actions of deportment of dancing, singing and comedy or sad shows, etc. He contemplates that such actions are completely without any definite nature; they are like the tunes generated from a flute, all being like magical shows. When as a result great disgust is generated in the mind, he is able to subdue the greed that takes honour as cognitive object.

This is how a sharp-faculty beginner, by observing the internal body with the understanding derived from reflection, comes to overcome the fourfold greed, rendering them unable to arise.

In the case of a blunt-faculty, his faculties being blunt, the intense defilements are difficult to subdue without the help of external conditions (*pratyaya*). He must therefore first observe an external corpse with clarity, and then gradually subdue the defilements within his own mind. That is, when at the beginning he intends to observe an external corpse, he first generates a thought of kindness and go to the charnel ground (*śivapathikā*). As the Bhagavat has said, "A beginner practitioner seeking the means for promptly destroying sensual greed should generate a thought of kindness and visit the charnel ground, practising contemplation diligently. ..." Having reached there, he should practise the *aśubhā* in accordance with the *sūtra* on the fourfold charnel-ground practice (see below), contemplating on the signs of an external corpse and then comparing them to his internal body: "Those signs being thus, the same should also be the case with this [body]." Through this means, he is gradually able to make his thought generate profound disgust towards the internal body as well, and thus able to counteract the aforesaid fourfold greed, as he comes to see the intrinsic nature within the body.⁴⁶

The *sūtra* that Saṃghabhadra refers to above seems to correspond to the *Kāyagatāsati-sutta*. This, as does the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta*,⁴⁷ also describes the following nine forms of a corpse thrown into the charnel ground (*sīvathikāyaṃ chadditaṃ*):

- 1, a corpse bloated, turning black-blue, putrefying;
- 2, a corpse being eaten by crows, etc.,;
- 3, a chain of bones with flesh and blood, connected by sinews (*aṭṭhika-saṃkhalikaṃ samamaṃsalohitaṃ nahārusambandham*);
- 4, a chain of fleshless bones smeared with blood, connected by sinews (*aṭṭhika-saṃkhalikaṃ nimmaṃsalohitamattikaṃ nahārusambandham*);
- 5, a chain of fleshless and bloodless bones, connected by sinews (*aṭṭhika-saṃkhalikaṃ apagatamaṃsalohitaṃ nahārusambandham*);
- 6, disconnected bones scattered in various directions (*aṭṭhikāni apagatasambandhāni disāvidisāsu vikkhitāni*);
- 7, bones bleached white, like the colour of shells (*aṭṭhikāni setāni saṅkhavaṇṇūpanibhāni*);
- 8, bones heaped up (*aṭṭhikāni puñjakajātāni*);
- 9, bones more than a year old, rotten and crumbled (*aṭṭhikāni terovassikāni pūtīni cunṇajātāni*)⁴⁸

However, although nine stages are distinguishable, the northern tradition explicitly groups them into four sets, regarded as respectively the counteractions of the fourfold greed (for colour, shape, contact and being served upon). We have already seen above, the Sarvāstivāda grouping given in the AKB. According to Saṃghabhadra,⁴⁹ it is somewhat different:

- I, greed for colour — contemplation on the corpse turning black-blue and becoming reddish;
- II, greed for shape — being eaten and being scattered;
- III, greed for contact — on its rotting and on the bones;
- IV, greed for being served upon — being bloated and putrefying.

(Like in AKB, contemplation on the skeleton is said to be able to counteract all four types of greed).

The Yogācāra grouping again differs slightly. The description in the *Śrāvaka bhūmi* of *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* is as follows:

... he purifies the *citta* from sexual greed conjoined with the fourfold greed — greed for colour, greed for shape, greed for contact, greed for being served upon.

Therein, [I,] when he reflects (*manasikaroti*) on [a corpse] becoming black-blue, or putrefying or rotting or bloated, or being eaten, he purifies his *citta* from the greed for colour.

[II,] when he reflects on its becoming reddish (covered by blood), he purifies his *citta* from the greed for shape.

[III,] when he reflects on its bones or the bone-chain or the skeleton (*asthi-samkalikā*), he purifies his *citta* from the greed for contact.

[IV,] when he reflects on its being scattered, he purifies his *citta* from the greed for being served upon.

In this way, he purifies the *citta* from sexual greed.⁵⁰

Like the Theravāda *Kāyagatāsati-sutta* and *Mahāsatipatthāna-sutta*, the **Śāriputrābhidharma* likewise, in the context of *kāyānupaśyanā*, besides the *anupaśyanā* of the various impure parts of the body, also prescribes various other forms of contemplation, including the *ānāpānasmṛti*, mindfulness of postures, contemplation on the elements, the different stages of decomposition of a corpse, etc.⁵¹ The latter comes under the internal-cum-external *anupaśyanā* of the body:

1. A *bhikṣu* sees a corpse thrown into the charnel ground, [dead] for one day [or two days] or three days.
2. He sees such a corpse being bloated and turning black-blue.
3. He sees such a corpse being eaten by animals.
4. He sees the corpse whose bones are connected, [the body] being reddish, putrefying, with foul pus and blood.
5. He sees the corpse whose bones are connected, with sinews and veins not yet severed, covered by blood and skin.
6. He sees the corpse whose bones are connected, already without blood and flesh but with sinews and veins not yet severed.
7. He sees the corpse whose bones have decayed but not yet removed from their original location.
8. He sees the corpse whose bones have been broken and far removed from their original locations; the foot-bones, thigh-bones, handbones, back-bones, hip-bones, ... scattered in various places.

9. He sees the corpse whose bones, after the lapse of a long time, having become white like shells and bluish like dove, rotten and crumbled.
10. He sees the corpse lying on a heap of fire; its head-hairs, body-hairs, skin, blood, flesh, sinews, veins, bones and marrow [etc.], are consumed by fire and gradually dissipate completely. "He contemplates thus: 'these *dharma*-s do not go and abide in the east, south, west, north, or in the four intermediary or upper and lower directions. These *dharma*-s arise not having been, and vanish after having arisen (**abhūtvā bhavanti* | *bhūtvā pratigacchanti* |⁵²).'"⁵³

It can be observed that this description varies somewhat from the aforementioned nine- or ten-stage accounts. Moreover, if we discount the first stage whose description is repeated as a part of the next two stages, the number of stages or forms then reduce to nine.

2.3. The context of the contemplation on loathsomeness of food

In the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, the "ideation on the loathsomeness with regard to food" (*āhāre paṭikkūla-saññā*) is given as one of the 10 ideations.⁵⁴ (See also § 2.4 below). The *Vism* expounds it as an individual object of practice (*kammaṭṭhāna*).⁵⁵

In the Sarvāstivāda, the *aśubhā* is also prescribed as a practice to counteract indulgence in taking delicious food. The SgPŚ prescribes it as one of the fivefold "ideations which bring liberation to maturity"⁵⁶ (成熟解脫; **vimukti-paripācanīyā samjñā*). These are: 1, ideation of being impermanent; 2, ideation of the impermanent being unsatisfactory; 3, ideation of the unsatisfactory being without a Self; 4, ideation of the loathsomeness of food; 5, ideation of death. (See also the 10 ideations in § 2.5). The 4th ideation is described thus:

With regard to rice, he should generate the resolve (*adhimokṣa*) of a bloated corpse; with regard to porridge with added vegetables, of thin feces; with regard to fresh butter (生酥; *nava-nīta*) and curd, of human brain and marrow; with regard to ghee (熟酥; *sarpis*), oil, [etc.], human grease; with regard to groats (*saktu*), bone pieces; with regard to biscuits, human skin; with regard to salt, broken teeth; with regard to vegetables born from stems, skull (*kapāla*) joined with hairs; with regard to juices, pus and blood.⁵⁷

It can be seen that this Sarvāstivāda version explicitly applies the *aśubhā* (using elements of both the 36-part reflection and the that on a corpse) in the ideation of loathsomeness of food. This makes the MVŚ feel necessary to distinguish the two contemplations — although both equally have loathsomeness (*prātikūlya*) as their mode of activity (*ākāra*),⁵⁸ the two can be distinguished: the former is an ideation of the loathsomeness of *rūpa*; the latter, of taste. According to some: the former counteracts sensual greed; the latter, greed for food.⁵⁹

In the **Śāriputrābhidharma*, on the ideation of the impurity of ‘lump’ (i.e., material) food (*kavalīkārāhāra*), it is said thus:

A *bhikṣu* takes lump food as if eating a son’s flesh; he practices the *aśubhā* ideation.⁶⁰

The *Sangīti-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya* also enumerates five *vimutti-paripācanīya saññā*. But the list differs in the last two items which are given as *pahāna-saññā* and *virāga-saññā*.⁶¹

2.4. The context of the eight-fold liberations (*vimokṣa*) and spheres of conquest (*abhibhv-āyatana*)

The doctrine of the eightfold liberations is found in both the Theravāda as well as the Sarvāstivāda texts.⁶² “Liberation” here does not refer to the attainment of *Nibbāna*/*Nirvāna*. Buddhaghosa explains it as “resolving/ inclining towards” (*adhimuccana*); and this is in the sense of (I) “being properly liberated from opposing states” (*paccanīka-dhammehi suṭṭhu vimuccananatṭho*)” and (II) “properly inclining towards the cognitive object by virtue of delight” (*ārammaṇe ca abhirati-vasena suṭṭhu adhimuccanatṭho*).⁶³ This Theravāda explanation essentially agrees with that in the **Śāriputrābhidharma*: “The *citta* faces towards it, holds it as supreme, is inclined towards it, is liberated in respect of it.”⁶⁴ The Sarvāstivāda explains it as “liberation from all that hinders”.⁶⁵ It is also in the sense of “turning one’s back on” (*vaimukhyārtho hi vimokṣārthah*):⁶⁶ the first two turn the back on the *citta* that is greedy for matter; the third, on that of the *aśubhā*; the fourth to seventh, each on that of the preceding lower stage (*bhūmi*); the eight, on all *citta*-s taking cognitive objects.⁶⁷

The *Mahāsakuludāyi-sutta* merely enumerates them, without any elaboration: (1) possessing matter, one sees matter (*rūpī rūpāni passaṭi*);

