

“Mindfulness of Breathing in the *Dhyāna Sūtras*.”

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Mindfulness of Breathing in the *Dhyāna Sūtras*

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Together with the meditation on the impure (*aśubhasmṛti*), mindfulness of breathing (Pāli, *ānāpānasati*; Sanskrit, *ānāpānaśmṛti*; variously rendered into Chinese as 安般守意, 安般念, 阿那般那觀, 念出入息, 持息會, 數息觀, etc.) represents one of the main forms of spiritual cultivation in the Early and Schismatic Buddhism.¹⁾ Abhidharma literature often celebrates these two meditative practices as “the two gates of ambrosia (*amṛta*) 甘露門,”²⁾ “the two main gates of entering spiritual cultivation 入修要二門,”³⁾ and “the two paths leading to Nirvāṇa 趣涅槃二種.”⁴⁾ Mahāyāna Buddhism, most notably the Representation-only School,⁵⁾ retains mindfulness of breathing amongst its spiritual techniques, but its role is much diminished as the dominant posi-

1) In what follows I shall avoid the usage of the rather pejorative term of Hinayāna or Lesser Vehicle and replace it with Schismatic Buddhism or Conservative Buddhism.

2) *Abhidharma mahāvibhāṣā-śāstra* 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論 (*Taishō shinshū dai-zō-kyō* [=T]) vol. 27, p. 348b16–17), *Pañcavastu vibhāṣā-śāstra* 五事毘婆沙論 (T28, 989c).

3) *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* 阿毘達磨俱舍論 (T29, 117b6), *Abhidharma nyāyānusāra-śāstra* 阿毘達磨順正論 (T29, 671a1).

4) *Abhidharmāmṛta-śāstra* 阿毘曇甘露味論 (T28, 975b11–12).

5) We find, for instance, the mindfulness of breathing extensively discussed in the *Yogācāryabhūmi* 瑜伽師地論 (T30, 430c–433b). However, we must note that this fragment is included in the *Srāvakaśāstra* and the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* contains only a brief mention of it: “vitarkapratipakṣen’ānāpāna-smṛtiṃ” (*Bodhisattvabhūmi*, ed. by Unrai Wogihara, Tokyo, 1930, p. 204); 為欲對治諸尋思故修習息念 (T30, 527a2).

tion is now occupied by devotional practices, visualization exercises, meditation aimed at the realization of emptiness, etc.

The purpose of the present paper is to examine the treatment of the mindfulness of breathing, especially the relation between “the sixteen bases” and “the six aspects,” in the so-called *dhyāna sūtras* or “meditation scriptures.” The term *dhyāna sūtra*⁶⁾ represents a reconstruction of the Chinese *chan jing* 禪經, which appears in the titles of a certain group of texts as well as in the writings of Chinese Buddhists of the early 5th century AD as Sengrui 僧叡,⁷⁾ Huiyuan 慧遠,⁸⁾ and Huiguan 慧觀.⁹⁾

This group represents treatises or manuals of meditation belonging to or, at least, partly drawing their inspiration from Sarvāstivāda tradition. We must not forget, however, that many of the *dhyāna sūtras* are, as it were, a common product of the Buddhist traditions from North-West India, Central Asia, and China. Although the basic material of these texts doubtlessly comes from Indian Buddhism, we must not exclude the possibility that they were compiled in Central Asia or that Buddhist monks from Central Asia, who in most of the cases were those who brought the *dhyāna sūtras* to China, had a more or less substantial influence on the final form of the scriptures in the process of translating them into Chinese. Kumārajīva would be perhaps the most eloquent example of this case.

6) I could find no evidence in Indian sources and Tibetan translations that the *chan jing* stands for an original *dhyānasūtrāni* or something similar. The *dhyāna sūtras* represents only a reconstruction whose only advantage is that it suggests better that we are actually dealing with a category of texts which, regardless of their compilation process, contain doctrines and practices that can be traced back to Indian Buddhism.

7) V. T55, 65a–b. Sengrui also uses the term *chan yao* 禪要 or “meditation summaries.”

8) V. T55, 65b–66a.

9) V. T55, 66b–67c. Huiguan also calls such texts *chan dian* 禪典 or “meditation scriptures.”