(2) internally without any ideation of matter, one sees matter externally (*ajjhataṃ arūpasāññī bahiddhā rūpāni passaṭi*); (3) one becomes resolved exclusively “it is beautiful”. (*subhan t’eva adhimutto hoti* |); (4) as a result of transcending ideation of matter in everyway, of the vanishing of ideation of the resistant, and of not applying the mind to ideation of diversity, [resolving] “space is infinite”, one fully attains and dwells in the sphere of infinity of space (*sabbaso rūpasāññānaṃ samatikkamā | paṭiḥhasāññānaṃ atthaṅgamā | nānattasaññānaṃ amanasikārā | ananto ākāso ti ākāsañāncāyatanam upasampajja viharati* |); (5) transcending the sphere of infinity of space in everyway, [resolving] “consciousness is infinite”, one fully attains and dwells in the sphere of infinity of consciousness (*sabbaso ākāsañāncāyatanam samatikkamma anantaṃ viññānaṃ ti viññānañāncāyatanam upasampajja viharati*); (6) transcending the sphere of infinity of consciousness in everyway, [resolving] “there is nothing”, one fully attains and dwells in the sphere of nothingness (*sabbaso viññānañāncāyatanam samatikkamma naṭṭhi kiñcīti ākiñcaññāyatanam upasampajja viharati* |); (7) transcending the sphere of nothingness in everyway, one fully attains and dwells in the sphere of neither ideation nor non-ideation (*sabbaso ākiñcaññāyatanam samatikkamma nevasāññānāsaññāyatanam upasampajja viharati* |); (8) transcending the sphere of neither ideation nor non-ideation in everyway, one fully attains and dwells in the cessation of ideation and sensation (*sabbaso nevasāññānāsaññāyatanam samatikkamma saññāvedayitanirodham upasampajja viharati* |).⁶⁸

The first three of this eight are of special interest for our discussion. (See also below) According to the commentary, matter in the first liberation refers to *jhāna* pertaining to the fine-material sphere (*rūpa-jhāna*), generated through the power of a *kaṣiṇa* with regard to one’s hairs, etc.; and “possessing matter” means that the meditator possesses that matter.⁶⁹

The *Atthasalinī* offers a more elaborate commentary on the first liberation:

“Possessing matter” — Matter is the fine-material *jhāna* (*rūpajjhānam*) generated internally with regard to the hairs etc. For, internally, when doing the preliminary exercise of blue, one does it with regard to the hairs or the bile or the pupil of the eye. When doing the preliminary exercise of yellow, one does it with regard to the fat, the skin, or the yellow region of the eyes. When doing the preliminary exercise of red, one does it with regard to the flesh, the blood, the tongue, the palms

of the hands and feet or the red region of the eyes. When doing the preliminary exercise of white, one does it with regard to the bones, the teeth, the nails or the white region of the eyes.⁷⁰ This is said with reference to one who has thus done the preliminary exercise and endowed with the arisen *jhāna*.

“One sees matter” — Externally too, one sees through the *jhāna*-eye (*jhāna-cakkhu*), matters of the *kasīna*, blue, etc.

With this [sentence], the obtainment of *jhāna* with regard to the *kasīna* comprising internal and external bases is shown.⁷¹

From this, it is clear that the first liberation concerns a contemplation on one's own bodily parts. The meditator has not been freed from ideations of these internal matters. Saṃghabhadra also interprets the first liberation by referring to the statement on the second liberation:

What is the meaning intended in the *sūtra* statement, “Possessing ideation of matter, one sees matters”? The profound meaning in this *sūtra* cannot be truly (*yathābhūtam*) comprehended by those who have not abolished matter. Nevertheless, according to the explanation passed down by the ancient *ārya*-s, “*rūpi*” means “(one who) has not been able to subdue ideations which take internal matters as cognitive objects”. How do we know that this is the case? From the contrast in the statement concerning the second liberation. i.e., concerning the second liberation, it says: “Internally without ideation of matter, one sees matters externally.” From this, we know that in the first liberation, one has not abolished ideation of matter internally.⁷²

The Pāli commentaries explain that for the second liberation, one attains *jhāna* by doing the preliminary exercise on external (*kasīna*) objects.⁷³ However, no notion of loathsomeness is anywhere explicitly referred to in these first two liberations.

In fact, in the related doctrinal categories called the eight spheres of conquest (*abhibhāyatana*; Skt: *abhibhv-āyatana*), the Pāli texts describe the first two as follows: (1) Internally possessing ideation of matter (*ajjhattam rūpasāññī*), one sees matter externally, limited, beautiful (*suvanna*) or ugly (*dubbanna*). Conquering them, one comes to have such an ideation: “I know, I see.” (2) Internally possessing ideation of matter, one sees matter externally, immeasurable, beautiful or ugly. Conquering them, one comes to have such an ideation: “I know, I see.”⁷⁴

As C.A.F Rhys Davids rightly observes: judging by the *Atthasālinī* (190), “*rūpī*” in the first liberation is equivalent to “*ajjhataṃ rūpasaññī*” in the description (of the first two) spheres of conquest.⁷⁵ Noticeably, in all the first four spheres of conquest, the matter that the meditator sees are described as being “beautiful or ugly”. The *Atthasālinī* explains that “beautiful or ugly” means pure (*parisuddha*) or impure (*aparisuddha*). Accordingly, there is no connection made with the *aśubhā* meditation.

The Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma texts also describe the first four spheres of conquest in similar terms. For instance, the *Prakarana-pāda* (likewise, the AKB) states:

Internally possessing ideation, one sees matter externally as being limited, beautiful or ugly. Conquering these matters, one knows, conquering them one sees — one comes to possess such an ideation. This is the first sphere of conquest.⁷⁶

However, at the same time, the northern Abhidharma texts also explicitly connect the first two liberations with the *aśubhā*. The AKB states that “the [first three liberations] have as cognitive objects, as the case applies, disagreeable and agreeable material abodes (*rūpāyatana*) pertaining to the spheres of sensuality.⁷⁷ On this, Yaśomitra comments:

“As the case applies” — the cognitive objects of the [first] two are the disagreeable matter, black-blue, etc. The cognitive object of the third is the agreeable [matter].⁷⁸

This had in fact consistently been the Sarvāstivāda explanation since the earliest canonical Abhidharma texts. Thus, the SgPS explains the first three liberations as follows:

1. “Possessing matter, one sees matters” (*rūpī rūpāṇi paśyati*) — Internally, with regard to the various ideations of matter, one has not been freed (遠離; **vigata*), freed in each case (別遠離; **prativigata*); has not subdued, subdued in every case; has not ceased, not destroyed. As a result ... one contemplates on matter externally, through the power of resolve (*adhimokṣa*), as being black-blue, bloated, rotten, scattered, eaten, turning reddish, bones or skeleton. ...
2. “Internally without ideation of matter, one sees matters externally (*adhyātmam arūpasamjñī bahirdhā rūpāṇi paśyati*)” — Internally, with regard to the various ideations of matter, one has been freed

... . As a result, ... one contemplates on matter externally, through the power of resolve, as being black-blue, bloated, rotten, scattered, eaten, turning reddish, bones or skeleton. ...

3. "Realizing the pure liberation through the body, one, having accomplished it, abides [in it] (*śubham vimokṣam kāyena sāksātkṛtvopasampadya viharati*)" — What is the preparation (*prayoga*) of this pure liberation? Through what expedience does one enter into this meditative attainment of pure liberation? The beginner, at the beginning of the contemplation, grasps the mark of a green (*nīla*⁷⁹) tree — green trunk, green branches, green leaves ... Having grasped these various green marks, through the force of resolve (*adhimokṣavaśena*) he applies his thought and ideates, reflects, determines and resolves (信解; *adhi-√muc*) that this colour is of a particular green mark. ... [In this process,] his thought is scattered, flowing over various marks and cannot focus on a single object-domain. He is thus not yet able to stabilize the *citta* and enter into the meditative attainment of the pure liberation. To concentrate ... he fixes mindfulness on a single green mark. Reflecting that it is a green, not a non-green mark, vigorously ... until he [is able to] make the *citta* stay continuously for a long time. With this preparation, practicing repeatedly with vigour, ... his *citta* comes to abide, fully abide (等住; *sam-√sthā*) and closely abide (近住; *upa-√sthā*), continuously in a single direction, focusing mindfulness on a single object, reflecting on the green mark, without a second, without reversion. One then realizes and enters into the meditative attainment of the pure liberation.⁸⁰

In the above exposition, the connection between the *aśubhā* and the first two liberations is abundantly clear.⁸¹ The third, in contrast, develops the ideation of the beautiful by contemplating on a given primary colour. As regards the eight spheres of conquest, since the Sarvāstivāda correlates the first four with the first two liberations, and the succeeding four with third liberation; it is also clear that the first four spheres involve the *aśubhā*.⁸² (See also below, § 4.)

2.5. The context of the 10 ideations (*saṃjñā*)

The *aśubhā* is also prescribed among the set of 10 ideations. There are various lists in both the southern and northern traditions, differing somewhat in content; but all equally stress that the 10 ideations lead ultimately to *Nirvāna*. The *Aṅguttara* (v, 105) enumerates the

following: *aśubha, āloka, āhāra, sabbaloke anabhirata, anicca, anicce dukkha, dukkhe anatta, pahāṇa, virāga, nirodha*.⁸³ It can be seen that the *aśubha-saññā* heads the list. The emphasis on the *aśubhā* is even more conspicuous in the corresponding list of the Chinese *Ekottara-āgama* which enumerates several stages of the *aśubhā* as among the ideations: 1, white bones; 2, turning black-blue; 3, bloated; 4, indigestion of what is eaten; 5, [turning] reddish (血想); 6, being eaten; 7, being impermanent; 8, greed for food (貪食); 9, death; 10, all pertaining to the world being non-delightable.⁸⁴

The MVŚ enumerates the following: 1, being impermanent; 2, the impermanent is unsatisfactory (*anitye duḥkha*); 3, the unsatisfactory being without a Self (*duḥkhe anātman*); 4, death; 5, *aśubhā*; 6, loathsomeness of food; 7, all pertaining to the world being non-delightable; 8, abandonment (*prahāṇa*); 9, detachment (*virāga*); 10, cessation (*nirodha*).⁸⁵

The compilers remark that these 10, no more and no less, are prescribed by the Buddha as precisely the requisite medicines for all sentient beings. Some other explanations given by other masters are as follows:⁸⁶

- (I) 1–4 are intended by the Buddha to highlight the noble path; 5–7, its preparatory effort (*prayoga*); 8–10, its fruits.
- (II) 5–7 highlight *śamatha*; 1–4, *vipaśyanā*; 5–7, fruits of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*.
- (III) 1–3 highlight the entering into "Perfection Without the Raw" (*samyaktva-nyāma = samyaktva-niyāma*),⁸⁷ i.e. *darśana-mārga*; 5–6, transcendence of the attachment to the sensuality sphere (*kāma-dhātu*) — there are sensual greed and greed for solid food in the sensuality sphere, and one addicted to them cannot transcend his attachment to this sphere; 7, transcendence of the attachment to the fine-materiality sphere (*rūpa-dhātu*) — among all forms of samsaric existence, the sensation of joy (*prīti*) and bliss (*sukha*) excel in the finemateriality sphere and bliss of *praśrabdhi* (*prāsraḥdhi*) excels in the fourth *dhyaṇa*, and one clinging to them cannot transcend attachment to the fine-materiality sphere; 4, transcendence of the attachment to the non-materiality sphere — the life span in this sphere is very long, and one who consciously strives to retain it cannot transcend attachment to this sphere; 8–10, the fruits of their paths.