Doctrinally, the *dhyāna sūtras* range from a basically orthodox Sarvāstivāda standpoint to a substantial compromise with Mahāyāna teachings and practices. In some cases, this compromise is so advanced that it is very difficult to make a distinction between such a text and a *samādhi sūtra* (*sanmei jing* 三昧經), which represents a purely Mahāyānist scripture.¹⁰ Texts like An Shigao's 安世高 (fl. 148–170 AD) translations: the *Da anban shouyi jing* 大安般守意經 (T15, 163c–173a), the *Skandhadhātāvāyatana-sūtra* 陰持入經 (T15, 173b–180b), Saṃgharakṣa's *Yogācārabhūmi-sūtra* 大道地經 (T15, 230c–236b) (partial translation); the first 27 chapters 品 of the present version of Dharmarakṣa's 竺法護 (239–316) translation of Saṃgharakṣa's *Yogācārabhūmi-sūtra* 修行道地經 (T15, 181c–223a); Buddhahadra's 佛馱跋陀羅 (359–429) translation of Buddhasena's *Yogācārabhūmi-sūtra*, also called the *Dharmatāra dhyāna-sūtra* or *Dharmatrāta dhyāna-sūtra* 達摩多羅禪經 (T15, 300c–325c); etc. belong to an orthodox Sarvāstivāda position. On the other hand, we have *dhyāna sūtras* that combine to various extents the meditative system of the Conservative Buddhism with Mahāyāna meditation and teachings. Their way of mixing the two systems is not uniform. Kumārajīva's 鳩摩羅什 (344–412) translation or compilation of the *Dhyānasamādhi-sūtra* 坐禪三昧經 (T15, 269c–286a), although

10) Mizuno Kōgen 水野弘元 distinguishes in his "Introduction to the History of the Meditation Doctrines in China before the Formation of the Chan School" 禪宗成立以前のシナの禪定思想史序説 (*Komazawa daigaku kenkyū kiyō* 駒沢大学研究紀要, No. 15, March 1957, p. 20) between a broad sense of the *chan jing/zen kyō* 禪經 which encompasses all sources used by the Buddhist practitioner as reference materials for his practice and a narrow sense which refers only to the meditation manuals compiled by the Yogācārin of North-West India. It goes without saying that my usage of the term *dhyāna sūtras* belongs to the narrow sense. However, Mizuno includes many *samādhi sutras* in his list of *chan jing* in the narrow sense (id., pp. 21–23), which seems to me to be a rather loose usage of the term *chan jing*. Despite all difficulties of distinguishing some *chan jing* from the *sanmei jing*, I think it is, nevertheless, more appropriate to treat the two categories separately.

largely based on traditional meditative practices and theories, deals in its last part with the spiritual cultivation of the Bodhisattva and attempts to encompass the two paths in a harmonious pattern. Other texts like Kumārajīva's translations: the *Chan mi yaofa jing* 禪秘要法經 (T15, 242c-269c), the *Siwei lue yaofa* 思惟略要法 (T15, 297c-300c); Dharmamitra's 曇摩蜜多 (356-442) translation of the *Wumen chan jing-yao yongfa* 五門禪經要用法 (T15, 325c-333a); Juqu Jingsheng's 沮渠京声 (5th century AD) translation of the *Zhi chanbing mi yaofa* 治禪病秘要法 (T15, 333a-342b); etc., although still indebted more or less to the meditation system proper to Conservative Buddhism, include a considerable number of Mahāyāna practices and theories or re-interpret traditional methods in a Mahāyānist spirit.¹¹⁾

Although the textual formation of many of these *dhyāna sūtras* remains a very complicated process, the original texts or, at least, much of the meditation practices and doctrines, especially those associated with Conservative Buddhism, can be traced back to the Kashmirian Yogācāra school belonging to the Sarvāstivāda tradition. Most of these meditation manuals were compiled or, at least, reflect the practice and theory of the Sarvāstivāda Yogācārins of the first four centuries of our era. We know that long before the rise of the Vijñānavāda or Representation-only Yogācāra school, a certain group of "masters of spiritual cultivation" or Yogācārya 瑜伽師, specializing in meditation, were active inside the Sarvāstivāda tradition, especially in Kashmir and North-West India.¹²⁾ Abhidharma literature, especially the *Abhidharma mahāvibhāṣā-śāstra*, offers an abundance of examples of the Yogācāryas being quoted as a most reliable source.¹³⁾ Apart from

11) I have included in the list above only the major extant *dhyāna sūtras*.