(IV) 1 highlights the direct/proximate antidote (*pratipakṣa*) for the hindrance of conceit with regard to the conditioning forces (*saṃskāra*); 2, the hindrance of laziness; 3, the hindrance of Selfview; 5, the hindrance of the greed for form; 6, the hindrance of indulgence in good food; 7, the hindrance of greed for delightful things in the world; 4, the hindrance of being inflated on account of being alive; 8, the hindrance of the non-virtuous (*adharmā*); 9, the hindrance of attachment (染著; **abhiniveśa*); 10, the hindrance of the support-basis.

2.6. The context of the fivefold “meditative attainment of vision” (*darśana-samāpatti*)

The *aśubhā* is also an integral part of the practice leading to the “fivefold ‘meditative attainment of vision’”. The MVŚ cites the *sūtra* as teaching these fivefold attainment as follows:

- I. A *bhikṣu* observes truly that his own body is filled with the 36 types of impurity: head-hair, body-hairs etc. (Whole list, as in §2.1, is given)
- II. Having observed thus, he further excludes skin, flesh, etc., and observes only the bones in which consciousness moves.
- III. Having done as before, he observes only the bones in which consciousness moves, abiding in this and the next life.
- IV. Having done as before, he observes that consciousness does not abide in this life, but only in the next life.
- V. Having done as before, he observes that consciousness abides in neither this nor the next life.

According to the MVŚ compilers, these attainments have non-greed (*alobha*) as their intrinsic nature, since they contemplate on the *aśubhā* in order to counteract greed. Two dissenting views are also mentioned: some masters regard *prajñā* as the intrinsic nature inasmuch as these are contemplations of things truly as they are (*yathābhūtam*). Others hold that the intrinsic nature is equipoise (*samādhi*), since they are said to be meditative attainments.⁸⁸

“Vision (*darśana*)” is explained as referring to the eyes; as a result of the eyes seeing the impurities, the five meditative attainments are successively generated. There is a hierarchy of the attainments

with respect to the spiritual status of the attainers. The first 2 can be acquired by both an ordinary worldling (*prthagjana*) and an *ārya*; third, by a stream-entrant and a once-returner; fourth, a non-returner; fifth, an *arhat*. Those of the Buddha are said to be unsurpassed (*anuttara*) because they are capable of subduing all cognitive objects: The *śrāvaka*-s and *pratyekabuddha*-s cannot collectively subdue all material abodes (*rūpāyatana*) as being impure; Aniruddha cannot observe that the *rūpa*-s of the fairies are impure; none, excepting the Buddha, is capable of observing the Buddha's body as being impure.⁸⁹

The **Śāriputrābhidharma* cites the *Samprasādanīya-sūtra* (正信經) by name as enumerating the same five meditative attainments.⁹⁰

The Pāli *Sampasādanīya-sutta* enumerates four such meditative attainments as among the unsurpassabilities (*ānuttariya*) in the Buddha's teaching of the *Dhamma*. The description therein are very similar, though not identical; but IV above is noticeably absent. In this *sutta*, the consciousness is given as the consciousness-stream (*viññāṇa-sota*).⁹¹

3. The three levels of mastery

The meditator may be (i) a beginner (*ādikarmika*), (ii) one who has mastered the practice (*kr̥ta-parijaya*) or (iii) one who has gone beyond mental application (*atikrānta-manaskāra*), i.e., an absolute master.⁹² The above description of the meditator placing mindfulness between the eyebrows (§ 2.1.1) pertains to the highest level.⁹³ The following account in the AKB concerns the *aśubhā* practice with the skeleton as object — the particular form of practice conceded by the Sarvāstivāda as capable of counteracting all the fourfold greed. (*supra*, § 2.2.1)

(i) Beginner level

The meditator first fixes his thought on a part of his body, either the toes, or the fore-head, etc. Having made his thought abide on it, he then, with the power of resolve, visualizes that the skin and flesh rots away, progressively seeing the whole body reduced to a skeleton. Next he extends the visualization, doing the same on a second individual, in this way gradually those in a monastery, a village, a whole country, and so on up to seeing the whole earth bounded by the sea being filled with skeletons. In order to enhance his power of

visualization, he then reduces the scope, gradually back to seeing just his own skeleton. Up to this point, he is said to be beginner in the *aśubhā* meditation.

(ii) The level of having mastered

To further advance his power of resolve in the practice of mentally reducing, he now leaves out the foot-bones and applies his thought to the remaining parts, progressively reducing in this way, leaving more and more parts out, until he finally visualizes one half of the skull. He has now mastered the operation of reducing in the *aśubhā* meditation and is said to have mastered the practice.

(iii) The level of absolute mastery — going beyond *manaskāra*

He now advances further: He leaves out even the half of the skull and holds his mindfulness between his eyebrows. When he can do this, he is said to have gone beyond mental application and becomes an absolute master.⁹⁴

Besides the division into the three levels, the MVŚ also distinguishes among practitioners of different dispositions: who (a) delight in brevity, (b) delight in details, and (c) delight in details and brevity.

(a) One who delights in brevity

He first goes to the cemetery (塚間; *śmaśāna*) and observes the sign/mark (*nimitta*), black-blue, etc in a corpse. Having properly grasped the sign, he goes aside and (mentally) observes it again. If his thought is still dispersed and the sign is unclear, he must go back to the cemetery, again observing and properly grasping that sign. He repeats the process until his thought is concentrated and the mental sign is clear. Thereupon, he quickly returns to his dwelling place, washes his feet and sits cross-legged, making himself mentally fit for overcoming the hindrances to meditation. Recollecting the sign that he has grasped previously, he now, through the power of resolve, transfers it onto his own body, starting from the stage of black-blue to that of skeleton (9 stages as we have seen above). In the skeleton, he first observes the foot-bones, ankle-bones, shinbones, ... (moving upwards), neck-bone, chin-bone, and finally, the skull. Having observed these impure signs (**aśubha-nimitta*) through resolve, he now fixes mindfulness between the eyebrows,

abiding in tranquility (湛然而住). He then turns this mindfulness into the sequential observation of the body (*kāyānupasyanā*), and successively into that of *dharma*-s (*dharmānupaśyanā*). This is the full accomplishment of the *aśubhā* of one who delights in brevity.

(b) **One who delights in details**

He does as in (a) up to fixing his mindfulness between the eyebrows. Having kept still for a little while, he further turns the mindfulness first to the observation of skull, next the teeth-bones, successively up to finally the foot-bones. Having thus observed his own bones through resolve, he proceeds to observe the bones externally as being by the side of his own bones, gradually filling up a bed, a room, a monastery, ... a country, up to the entire earth bounded by the ocean — to as far as his mental vision can reach — everywhere filled with bones. Next, he gradually reduces his visualization, until he sees only his own skeleton. In it, he further removes the foot-bones, etc., successively until he finally sees his skull. Having thus observed the *aśubha* signs through resolve, he fixes mindfulness between the eyebrows and abides in tranquility. He further turns this mindfulness into the sequential observation of the body, and successfully, into that of *dharma*-s. This is the full accomplishment of the *aśubhā* of one who delights in details.

(c) **One who delights in details and brevity**

He does as in (b) up to seeing the entire earth bounded by the ocean to be everywhere filled with bones. He then gradually reduces the visualization, successively until he finally sees (only) the skull. Fixing his mindfulness between the eyebrows and keeping still for a little while, he repeats the detailed and brief visualizations as before until he has acquired full mastery, and fixes mindfulness between the eyebrows, abiding in tranquility. Next, he turns this mindfulness into the sequential observation of the body, and successively, into that of *dharma*-s. This is the full accomplishment of the *aśubhā* of one who delights in details and brevity.

This repeated visualization in details and brevity is practiced so that it can be clear to practitioner that his thought has gained sovereignty. It is in fact only one who has acquired freedom over the objectdomain who can contemplate in this way in details and brevity.

The meditator (*yogācāra*) reflects thus: "From beginningless time in *samsāra*, my thought has been distorted by defilements, taking what is impure as being pure. I must now observe the impure truly as it is." In order to acquire full mastery in the contemplation, he thus repeatedly visualizes in both details and brevity.⁹⁵

As to the three levels of mastery, several opinions are recorded in the MVŚ. The following is the first, apparently belonging to the compilers.⁹⁶

I. One who delights in brevity

The beginner stage starts from his going to the cemetery to contemplate on the signs of a corpse turning black-blue, etc., up to his shifting, through resolve, to his own body, visualizing it as turning black-blue etc., successively up to being a skeleton.

The mastery stage starts from visualizing the foot-bones of the skeleton, successively up to the skull; and then further excluding half of it and contemplating on only a half, and finally excluding one part of this and contemplating on just one part of it.

The absolute mastery stage starts when he, after the above contemplation of the signs of the *aśubhā*, focuses his mindfulness between the eyebrows, abiding in tranquility, and then further turns this mindfulness into *kāyānupaśyanā*, successively up to *dharmānupaśyanā*.

II. One who delights in details

The beginner stage starts from his going to the cemetery to contemplate on the signs of a corpse turning black-blue, etc., up to his gradually reducing the visualization to finally visualizing only his own skeleton.

The mastery stage starts when he then further excludes the footbones, successively up to visualizing the skull; and then further excluding half of this and contemplating on only a half, and finally excluding one part of this and contemplating on just one part of it.

The absolute mastery stage starts when he, after the above contemplation of the signs of the *aśubhā*, focuses his mindfulness between the eyebrows, abiding in tranquility, etc.

III. One who delights in both details and brevity

The beginner stage starts from his going to the cemetery to contemplate on the signs of a corpse turning black-blue, etc., up to his repeatedly expanding and reducing the visualizations, contemplating as before, to finally further reducing the visualization up to contemplating on just his own skeleton.

The mastery stage starts when he then further excludes the foot-bones, successively up to visualizing the skull; and then further excluding half of this and contemplating on only a half, and finally excluding one part of this and contemplating on just one part of it.

The absolute mastery stage starts when he, after achieving mastery, focuses his mindfulness between the eyebrows, abiding in tranquility, etc.

4. From the impure to the pure

4.1. Positive experience at the accomplishment of the *aśubhā*

It is stated in both the Theravāda and northern sources alike, that in the very practice of the *aśubhā* itself — when the practitioner has succeeded — there arises not just a sense of disenchantment of the impure, but also a positive experience of relief and great joy. It is for this reason that the *aśubhā* can lead — and often described specifically as a main practice leading — to the attainment of the first *dhyāna* wherein there are rapture, joy, happiness and one-pointed-ness of mind. In fact, to be able to transcend the ordinary mental state of the sensuality sphere characterized by sensuality and non-unification of the mind, one must transcend craving, and at the same time, one's mind must be sufficiently positive — calm, joyful and peaceful. And this is achieved by the practice of the *aśubhā*. If the practice necessarily results in a negative state of depression, then it is unimaginable that it can lead to the attainment of the first *dhyāna*. In fact, if we consider from the perspective of the eight liberations, the implication is that the *aśubhā* can even lead to the attainment of the second *dhyāna* (second liberation). The Theravāda *Atthasālinī* describes the arising of great joy in this context thus:

Although this cognitive object is loathsome, he sees the profit thus: "Through this path, I shall be emancipated from old-age-and-death". It is on account of this very [vision] and of the removal of the oppression

of the hindrances that rapture and mental ease arise. It is like [rapture arising] with regard to the heap of foulness, in one who sees the profit in throwing away the [withered] flowers, thinking, "Now, I shall get much payment." It is also like [that] in a sick person who has been relieved from the suffering of the sickness, when vomiting and purging.⁹⁷

Samghabhadra tells us that the practitioners dwelling in the hermitages (*araṇya*) describe the ultimate stage of accomplishment of the *aśubhā* as follows:

Those dwelling in the hermitages state thus: At the time of [the stage absolute mastery] of this contemplation, there arises a sign of ultimate [accomplishment]. That is, a sign of purity/beauty manifests all of a sudden (救爾現前). On account of this, breathing may become reduced, or a non-delighting thought may arise; because he is aware that he has reached the ultimate stage of the cultivation, and because when the sign of purity arises, his thought is disturbed. This is like the case of one who repeats the recitation of what he has already fully memorized.⁹⁸

What is particularly interesting is the mention that a sign of purity arises to the accomplished meditator on the *aśubhā*. Among other things, this means that provided the *aśubhā* is practiced properly and successfully, meditation on the impure and loathsome does not end up with a negative state of depression.

4.2. The "pure liberation" succeeding the *aśubhā*

We have seen (§ 2.4) that in the context of the eight liberations, the third, as opposed to the first two, is a visualization of the pure or beautiful (*śubha*). In the doctrine of the eight spheres of conquest too, the first four involve visualization of the impure, and the succeeding four are visualizations of the pure. In respect of the attainment of *dhyāna*, the first two liberations belong to the first two *dhyāna*-s, and the third belongs to the fourth *dhyāna*. The MVŚ explains why the third *dhyāna* does not constitute a liberation:

The third, "pure liberation", is taught for the purpose of "turning one's back on" (i.e., liberating) the thought of impurity". This is not designated with regard to the lower stages (*bhūmi*) because in them, on account of being overridden by the contemplation on the impure,

there is no extensiveness and clarity. In the third *dhyāna*, although the first two impure liberations are absent, there is the confusion by excellent happiness (*sukha*), and thus no extensiveness and clarity. It [too] therefore is not [so] designated.⁹⁹

Elsewhere, the same text offers a few more reasons:

In the first three *dhyāna*-s, there is disturbance on account of the presence of reasoning (*vitarka*), investigation (*vicāra*), rapture (*prīti*), happiness (*sukha*) and the in- and out-breathing; hence there is no pure liberation ... [designated].

Moreover, the third *dhyāna* is too far away from the sensuality sphere, and it is not the most excellent among the *dhyāna*-s; hence no liberation ...

Moreover, in the third *dhyāna*, there is the sensation of happiness which is the most excellent in samsaric existence, and this can make the practitioner become attached and confused; hence no liberation ...¹⁰⁰

In brief, it is in the fourth *dhyāna*, the most excellent of all *dhyāna*-s, that the "pure liberation" is to be cultivated. For, therein, all disturbances and agitation have come to cease: *Vitarka*, etc., have ceased — in particular, even the highest form of mundane happiness is transcended — breathing too has ceased. But why should one further cultivate this "pure liberation" to liberate the thought from the ideation of the impure? The MVŚ offers the following rationale:

- [1] The practitioner intends to test as to whether he has fully acquired the skillful roots. He reflects that this is the case only if no defilement is generated even when he contemplates on the pure.
- [2] His mind has been depressed or sunken while practicing the contemplation on the impure. On account of this, there is no progress in respect of the acquisition of the skillful *dharma*-s. To progress further, he takes up the contemplation on the pure. This is like the case of one who has been repeatedly contemplating on the loathsomeness of a corpse in the cemetery. His thought has become sunken, and to progress in the cultivation of the skillful, he needs to make his thought joyful by gaining sight of beautiful scenery in the parks or pleasant things in town.

- [3] Having practiced the contemplation on the impure for a long time, his thought has become attached (to the practice), and he cannot progress in cultivating the skillful. He must now leave aside such contemplation and practice the “pure liberation”.
- [4] He wants to prove to himself that his thought has gained stability and he will not retrogress: If even when his thought takes a pure cognitive object no defilement is generated, how much less still when it takes objects of a different (i.e., impure) type?
- [5] He wants to show that all is not capable of cultivating the “pure liberation”; only those reborn in the human world, after falling from among the gods who have excellent resolve and delight in the pure, are capable of doing so.

By way of illustrating the last point, the MVŚ goes on to relate the following story: A *bhikṣu* came to the Buddha, requesting to be provided with good-quality lodging. He demanded that the room must be thoroughly cleaned; incense must be burnt and flowers scattered, the mattress and pillow must be soft, etc; otherwise he would not accept the lodging. The Buddha instructed Ānanda to comply with all these demands. That *bhikṣu* got up in the middle of the night and generated the “pure liberation”, and on this basis, also the other liberations; having exhausted the outflows he attained *arhat*-hood. He then further applied effort to develop psychic powers with which he flew away early in the morning. The Buddha explained to Ānanda that that *bhikṣu* had come from among the gods who had excellent resolve and delight in the pure. Were he not given the good quality and beautiful lodging, he would not have been able to cultivate the “pure liberation” and finally attain *arhat*-hood.¹⁰¹

The above rationale, together with the story, serves to highlight the Abhidharma recognition that, the “pure liberation” can serve as an important practice — at least for certain type of beings — for spiritual progress towards *arhat*-hood. In general, for those who take up the practice of the *aśubhā*, the contemplation on the pure can have tremendous psycho-spiritual significance. This practice is also one of the important demonstrations¹⁰² that Buddhist methods of spiritual cultivation are not necessarily one-sidedly “negative”, negating the human sense of the aesthetic altogether.¹⁰³

In this connection, the **Dharmatrāta-dhyāna-sūtra*, which expounds the meditation tradition of the Sarvāstivāda *yogācāra*-s, contains an interesting account of the *aśubhā*. This text describes progress of meditative praxis in four stages: (i) retrogression (*hāna-bhāgīya*), (ii) staying (*sthiti-bhāgīya*), (iii) higher distinction (*viśeṣa-bhāgīya*) and (iv) penetration (*nirvedha-bhāgīya*).¹⁰⁴ Each stage is discussed under two sections: (a) preparatory path (方便道, *prayoga-mārga*) and (b) path of distinctive progress (勝進道, **uttāra/viśeṣa-mārga*). The discussion on the *aśubhā*, however, is somewhat abbreviated compared to that on the *ānāpānasmṛti*. Under the preparatory path of the stage of higher distinction, the practice of the *aśubhā* is described as being followed by that of the “pure liberation” — even though this section is wholly devoted to the *aśubhā*, and not at all in the context of the eight liberation:

The contemplation of the impure counteracts,
 The ideation of the pure with regard to the body.
 Not seeking this, one removes sensual greed,
 Reflecting and cultivating disenchantment.
 There is further the pure (*śubha*) counteraction
 Which does not make the ideation of disenchantment.
 This is the expedience of the “pure liberation”,
 [With it] the wise opens his wisdom-eye:
 That is, in the object of the impure [contemplation],
 The white bones, light [is visualized] to issue.
 From this, successively, wonderful gem-trees,
 Of blue, yellow, red or white colours,
 And likewise branches, leaves and flowers,
 [And also] excellent garments, pearl-necklaces (*muktā-hāra*) of
 various wonderful colours
 — This is the sign of the “pure liberation” expedience.
 Adornments manifest themselves
 All over the impure body,
 In steps increasing progressively,¹⁰⁵
 [With] wisdom-lamps lit by *samādhi*
 Coming out from the one body,
 Tall, broad and all pervasive.
 Likewise are the adornments
 Issuing from all other bodies.
 This is an expedience [of] the *aśubhā*,
 — The “pure liberation”.¹⁰⁶

Similar descriptions of the contemplation of the pure, as necessarily following that of the impure, is also found in some other *dhyāna* texts translated by Kumārajīva. They further speak, in a similar manner, of the positive signs at the accomplishment of the *aśubhā*. The following description is from the **Dhyāna-samādhi-sūtra* (坐禪三昧經):

When, [at the last stage of the *aśubhā* practice,] one attains *dhyāna* (禪定), three signs appear: [1] the body is at ease, soft and light; [2] light issues from the white bones, of the colour of white shells; [3] the *citta* is able to abide in quiescence. This is the contemplation of the pure.