12) On the Kashmirian Yogācāra school, v. Paul Demiéville, "La Yogācārabhūmi de Saṅgharakṣa," BEFEO, Tome XLIV, Fasc. 2, pp. 340-2.

13) Nishi Giyū 西義雄, "The Yogācāryas and Their Role in Schismatic Buddhism" 部派佛教に於ける瑜伽師とその役割, *Bukkyō kenkyū* 佛教研究, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1939), pp. 1-48.

their role in the formation and development of the Sarvāstivāda system of spiritual practice, the Sarvāstivāda Yogācārinś composed their own meditation manuals and treatises which represent the *dhyāna sūtras* in their original form.¹⁴⁾ These *dhyāna sūtras* clearly show that the Yogācārinś were more interested in the concrete details of the spiritual training than in the philosophical speculations of the Abhidharma and that, although part of the Sarvāstivāda tradition, they proved to be open to influences coming from other schools and Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is quite possible that on the base of their discoveries and insights resulting from their spiritual quest as well as under the pressure of the growing Mahāyānist trend around them, this group of “masters of spiritual cultivation” or, at least, a part of them were led to elaborate new theories and practices which, eventually, served as the base of the Representation-only school.¹⁵⁾ However, much of this historical process of transition from the Sarvāstivāda Yogācāra to the Vijñānavāda Yogācāra remains to be elucidated. And we must not forget that, as Demiéville aptly puts it, “for whoever takes the risk of making the history of Indian Buddhism according to Chinese texts, prudence is a must, not only in chronological matters.”¹⁶⁾

As I have already shown, mindfulness of breathing is a central practice in Conservative Buddhism and it loses much of its importance in Mahāyāna. A similar phenomenon is to be found in the *dhyāna sūtras*. *Ānāpānasmṛti* is extensively treated in those texts belonging to the orthodox Sarvāstivāda. These *sūtras* are, therefore, the object of my examination here. On the other hand, mindfulness of breathing tends

14) cf. Nishi Giyū, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

15) Yababe Nobuyoshi calls what I term here the “Sarvāstivāda Yogācāra” the “Proto-Yogācāra,” which denotes the stage before the formation of the Vijñānavāda school proper (cf. “An Shigao as Proto-Yogācāra,” 1991, unpublished manuscript).

16) *op. cit.*, p. 358.

to become a marginal technique in those *dhyāna sūtras* influenced by Mahāyāna teachings and practices. The *Sixwei lüe yongfa*, for instance, makes no mention of the mindfulness of breathing. The *Wumen chan jingyao yongfa*, although supposed to deal with “the five meditation gates,” makes only few brief remarks concerning the *ānāpānasmṛti* at the beginning of the *sūtra* (T15, 325c), but it gives no further details on it. The *Chan mi yaofa jing* contains a whole section on the mindfulness of breathing (T15, 256c–258b), but apart from a few lines dealing with breathing counting, the *ānāpānasmṛti* appears to be an auxiliary technique included into the larger frame of the meditation on the impure, which is, however, treated from a Mahāyānist viewpoint and has little in common with its counterpart in Conservative Buddhism, as it lays more emphasis on the visualization of different images resulting from this method.

Before dealing with the *ānāpānasmṛti*, we need a few words on the textual history of the main *dhyāna sūtras* examined here. First, the *Da anban shouyi jing* represents an extremely corrupt text which gathers together An Shigao’s original translation, almost impossible to reconstruct, fragments from An Shigao’s own commentary as well as fragments from glosses by Chen Hui 陳慧, Kang Senghui 康僧会, Zhi Dun 支遁, Daoan 道安, and Xie Fu 謝敷. The original text, most probably written in Gāndhārī and entitled **Ānāpānasvadi*, was a small manual of the Sarvāstivāda Yogācārins compiled around 100 AD. The Parthian monk An Shigao translated this manual into Chinese by the middle of the 2nd century, but the present text dates from the end of the 6th century.¹⁷⁾ Saṃgharakṣa’s *Yogācārabhūmi-sūtra* was translated into Chinese by Dharmarakṣa in 284. Its present text obviously