At this time, he has acquired the *citta* pertaining to the fine-materiality sphere. ... When the *citta* has acquired this [*dhyāna*-]*dharma* and the body is in the sensuality sphere, its four Great Elements are extremely soft and pleasant, the [body's] colours are lustrous, bright and agreeable — this is ease (the first sign). The second [sign] is that in the sign of the white bones of the previous contemplation of the bones, light [now] shines forth everywhere, exclusively white. The third [sign] is that his *citta* abides in one place. This is called the contemplation on the pure ... The above three signs are known only by [the meditator] himself, and not visible to others.¹⁰⁷

In the **Mahāprajñāpāramitā-upadeśa*, although the contemplation on the impure and that on the pure are discussed within the context of the eight liberations,¹⁰⁸ eight spheres of conquests and ten spheres of totality (*krtsnāyatana*),¹⁰⁹ it nonetheless also treats the contemplation on the pure as subsumable under the *aśubhā*, and describes the former as the continuation of the latter practice by visualizing light emitting from the white bones, pervading everywhere. It likewise states that this “pure liberation” results in the meditator's experience of rapture and happiness within his whole body:

The contemplation on the impure is twofold: 1. impure, 2. pure. In the contemplation on the impure, there are two liberations and four spheres of conquest. In the contemplation on the pure, there are one liberation, four spheres of conquests and eight spheres of totality. ...

Further, the practitioner first contemplates his body as impure, and, he focuses within his thought all the internal and external impurities pertaining to the bodily *dharma*-s. At that time, disgust (*nirveda*) arises, and greed, hatred and ignorance become thinned. Thereupon, he is startled and realizes: “I must have been without eyes; this being thus, how could I become attached?”

He then concentrates his thought to contemplate on reality, so as not to repeat the same mistake. His thought having been tamed (調柔, **dānta*), he visualizes that the skin, flesh, blood, marrow and [all other] impurities are removed from his body, and only white bones remain. He focuses the thought on the skeleton. When the thought is scattered, he makes it concentrate again.

As a result of having concentrated his thought profoundly, he sees light issuing from the white bones, like [the colour of] a shell or conch, capable of illuminating internal and external things. This is the initial gateway of the “pure liberation”. He then visualizes that the skeleton is dissipated, and only the light from the bones is visible, and grasps the sign of the pure (淨潔; *śubha*) outside.

Further, he grasps these signs and focuses his thought on the pure: precious things like diamond (*vajra*), pearl, gold and silver; or pure earth; or pure water; or smoke-free and fuel-free pure fire; or dust-free pure wind; blue colours;¹¹⁰ yellow colours like *campaka* flowers; red colours like red lotuses; white colours like snows; etc., — accordingly as these various colours, each has pure radiance. At the time, the practitioner experiences rapture and happiness which pervade the whole body. This is called the “pure liberation”. As it takes pure cognitive objects, it is called “pure liberation”; as the experience of rapture and happiness pervades the whole body, it is said that [the practitioner] “realizes through the body” (*kāyena sāksāt-karoti*). It is called a “liberation” because, when this mental happiness is acquired, one turns one’s back on the fivefold sensuality and does not delight in them anymore.¹¹¹

5. Is the *aśubhā* of the nature of an erroneous illusion?

From the above discussions, it should be abundantly clear that resolve (*adhimukti/adhimokṣa*), conceived as a specific mental force which enables the mind to be completely resolved and determined with regard to a particular state or mode of being of a phenomenon, is indispensable for any meditative practice involving visualization. This is particularly the case with the *aśubhā*. Another term of importance in the Abhidharma system of meditative praxis is “mental application” (*manaskāra/manasikāra*). This term, as used in the context of meditation, however, is not necessarily confined to the specifically Abhidharma notion of its being one of the ten universal thought-concomitants (*mahābhūmikadharmā*). In the meditative context here, it is to be understood as having

the sense of “meditative reflection”, as in: “one reflects properly (*yoniso manaskaroti*)”. In the Sūtra, it is sometimes used in an even more general sense of “paying attention”, as when the Buddha says: “O *bhikṣu*-s, I shall teach you a doctrine ... So, listen, and pay attention well and properly (*dharmam vo bhikṣavo deśayiṣyāmi | ... tac chṛṇuta sādhu ca suṣṭhu ca manasikuruta*)”. However, it would seem that, even in this context too, the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharmikas take mental application (as much as resolve) as that specified as a universal thoughtconcomitant. Thus, the MVŚ states, in the usual Abhidharmic manner, that “[the *aśubhā*] is the non-greed conjoined with visualization (假想; *saṃjñā*), *adhimukti* and *manaskāra* (*adhimukti-manaskāra*) ...”¹¹²

Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma distinguishes three types of mental application:¹¹³

- I. Mental application to intrinsic characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa-manaskāra*) — e.g., that which reflects: “*rūpa* has the characteristic of deterioration and resistance (*rūpaṇa*)”.
- II. Mental application to common characteristic (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa-manaskāra*) — that which is conjoined with the sixteen modes of understanding (*ākāra*) subsumed under the Four Noble Truths.
- III. Mental application of resolve (*adhimukti-manaskāra*) — This is mental application that proceeds from *adhimukti*, on account of which one’s mind becomes totally resolved, determined and convinced, with regard to a particular state of a given phenomenon that one has intended to experience.

I and II are called mental application to the real” (*tattva-manaskāra*) because they reflect on the real states of things. This is in contrast to III which is so specifically labeled because it makes the mind resolved and become convinced of a particular state which is other than the real or actual state/mode of a phenomena under investigation. It is of the nature of a constructive imagination, and is the *sine qua non* for the visualization in the *aśubhā*, the four immeasurables (*apramāṇa*), the spheres of conquest, the spheres of totality, etc.

In the MVŚ, there are four opinions concerning the relationship between these three mental applications and the arising of the Noble Path, of which the compilers endorses 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-sahagatam smṛtibodhyaṅgam 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-manaskāra* which in turn induces the Noble Path. (iv) Immediately after *sāmānyalakṣaṇa-manaskāra*, the Noble Path arises; and conversely.¹¹⁴

It is clear that for the Sarvāstivāda, a meditation, such as the *aśubhā*, which operates by virtue of a mental application of resolve, can lead to the attainment of spiritual fruition. In any case, although it is not a mental application to the real, it nonetheless is not an “illusion” in the ordinary sense — characterized by topsy-turvi-ness (*viparyāsa*). An experience of the 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 of insight. From this perspective, the genuine spiritual experiences 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 unenlightened worldling in a non-concentrated (*asamāhita*) state of consciousness.

The conception of reality in the Mahāyāna Yogācāra particularly developed along this line of thinking. As a matter of fact, one of the major proofs for its central doctrine of “cognition-only” (*vijñaptimātra*) is precisely based on the meditative experience of the *aśubhā*. Asaṅga’s **Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* argues thus:

Through this scriptural authority (*āgama*), the logical reasoning (*yukti*) has also been shown. For, whatever knowable-image (*shes ba’i gzugs brnyan; *jñeya-pratibimba*) — [a corpse] turning blackblue, etc., — that is seen, is none other than [one’s own] *citta* that is seen; it is not a distinct object (*don gzhan; arthāntara*), black-blue, etc. By means of this logical reasoning, the *bodhisattva* is able to infer, with regard to all cognitions (*rnam par rig pa; vijñapti* — i.e., all phenomenal existents),¹¹⁵ the fact of mere-cognition. ... By means

of this reference, the fact of mere-cognition can be inferred by the *bodhisattva* even when he has not attained the knowledge of reality (*de kho na shes pa; *tattva-jñāna*).¹¹⁶

A stanza in this text (in the Chinese, but not the Tibetan version) shows, once again, how important this meditative experience through resolve is, as a support of their doctrine of *viñaptimātra*:

With regard to a given thing, the *yogācāra*-s
Each generates a different resolve (*adhimukti*);
[Yet] each is able to accomplish what is [desired] to be seen.
It is thus known that the object grasped (*grāhya*) is nothing but mere-cognition.¹¹⁷

At any rate, the Sarvāstivādins are quite articulate in their arguments that the meditative experience in the *aśubhā* is not an upside-down understanding in the ordinary sense. Whatever is upside-down is unskillful in nature and leads to defilements; but the *aśubhā* is morally skilful, being of the nature of non-greed, and in fact leads to spiritual attainment. Although it cannot actually abandon defilements (not being a mental application on the reals and not bearing on the totality of things), it is efficacious in their suppression.¹¹⁸ Moreover, what is seen in the *aśubhā* has a relative reality — not absolutely unreal — since it is ultimately based on some bodily parts that have been seen. In fact, for the Sarvāstivāda, no imagination or visualization is at all possible unless it is ultimately based on some reals. These standpoints are underscored in the following discussion in the MVŚ:

Question: The contemplation that the room is filled with bones, etc., — what does this *aśubhā* take as its cognitive objects?

According to some: It takes the bones, etc., in one's own body as cognitive objects.

According to others: It has the bones, etc., that have been seen in a charnel ground.

Another opinion: It takes the matter, space-elements, in the room as its objects.

Comment (of the compilers): It should be explained thus: This is a visualization; there is no fault in the non-greed, conjoined with resolve and mental application, taking whatever cognitive object that it pleases.

Question: This visualizes all that is non-skeleton, etc., as skeleton, etc., — is this not topsy-turvy (*viparīta*)?

Answer: Even though it is not [an experience] of things truly as they are (*yathābhūta*), it is nevertheless not topsy-turvy for the following reasons: [i] it is skilful; [ii] it is brought about through proper mental application (*yoniśo manaskāra*); [iii] it has the skilful root, non-greed, as its intrinsic nature; [iv] it constitutes the preparatory practice (*prayoga*) for bringing about the Noble Path; [v] it can suppress defilements; [vi] it effects a desirable fruit (*iṣṭa-phala*).

According to some: This *aśubhā* is also said to be topsy-turvy, since it visualizes what are not impure as impure.

Question: If so, why is it not unskillful?

Answer: What is said to be unskillful is on account of two reasons: (1) topsy-turvy in respect of cognitive objects; (2) topsy-turvy in respect of intrinsic nature. This *aśubhā* is topsy-turvy in respect of cognitive objects, not in respect of intrinsic nature; hence it is not unskillful.

Moreover, what is said to be unskillful is on account of two reasons: (1) topsy-turvy in respect of cognitive objects; (2) topsy-turvy in respect of intention (*āśaya*). This *aśubhā* is topsy-turvy in respect of cognitive objects, not in respect of intention; hence it is not unskillful.

The following explanations by Saṃghabhadra may serve to further clarify some of the points briefly mentioned in the above discussion. In particular, Saṃghabhadra stresses that the *aśubhā* is not topsy-turvy because the visualization is done intentionally and with full awareness of its purpose. Moreover its practice actually yields a spiritually profitable outcome; it is a spiritually efficacious skill in means (巧方便; **upāya-kauśalya* / **kauśalya* — an interesting usage by a non-Mahayāna Ābhidharmika), rather than an unskillful act:

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 visualizes the various

impurities. This does not come under erroneous mental application, as it is opposed to the nature of defilements. In fact, what is erroneous/ upside-down cannot accomplish what one has intended. This [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 this not 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, 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,¹¹⁹ and is thus able to subdue the defilements, how can it be topsyturvy? The power of this contemplation can suppress the defilements rendering them incapable of manifestation for the time being — since it has such power of a skill in means, how can it be unskillful?¹²⁰

6. Concluding remarks

According to both the northern and Theravāda traditions, the practice of the *aśubhā* had produced some undesirable effect on some monks who as a result committed suicide. This tradition notwithstanding, the survey above shows that the *aśubhā* had continuously and consistently been emphasized in the general Buddhist tradition, and elaborately developed both doctrinally and as a system of meditative praxis. In this connection, the doctrine of a type of advanced practitioners, including *arhat*-s, called *cetanā-dharman*, is noteworthy. We have pointed out above that this doctrine is connected with the tradition concerning the *aśubhā*. It suggests that among the ancient practitioners, there was (and will always be) a particular psychological type in whom the feeling of intense disgust generated from the *aśubhā* could trigger off the thought of suicide. It is not the *aśubhā* itself that was to be blamed for whatever negative effect it might induce. Seen from this perspective, we can understand why the ancient practitioners and the theoreticians seemed not only not to have shunned the meditation as undesirable, but also in fact continued to uphold its importance, prescribing it in various forms and numerous contexts.

It is taught that the *aśubhā*, though indispensably relying on *adhimokṣa* for its profound visualization, is not a case of cognitive error (topsy-turviness) which necessarily generates defilements and unsatisfactoriness. This is because it is practiced with a positive spiritual intention and proper awareness. Moreover it is skillful in nature, having as it does the skillful root, non-greed, as its intrinsic nature. Although it does not abandon defilements directly, it nonetheless suppresses them. It serves as a preparatory cultivation for not only the attainment of the first two *dhyāna*-s, but also of higher spiritual progress in general. Saṃghabhadra highlights the fact that such an experience, skillful in nature, based on awareness, and spiritually positively efficacious, can hardly be regarded as an illusion or being topsy-turvy in the ordinary sense.

The doctrine of the eight liberations and spheres of conquest, in which the *aśubhā* is followed by the practice of contemplation on the pure/beautiful is interesting. For one thing, it shows the profound wisdom and experience of the tradition of Buddhist meditation which prescribes the latter as a psychologically counteractive practice for, and transcendence of, the former which has been preoccupied with the experience of disgust. At the same time, both traditions agree in stating that the *aśubhā* itself (even without the counteraction of the *śubhā* meditation), at its final stage of accomplishment, actually results in a positive state of ease, joy and calm. It is in fact for this reason that the *aśubhā* can serve as an important preparation for the entry into the first two *dhyāna*-s. According to Saṃghabhadra, it is a common assertion by the hermitage meditators that at that moment, “a sign of the beautiful” manifests spontaneously. It is probably this tradition of ancient *yogācāra*-s that came to prescribe the meditation on the pure — even outside the context of the eight liberations and spheres of conquest — at the last stage of the *aśubhā* contemplating on the white bones. It proceeds to be a visualization on a very grand and majestic scale: Light is visualized to emanate from the white bones, pervading everywhere, and with it is the manifestation of a host of signs of beauty, purity and adornment. The contemplation on the pure/beautiful has now become an integral part (no more just a counteraction) of the *aśubhā*; the contemplation on the impure and loathsome leads to the profound spiritual vision of the pure and beautiful.

- AKB = *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*. Ed Pradhan P. 2nd edn. (Patna, 1975)
- AVN = *Arthaviniścaya-sūtra-nibandhana*. Ed., Samtani, NH. (Patna, 1971)
- DDS = **Dharmatrāta-dhyāna-sūtra* 達磨多羅禪經 T15, no. 618.
- DSS = *Dharma-skandha-śāstra* 阿毘達磨法蘊足論 T26, no. 1537.
- MVŚ = *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā* 大毗婆沙論 T27, no. 1545.
- Ny = **Nyāyānusāra* 順正理論 T29, no. 1562.
- SgPŚ = *Samgītiparyāya-śāstra* T26, no. 1536.
- ŚrBh = *Śrāvakabhūmi, the Second Chapter, revised Sanskrit Text and Japanese Translation*. Śrāvakabhūmi Study group, The Institute for Comprehensive Studies of Buddhism, Taishō University (Tokyo, 2007).
- Vism = *The Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa*. Ed., Rhys Davids CAF (London, 1975).
- Vy = *Sphuṭārthā Abhidharmakośabhāṣya-vyākhyā*. Ed., Wogihara U (Tokyo, 1971).

- 1 MVŚ, 2a.
- 2 MVŚ, 3b. Also cf. AKB, 2: *prajñāmalā sānucarābhīdharmaḥ | ... amaleti anāsravā | ... yāpi ca śrutacintābhāvanāmayī sāsraṇā prajñopapattipratilambhikā ca sānucarā | yac ca sāstram asyāḥ prāpti-artham anāsravāyāḥ prajñāyāḥ | tad api tatsambhārabhāvād abhidharma iti ucyate |*
- 3 Cf. AKB, 2: ... *dharmalakṣaṇam vā prati abhimukho dharmā ity abhidharmaḥ |*
- 4 The term *anupaśyanā* may be rendered as “consideration”, “review”, etc., Xuan Zang renders it as 循觀 of which 循 (‘following’, ‘circulating’, ‘(moving) in an order/sequence’, etc) is clearly meant to signify the prefix, *-anu*. My rendering of the term here reflects Xuan Zang’s understanding.
- 5 若具正勤正知正念, 除世貪憂。 Cf. *Majjhima* iii, 91: *tassa evam appamattassa ātāpino pahitattassa viharato ye te gehasitā sarasamkappā te pahīyanti |*
- 6 Cf. *Samyuktāgama*, T2, 171b, *sūtra* no. 610; *Dīgha*, ii, 294; *Majjhima*, iii, 90; etc.
- 7 塵垢。 Cf. AVN, 24: *rajo malam*. Pāli here has *taco*.
- 8 ‘The store for raw (/undigested) food’.
- 9 ‘The store for matured (/digested) food’.
- 10 DSS, T26, 476a. Some of the items are uncertain. 肚脂, if non-corrupt, would lit. mean “stomach fat” which is ambiguous, and does not seem to fit in properly in this position. In the Sarvāstivāda tradition, the number is consistently 36 — E.g., cf. MVŚ, 712c: 於此身中, 三十六種諸不淨物。 In the Pāli *sutta*-s, 31 parts are enumerated within the *sutta* itself. In the DSS here, the 36 parts are enumerated not in the quoted *sūtra*, but in the commentary part. The *Samyuktāgama*, no. 610, too, does not enumerate the parts. This DSS list is closer to that in AVN (see *infra*), which also gives 36 items, than to the Pāli list. We can compare this list to the list in the SrBh, II, 58, 60:
- [1] *keśā*, [2] *romāṇi*, [3] *nakhā*, [4] *dantā*, [5] *rajaḥ*, [6] *malam*, [7] *tvak*, [8] *māmsam*, [9] *asthi*, [10] *snāyu*, [11] *sirā*, [12] *vṛkkā*, [13] *hrdayam*, [14] *plīhakaṃ*, [15] *klomakaṃ*, [16] *antrāṇi*, [17] *antraguṇāḥ*, [18] *āmāśayaḥ*, [19] *pakvāśayaḥ*. [20] *yakṛt*, [21] *purīṣam*, [22] *aśru*, [23] *svedaḥ*, [24] *khetāḥ*, [25] *śiṅghānakaḥ*, [26] *vasā*, [27] *lasikā*, [28] *majjā*, [29] *medaḥ*, [30] *pittam*, [31] *śleṣmā*, [32] *pūyaḥ*, [33] *śonitam*, [34] *mastakaṃ*, [35] *mastakaluṅgam*, [36] *prasrāvāḥ*.
- **Dharmatrāta-dhyāna-sūtra*, T15, no. 618, 318b, gives the following 36: 髮毛爪齒骨, 筋肉厚薄皮, 肪[月*冊]髓腦膜, 脾腎心肝肺, 胞胃大小腸, 屎尿膿涕唾, 垢汗諸血淚, 黃白及痰癢, 三十六不淨。
- 11 All the terms preceding “*vipaśyanā*” are understood as synonyms of the latter. See SgPŚ, T26, 375b.
- 12 DSS, 476a.
- 13 The fourfold *samādhi-bhāvanā* are: 1. that which conduces to the abandonment of greed (*rāga-prahāṇa*); 2. that which conduces to “happy dwelling in the present life”; 3. that which conduces to the obtainment of knowledge and vision (*jñānadarśana-pratilambha*); 4. that which conduces to the obtainment of wisdom (*prajñā-pratilambha*).
- 14 The passage is quoted from AVN, 23–25: *iha bhikṣavo bhikṣur aranyagato vā vrkṣamūlagato vā śūnyāgāragato vā | imam eva kāyam ūrdhvaṃ yāvotpādatalādadhāḥ keśamastakāt*

*tvakparyantam yathāvasthitam yathāpranīhitam pūrṇam nānāprakārasyāsucer
yathābhūtam samyak prajñayā pratyavekṣate | santi asmin kāye keśā romāni nakhā dantā
rajo malaṃ tvak maṃsam asthi snāyu śirā vrkkā hṛdayam plīhā klomakam antrāni
antraguṇā āmāśayaḥ pakvāśaya udaryam yakṛt purīṣam aśru svedaḥ khedaḥ simhānako
vasā lasikā majjā medaḥ pittaṃ śleṣmāpūyam śonitam mastakam mastakaluṅgam itī
pūrṇam nānāprakārasyāsucer yathābhūtam pratyavekṣate | tadyathā bhikṣava ubhayaṭo
dvāravinirmuktam koṣṭhāgāraṃ paripūrṇam nānāprakārasya sasyajātasya dhāṇyat
ilasarsapamudgayavamāśāṇām | tac cakṣumān puruṣo vyavalokayan jānīyād imāni
śūkadhānyāni | imāni haladhānyāni | evam eva bhikṣavo bhikṣur imam eva kāyam
yathāvasthitam yathāpranīhitam yavat pratyavekṣate | iyaṃ bhikṣavaḥ samādhibhāvanā
āsevitā bhāvitā bahulikṛtā kāmarāgaprahāṇāya samvartate | Cf. also Majjhima-nikāya,
iii, 89 and 90 f; Dīgha, ii, Mahāsatipatthāna-sutta, 293 f; Vism, 8.42 ff.*

¹⁵ Also cf. notes 7 and 10.