17) Cf. my article “On the Compilation Process of the Present Text of the *Anban shouyi jing* Translated by An Shigao” 安世高訳『安般守意経』現行本の成立について, *Tōyō no shisō to shūkyō* 東洋の思想と宗教, No. 9 (1992), pp. 48–63.

contains two different *sūtras*: the first 27 chapters, which represent the Sarvāstivāda Yogācāra meditation system, and the last three chapters, which are a Mahāyānist appendix added in China around the middle of the 4th century most probably in keeping with the growing interest in the teachings of the Greater Vehicle. The *Dhyānasamādhi-sūtra*, translated or compiled by Kumārajīva in 407, is a systematical presentation of both Conservative and Mahāyānist meditation practices and theories. The chapter dealing with the mindfulness of breathing doubtlessly relies on materials belonging to Sarvāstivāda. According to Sengruī's preface, which carefully notes the authors whose texts were used in compiling the *sūtra*, "the *gāthās* dealing with six mental impediments 六覺 represent Aśvagoṣa's practice" (T55, 65b2-3) and "the six aspects 六事 of [the mindfulness of] breathing gate have been taught by various Vaibhāṣikas or Abhidharma masters 論師" (id., b4-5). We find, indeed, the six mental impediments similarly treated in Aśvagoṣa's *Saundarananda-kāvya*, Chapter 15, which actually concludes with the recommendation that one should remove them through the *ānāpānasmṛti* practice (15; 64). And as we shall see below, the six aspects represent a technique elaborated by Abhidharma masters. Buddhasena's *Yogācārabhūmi-sūtra* was composed by the Kashmirian Yogācārya Buddhasena around 400 and translated by his disciple Buddhābhadrā sometime after 413. The present text in the *Taishō daijō kyō* is called *Damoduola chanjing* 達摩多羅禪經, as it is wrongly attributed to Dharmatāra or Dharmatrāta. It devotes the whole of its first *juan* to a very detailed discussion of the *ānāpānasmṛti*, whose practice is divided into four stages, i.e., retrogression 退分, establishment 住分, progression 升進分, and completion 決定分, each treated from two viewpoints, i.e., method or the preparatory way (*prayoga-mārga* 方便道) and insight aspects or superior way (*viśeṣamārga* 勝道).¹⁸⁾

18) For the textual history of the above texts, cf. Satō Taishun's 佐藤泰舜
(Continued to next page)

The actual of technique of the mindfulness of breathing described in the *dhyāna sūtras* consists of two methods, i.e., ‘the sixteen bases’ and the ‘six aspects.’ The sixteen bases represent a very old technique dating back, most probably, to the earliest days of Buddhism. Lambert Schmithausen and Johannes Bronkhorst point out that mindfulness (*satī*), which in the beginning merely concerned the body, played an important role in original Buddhism, ‘although it may have been borrowed from outside movements, because it appears to be known to Jainism.’¹⁹⁾ The subject is too complex and I intend to deal with it on another occasion, but I think we can agree that the sixteen bases of the mindfulness of breathing are a practice peculiar to Buddhism and that they belong to the earliest Buddhist stratum. Certainly, India has an extremely long tradition of breathing practices, but the Buddhist *ānāpānasmṛti* must not be confused with a respiration control technique. At no stage does the Buddhist practitioner try to control or change something in the natural process of breathing. *Ānāpānasmṛti* consists of a careful concentration on breathing in and out²⁰⁾

(Continued from page 48)

introductions 解題 to his translations in the *Kokuyaku issai kyō* 国訳一切経, *Kyōshū-bu* 経集部, vol. IV, 1984 [1928]. and P. Demiéville, *op. cit.*, pp. 342–63.

19) Johannes Bronkhorst, *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*, Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, Stuttgart, 1986, p. 89.