¹⁶ MVŚ. 204a–b: 如契經說：有諸苾芻，居阿練若，或在樹下，或在靜室；結加趺坐，端身正願，住對面念，乃至廣說。 Cf. Majjhima-nikāya, iii, 89: *idha bhikkhave bhikkhu araṇṇagato vā rukkhamūlagato vā suññāgāragato vā nisīdati pallaṅkam ābhujitvā ujum kāyam paṇidhāya parimukkham satim upatthapetvā ...*

¹⁷ E.g., SgPŚ, T26, 407b: 結加趺坐，端直其身，捨異攀緣，住對面念。

¹⁸ Conze, E, ed., and tr., *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Roma, 1957), 27.

¹⁹ T7, no. 220, 980a.

²⁰ MVŚ, 204a–c.

²¹ MVŚ, 204c.

²² *Jñānaprasthāna-śāstra*, 926c; MVŚ, 205a.

²³ MVŚ, 205a.

²⁴ MVŚ, 205a.

²⁵ MVŚ, 205a–b.

²⁶ *Majjhima*, iii, 89 ff.

²⁷ MVŚ, 205b.

²⁸ *Majjhima*, iii, 91: *puna ca param bhikkhave bhikkhu seyyathāpi passeyya sarīram sīvathikāyam chadditam , ekāhamatam vā dvīhamatam vā tīhamatam vā uddhumātakam vinīlakam vipubbakajātam | so imam eva kāyam upasaṃharati |*

²⁹ E.g., *Majjhima*, i, 424: *asubham rāhula bhāvanam bhāvehi | asubham hi te rāhula bhāvanam bhāvayato yo rāgo so pahiyissati |*

³⁰ E.g., *Samyuktāgama*, T2, 207b; *Vinaya*, iii, 69 f, *Mahāvibhaṅga*, *pārājika* III: *te ca bhante bhikkhū ... anekākāravokāram asubhabhāvanānuयोगam anuyuttā viharanti , ... te bhikkhū sakena kāyena atṭiyantā harāyantā jīgucchantā attanāpi attānam jīvitā voropenti aññamaññaṃ pi jīvitā voropenti | ... Migalaṇḍiko samanakkuttako ... ekam pi bhikkhum ekāhena jīvitā voropesi ... satthim pi bhikkhū ekāhena jīvitā voropesi | sādhu bhante bhagavā aññaṃ pariyāyam ācikkhatu yathāyaṃ bhikkhu-saṃgho aññāya saṅghaheyyā ti | ... bhagavā bhikkhū āmantesi | ayam pi kho bhikkhave ānāpānasati-samādhi bhāvito bahulikato santo c'eva paṇito ca ... |*

Also cf. other Vinaya accounts preserved in Chinese: *Mahīśāsaka-vinaya*, T22, 7c; *Dharmagupta-vinaya*, T22, 576b; *Mahāsāṃghika-vinaya* T22, 254c; *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya*, T23, 8a–b; etc.

- ³¹ *Vinaya*, iii, 69.
- ³² 得道果. It is of course still debatable as to whether “fruit of the path” necessarily means *arhat*-hood. But the implication is strong when this narration is considered together with the Pāli version which speaks of the *vītarāga*.
- ³³ T22. No. 1421, 7b.
- ³⁴ The six types of *arhat*-s are: (1) *parihāṇa-dharman* — those susceptible to retrogression. (2) *cetanā-dharman*. (3) *anurakṣaṇā-dharman* — those capable of preserving their spiritual attainment by constantly guarding against the loss of what they have attained. (4) *sthitākampya* — those who remain stable in their stage of attainment, with neither progress nor retrogression. (5) *pravedhanā-dharman* — those capable of penetrating the state of the *akopya-dharman arhat* which they can attain quickly. (6) *akopya-dharman* — those of an unshakable nature; they are the highest type, not susceptible to retrogression. (MVŚ, 319c; etc.)
- ³⁵ E.g., MVŚ, 320b.
- ³⁶ 《阿毘曇甘露味論》，T28, no. 1553, 973c: 云何思法? 軟智軟精進, 勤觀身不淨可惡, 思惟自滅身; 是思法。
- ³⁷ 《阿毘曇心論經》，T28, no. 1551, 851a: 若人軟智軟方便, 常厭惡身, 念欲壞滅; 彼死成就思法。
- ³⁸ Ny, 710a: 言思法者, 謂有獲得如是類根, 安住此根, 能於諸欲極多厭惡。由斯厭惡, 起自害思。或此類根, 雖性味鈍, 而多緣力之所集成; 於加行中念力堅固, 多住厭觀少有欣情。恒作是思: “勿遇病等, 便於正念有所忘失, 於加行中致有慢緩; 由加行慢緩, 令我有退失。” 由斯籌慮, 起自害思。…
- ³⁹ MVŚ, 35b, 33b.
- ⁴⁰ Vy, 54 f.
- ⁴¹ *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, 55.
- ⁴² *Vism*, 178.
- ⁴³ T32, no. 1648, 424c–426b enumerates and explains in the same order: 縫脹, 青淤, 潰爛, 斬斫離散, 食噉, 棄擲, 殺戮棄擲, 血塗染, 虫臭, 骨。However, earlier on, at 411a, it enumerates in a slightly different order: 十不淨想: 縫脹想, 青淤想, 爛想, 棄擲想, 鳥獸食噉想, 身肉分張想, 斬斫離散想, 赤血塗染想, 虫臭想, 骨想。
- ⁴⁴ *Vism*, 193 f. Also cf. **Vimuktimārga*, 426b, which mentions, in an abbreviated manner, that the 10 forms correspond to the counteraction of 10 different types of greed concerning the body.
- ⁴⁵ AKB, 337 f: *saṃkalā sarvarāgiṇām ||9|| asthisamkalāyām hi sarvaṃ etac caturvidhaṃ rāga(va)stu nāstīti* ,
- ⁴⁶ Ny, 671a–c. From here, Saṃghabhadra proceeds to expound on the contemplation of the skeleton, differentiating the three levels of its mastery. (See also, §3.)
- ⁴⁷ *Dīgha*, ii, 295 ff.
- ⁴⁸ *Majjhima*, iii, 92.
- ⁴⁹ Ny, 671b–c.
- ⁵⁰ ŚrBh, II, 64: ... *maithunarāgāc caturvidhā rāgapratisaṃyuktād varṇarāga-saṃsthānarāga-sparśarāgopacārarāga-pratisaṃyuktāc cittaṃ viśodhayati | tatra yadā vinīlakam vā vipūyakam vā vipaṭumakam vā vyādhmātakam vā vikhāditakam vā*

manasikaroti tadā varṇarāgāc cittaṃ viśodhayati | yadā punar vilohitakaṃ manasikaroti tadā saṃsthānarāgāc cittaṃ viśodhayati | yadā punar asthi vā saṅkalikāṃ vāsthiśaṅkalikāṃ vā manasikaroti tadā sparśarāgāc cittaṃ viśodhayati yadā vikṣiptakaṃ manasikaroti tadopacārarāgāc cittaṃ viśodhayati | evaṃ sa maithunarāgāc cittaṃ viśodhayati ||

⁵¹ T28, no. 1548, 613a–614b.

⁵² 此法本無而生, 已生還滅。

⁵³ T28, no. 1548, 614a–b.

⁵⁴ The *Dasuttara-sutta* (*Dīgha*, iii, 289, 291) enumerates it under (nine and ten) things to be produced (*nava dhammā uppādetabbā, dasa dhammā uppādetabbā*).

⁵⁵ *Vism*, 341 ff.

⁵⁶ SgPŚ, 423c–424a: “Why are these five called ‘ideations which bring liberation to maturity’? *Vimukti*-s are threefold: *citta-vimukti*, *prajñā-vimukti*, *asamskrta-vimukti*. These five ideations generate the *samskrta vimukti*-s which have not yet been generated, develop, consolidate and expand those which have been generated. As a result, the *asamskrta vimukti*-s come to be swiftly realized. For this reason, they are called ideations which bring liberation to maturity’.”

⁵⁷ SgPŚ, 423c.

⁵⁸ In the Sarvāstivāda, a “mode of activity” is the mode in which a mental factor understands its cognitive object; it is the thought-concomitant, *prajñā*.

⁵⁹ MVŚ, 838a.

⁶⁰ T28, 638a.

⁶¹ *Dīgha*, iii, 243.

⁶² In the Theravāda: *Mahānidāna-sutta*, *Dīgha*, ii, 70 f; *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, *Dīgha*, ii, 111 f; *Mahāsakuludāyī-sutta*, *Majjhima*, ii, 12 f; *Atthasālinī*, 190; etc. In the Sarvāstivāda, references are numerous, especially in the Abhidharma texts: *Dīrghāgama*, T1, 490c, 489b; *Madhyamāgama*, T1, 582a, 694a f; SgPŚ, T26, 443a–b, *Prakarāṇa-pāda*, T26, 712c–713a; MVŚ, 434b–c; **Śāriputrābhidharma*, T28, 639c–642a; **Amṛtarasa-śāstra*, T28, 976a; etc.

⁶³ *Atthasālinī*, 190. The **Śāriputrābhidharma*’s explanation (T28, 639c640a) is close to this: 心向彼, 尊上彼, 傾向彼; 以彼解脫。

⁶⁴ T28, 640a: 何謂得解脫? 心向彼, 尊上彼, 傾向彼, 以彼為解脫。是名解脫。

⁶⁵ MVŚ, 727a.

⁶⁶ AKB, 455.

⁶⁷ MVŚ, 434b–c. Other explanations are also cited therein.

⁶⁸ *Majjhima*, ii, 12 f.

⁶⁹ *Papañcasūdanī*, iii, 255: *ettha ajjhatam kes’ādisu nīlakasiṇādivasena uppāditam (rūpajjhānam) rūpam tad assa atthi ti rūpī |*

⁷⁰ *Atthasālinī*, 190 f.

⁷¹ *Loc. cit.* *ajjhattamhi nīla-parikammam karonto kese vā pitte vā akkhitarākāya vā karoti pītakaparikammam karonto medde vā chaviyā vā akkhīnam pītakaṭṭhāne vā karoti lohītaparikammam karonto mamse vā lohite vā jivhāya vā hatthatalapādātalesu vā akkhīnam rattatṭhāne vā karoti | odātaparikammam karonto atṭhimhi vā dante vā nakhe vā akkhīnam setakaṭṭhāne vā karoti evaṃ parikammam katvā uppannajjhānasamañīnam*

*sandhāy' etam vuttam | rūpāni passatī ti | bahiddhā pi nīlakasiṇādi-rūpāni jhānacakkhunā
passati | iminā ajhattabahiddhā-vatthukesu kasīnesu jhānapaṭilābho dassito |*

⁷² Ny, 722b–c.

⁷³ *Papañcasūdanī*, 256; *Atthasālinī*, 191.

⁷⁴ *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, *Dīgha*, *Mahāsakuludāyī-sutta*, *Majjhima*, ii, 13 f;
Dhammasaṅgānī, 223 f; *Atthasālinī*, 187 ff; etc.

⁷⁵ CAF Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Psychological Ethics* (London, 1974) 58, note 3. The ancient texts in the northern tradition, of course, already interpret in this manner — E.g., cf., **Mahāprajñāpāramitā-upadeśa*, T25, no. 1509, 215a.

⁷⁶ T26, no. 1542, 713a: 內有色想, 觀外色少, 若好顯色, 若惡顯色; 於彼諸色勝知勝見。具如是想, 是初勝處。AKB, 457: *adhyātmam rūpasamjñī bahirdhā rūpāni paśyati parītāni suvarṇāni durvarṇāni | tāni khalu rūpāṇy abhibhūya jānāty abhibhūya paśyatītyevamsamjñī bhavatīdam prathamam abhibhv-āyatanam* .

⁷⁷ AKB, 456: *kāmāvacaram eṣāṃ rūpāyatanam ālambanam amanojñam manojñam ca yāthāyogam* The spheres of conquest, though similar to the liberations, are distinguished from the latter: In the latter, one is only liberated in the sense of being able to turn one's back on the objects. In the former, one conquers the objects and attains mastery over them — One can resolve on the object as one wishes, and no defilement will arise with regard to the object. (AKB, 457: *ebhī tv ālambanābhibhavanam yatheccham adhimokṣāt kleśānutpādāc ca*)

⁷⁸ Vy, 689.

⁷⁹ See the remarks in the *Pāli-English Dictionary* (PTS) on the fluctuating connotation of this term as a colour.

⁸⁰ SgPŚ, T26, 443a–c.

⁸¹ Also cf. AKB, 455: *prathamau dvau vimokṣāv aśubhā-svabhāvau* .

⁸² See also MVŚ, 873b; AKB, 457.

⁸⁸ The **Śāriputrābhīdharma* (T28, no. 1548, 643b) gives a very similar list of 10: *aśubhā*, **āhāre pratikūla*, **sarvaloke anabhirati*, **maraṇa*, **anitya*, **anitye duḥkha*, **duḥkhe anātman*, **prahāṇa*, **virāga*, **nirodha*.

⁸⁴ T2, no. 125, 780a: 其有修行十想者, 便盡有漏, 獲通作證, 漸至涅槃。云何為十? 所謂: 白骨想, 青瘀想, 脹想, 食不消想, 血想, 噉想, 有常無常想, 貪食想, 死想, 一切世間不可樂想。However, in this *sūtra* itself different sets of 10 are given — cf. 780a, 789b.

⁸⁵ MVŚ, 836c. The **Amṛtarasa-sāstra* (T28, no. 1553, 975b) gives exactly the same items, except that the order of items 4, 5, 6 and 7 are different. It likewise states that “one who constantly recollects on these 10 *samjñā*-s makes an end to *duḥkha*.”

⁸⁶ MVŚ, 837a–c. I have here given only a few selected explanations.

⁸⁷ 正性離生. “Raw” (*āma*) signifies defilements. The term is used interchangeably with 正性決定 (*samyaktva-niyāma*), “Certainty of Perfection”, where “Perfection” = *Nirvāṇa*. Cf. MVŚ, 12a.

⁸⁸ MVŚ, 206c: “It has, as its intrinsic nature, the skilful root (*kuśala-mūla*), non-greed. According to the meditators (修定者), it has understanding (*prajñā*) as its intrinsic nature (this view is shared by the author of the **Dharmatrāta-dhyanā-sūtra* — T15, 316b: 修禪所起慧, 不淨觀一智.) ... According to other masters, it has disgust (厭; **nirveda*) as its intrinsic nature.”

- ⁸⁹ MVŚ, 208a–c.
- ⁹⁰ T28, 636c–637a.
- ⁹¹ *Dīgha*, iii, 104 f.
- ⁹² AKB, 338; MVŚ, 205a–206c.
- ⁹³ MVŚ, 205b.
- ⁹⁴ AKB, 338.
- ⁹⁵ MVŚ, 205b–c. Other reasons for the repeated contemplations in details and brevity are also given (205c).
- ⁹⁶ MVŚ, 206a–c. Four other views on the distinction among the three stages are given.
- ⁹⁷ *Atthasālinī*, 199 f: *paṭikkūle pi c'etasmim ārammaṇe addhā imāya paṭipadāya jarāmaranāmhā paṭimuccissāmī ti evaṃ ānisamsadassāvitāya ceva nīvarana-santāpappahānena ca pīti somanassam uppajjati bahum dāni vetanam labhissāmī ti ānisamsadassāvino pupphachaddakassa gūtharāsimhi viya upasantavyādhidukkhassa rogino vamanavirecanappavattiyam viya ca |*
- ⁹⁸ Ny, 672a.
- ⁹⁹ MVŚ, 434c.
- ¹⁰⁰ AKB, 456: “Why is there no liberation [designated] in the third *dhyāna*? Because of the absence of greed for matter pertaining to the stage of the second *dhyāna* [wherein bodily consciousness is absent], and because of being agitated by the highest of all happiness.” (*kāsmān na tṛtīye dhyāne vimokṣaḥ | dvitīyadhyānabhūmika-varṇa-rāgābhāvāt sukhamāṇḍeñjitatvāc ca*)
- ¹⁰¹ MVŚ, 436b–c.
- ¹⁰² Other examples include the meditations called the four immeasurables: loving-kindness compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. Cf. *Samyutta*, v, 119: “I say, bhikkhus, that the liberation of the mind in the form of loving-kindness (*mettā-cetovimutti*) has the beautiful as culmination (*subha-paramā*)”. The positive 12-link conditionality expounded in the *upanisā-sutta* of the *Samyutta-nikāya* — starting from the experience of suffering to faith to joy, etc., moving upwards to final emancipation — is yet another important demonstration.
- ¹⁰³ MVŚ, 436b–c.
- ¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Vism*, 88; **Vimuktimārga*, T32, 417c.
- ¹⁰⁵ 階級次第上. Or: “There are stairs going up progressively” (?)
- ¹⁰⁶ T15, 316b–c. Yin Shun is of the opinion that such descriptions suggest mutual influence between the Sarvāstivādin Śrāvakayāna *yogācāra*-s and the tantric *yogācāra*-s emerging around the same period. They may also suggest the common source of the two meditation traditions which later came to develop separately. See Yin Shun, *A Study of the Śāstras and Ācāryas: With Special Reference to the Sarvāstivāda School* (Taipei, 1968), 629 ff.
- ¹⁰⁷ T15, no. 614, 272a. See also, 禪祕要法經, T15, no. 613, 244b ff; 思惟略要法, T15, no. 617, 298c–299a.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Vimokṣa* is rendered here by its gloss 背捨 (*vaimukhya*).
- ¹⁰⁹ For an account of the 10 *kṛtsnāyatana*-s, see AKB, 457; etc.
- ¹¹⁰ Blue colours like 金精山. The Chinese term here is unclear to me.

- ¹¹¹ T25, no. 509, 215b–c.
- ¹¹² MVŚ, 208a: 此是假想勝解作意相應無貪 … There is some ambiguity here as to whether 勝解作意 (*adhimukti-manaskāra*) is to be read as a coordinate (*dvanda*) or a determinative (*tadpuruṣa*) compound. Another possible translation would be: “This is a visualization; [it is] the non-greed, conjoined with resolve and mental application …” See also below, for a fuller quote of this passage.
- ¹¹³ See MVŚ, 53a–b; AKB, 108. The Yogācāra basically inherited this doctrine, but adds many more, such as “mental application to Suchness” (*tathatā-manaskāra*) — cf. T30, 332c; etc.
- ¹¹⁴ MVŚ, 53a–b.
- ¹¹⁵ The **Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* classifies all phenomenal existents as being equally cognitions (*vijñapti*).
- ¹¹⁶ Text quoted from G. Nagao, ed., *THEG PA CHEN PO BSDUS PA*, 62–64; included in his *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha — Japanese translation and Annotation* (Tokyo, 1982), Vol. one: *lung 'dis rigs pa yang bstan pa yin no* | *'di ltar sems mnyam pa bzhag pa na shes - bya'i gzugs brnyan rnam par bsngos pa la sogs pa gang dang gang mthong ba de dang de nyid sems mthong ba ste* , *rnam par bsngos pa la sogs pa don gzhan med do* || *rigs pa 'dis byang chub sems dpa' rnam par rig pa thams cad la rnam par rig pa tsam nyid du rjes su dpag par bya bar 'os so* | ... *rjes su dpag pa 'dis byang chub sems dpa' de kho na shes pas ma sad pas kyang rnam par rig pa tsam du rjes su dpag par bya'o* |
- ¹¹⁷ 攝大乘論本, T31, no. 1594, 137b: 諸瑜伽師於一物, 種種勝解各不同; 種種所見皆得成. 故知所取唯有識.
- ¹¹⁸ Cf. AKB, 338: *adhimukti-prādeśika-manaskāratvād aśubhayā na kleśaprahāṇam viṣkambhaṇam tu* Yaśomitra comments that it does not take all the five aggregates or *dharma*-s pertaining to all the stages (*bhūmi*) as cognitive objects, but only a part of the *rūpa-skandha* — Vy, 526: *prādeśikaś cāyam avyāpī 'iy arthaḥ na hi aśubhā pañca-skandhā-lambanā* | *sakala-bhūmy-ālambanā vā* | *kiṃ tarhi* | *rūpaskandhaikadeś'ālambanā* |
- ¹¹⁹ Cf. similar argument in the **Vimuktimārga* (T32, no. 1648, 422b) on this point, for the *krtsnāyatana*-s being not topsy-turvy.
- ¹²⁰ Ny, 672a–b.