20) *Ānāpānasmṛti* means “mindfulness (*smṛti*) of breathing in (*āna*) and breathing out (*apāna*).” According to Hattori Masa’aki 服部正明 (“*Prāṇāyāma*” 調息, Appendix VIII to the *Mahāyāna Buddhist Scriptures* 大乘仏典 (vol. X), Chūō kōronsha 中央公論社, Tokyo, 1975), *āna-apāna* was originally patterned after the compound *prāṇa-apāna*, which in Vedic and classical medicine sources stands for “breathing above heart” and “breathing below heart,” a distinction made in conformity with the ancient Indian physiology. However, the only allusion to such an etymology I could find in Buddhist literature is the following passage from the *Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣā-sāstra* (T27, 134a29–b1): “Some people teach that the upper breathing is called *āna* (‘taking in’) and the lower breathing is called *apāna* (‘taking out’)” 有說者。上息名持來。下息名持去。However, the compilers of the *Mahāvibhāṣā* reject this opinion as incorrect. Whatever the etymological protohistory of the *āna-apāna* may have been, I think that since the earliest days Buddhists perceived and interpreted it as “breathing in and out”.

with all its physiological and psychological implications. On this basis, the Buddhist practitioner expands his field of observation to impermanence, detachment, etc. Let me quote from the *Ānāpānasati sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 118):

Mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out. Whether he breathes in a long (breath) he comprehends (*pājānati*) 'I am breathing in a long (breath)'; or whether he is breathing out a long (breath) he comprehends, 'I am breathing out a long (breath)'; or whether he is breathing in a short (breath) he comprehends, 'I am breathing in a short (breath)'; or whether he is breathing out a short (breath) he comprehends, 'I am breathing out a short (breath).' He trains himself (*sikkhati*), thinking, 'I will breathe in experiencing (*paṭisaṃvedī*) the whole body.' He trains himself, thinking, 'I will breathe out experiencing the whole body.' He trains himself, thinking, 'I will breathe in tranquillising (*passambhayam*) the activity of the body (*kāyasamkhāra*).' He trains himself, thinking, 'I will breathe out tranquillising the activity of the body.' He trains himself, thinking, 'I will breathe in . . . breathe out experiencing rapture (*pīti*).' He trains himself, thinking, 'I will breathe in . . . breathe out experiencing joy (*sukha*).' He trains himself, thinking, 'I will breathe in . . . breathe out experiencing the activity of thought (*cittasamkhāra*) . . . tranquillising the activity of thought . . . experiencing thought (*citta*) . . . rejoicing (*abhippamodayam*) in thought . . . concentrating (*samādaham*) thought . . . freeing (*vimocayam*) thought.' He trains himself, thinking, 'I will breathe in . . . breathe out beholding (*anupassī*) impermanence (*anicca*) . . . beholding detachment (*virāga*) . . . beholding stopping (*ni-*

rodha) . . . beholding casting away (*paṭhiṃissagga*).²¹⁾

These sixteen stages or sixteen bases (*soḷasavatthuka*), as Buddhaghosa calls them,²²⁾ are found in all the *dhyāna sūtras* that discuss the *anapanasmṛti*. They are called “the sixteen excellent [practices]” 十六勝 in An Shigao’s translation of the **Ānāpānasvādi* (=As) (cf. T15, 165a8–19) and 十六特勝 in Saṃgharakṣa’s *Yogācārabhūmi* translated by Dharmarakṣa (=SYb) (cf. T15, 216a15–28)²³⁾ or “the sixteen limbs” 十六分 (**ṣoḍaśāṅga*) in the *Dhyānasāmādhi-sūtra* (=Ds) (cf. T15, 275b19–276a5) and Buddhasena’s *Yogācārabhūmi* (=BYb) (cf. T15, 310b22). However, the same BYb also uses the translation 十六行 (**ṣoḍaśācara*) (cf. T15, 302b1–14). On the whole, these sixteen practices are similar to the original pattern found in the Pāli text above. A detailed discussion of each particular text is not possible here. In what follows I shall point out the most conspicuous differences. The As seems to contain the largest number of differences, but the text is so unclear and corrupt that it is difficult to decide whether it represents a variant or just a very clumsy rendering into Chinese. The

21) I. B. Horner’s translation in *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. III, Pali Text Society (=PTS), Luzac & Company, LTD., London, 1967, pp. 124–125. (I have introduced the Pāli terms in brackets, which do not exist in Horner’s translation.) The original text is in *Majjhima-Nikāya*, ed. by Robert Chalmers, Vol. III, PTS, Luzac & Company, LTD., London, 1960, pp. 82–83. The whole *sutta* as such consists of two historically different layers and was compiled in the present form one or two centuries after Aśoka’s reign. The part which contains the passage above is very old or at least transmits a very old practice dating back to the earliest days of Buddhism. A similar text, repeated in different versions, is found in the *Samyutta Nikāya* 54, *Ānāpāna Samyuttam* (cf. *Samyutta-Nikāya*, ed. by Leon Feer, Luzac & Company LTD., London, 1960, pp. 311–341).

22) Cf. *The Vissudhi-Magga*, ed. by C.A.F. Rhys Davids, PTS, London, 1975, p. 267, 291.

23) Demiéville, *op. cit.*, p. 415, n. (1), attempts to reconstruct 特勝 as **uttaracaryā* making reference to Xuanzang’s 玄奘 translation as 勝行.

order of the description is not identical to the one found in the Pāli text: after the stage of comprehending the movement of the body 動身, the practitioner returns to respiration and observes whether he breathes faintly 微, whether his breath has stopped or not 止·不止, etc. The text says nothing about experiencing, etc., the activity of thought. The impermanence is not translated by the usual 無常, but by a periphrasis: “ he breathes and comprehends that all the things in this world (‘ the ten thousand things ’) [are bound to] perish and there is no way to obtain them back ” 念万物已去不可復得喘息自知. The text ends with the stage of beholding detachment 棄捐所思 and stopping 放棄軀命, which means that it lacks the *paṭinissagga* phase of the Pāli text. We also find some differences in the *Ds*, which lacks some of the stages pertaining to the activity of the thought and the thought described in the *Ānāpānasati sutta*. Besides, the thirteenth stage, which is called “ the observation of vanishing 出散觀 of the conditioned (*samskṛta*) *dharmas* 有為法,” has no equivalent in the Pāli source.

The above *dhyāna sūtras* as well as many of the Abhidharma treatises also contain a second technique of the *ānāpānasmrīti* called “ the six aspects ” or “ the six means. ” I shall first present “ the six means ” (*ṣaḍkāraṇa* 六因) according to the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* 阿毘達磨俱舍論,²⁴⁾ since Vasubandhu’s systematic way of explaining them will allow us to understand the variants appearing in the *dhyāna sūtras* and Abhidharma sources. The practice starts with “ counting ” (*gaṇanā* 數), which consists in counting breathing from one to ten. When this is accomplished without any counting failure (*doṣā* 失), the practitioner advances to the second step, i.e., “ pursuing ” (*anugama* 隨), which means intently following the inhalation as it enters the body and moves from the throat, through the heart, the navel, the kidneys, the thighs to the toes and then the reverse movement of the exhalation until it

24) *Abhidharma-kosabhāṣya of Vasubandhu*, ed. P. Pradhan, Patna, 1967, p. 339–340; Xuanzang’s Chinese translation is found in T29, 118a23–b15.

leaves the body. Next comes “concentration” (*sthāpanā* 止) which denotes focusing one’s attention on some part of the body from the tip of the nose to the big toe. In the fourth step, called “observation” (*upalakṣanā* 觀), the practitioner discerns that the air breathed in and out as well as form (*rūpa* 色), mind (*citta* 心), and mental functions (*caitta* 心所) ultimately consists of the four great [basic] elements (*mahābhūta* 大種). He thus analyzes all the five aggregates (*pañca skandhāḥ* 五蘊). Next follows “the turning away” (*vivarta* 轉) which consists of changing the object of observation from the air breathed in and out to “the wholesome roots” of purity (*kuśalamūla* 善根) and ultimately to “the highest mundane *dharma*” (*aggradharma* 世間第一法). The last step is called “purification” (*parisuddhi* 淨) and it marks entering the stage of “realization of the Way” (*darśanamārga* 見道), which in Abhidharma literature denotes the stage of “the stream entry” (*srota āpatti-phalla*) that will inevitably lead the adept to *Nirvāṇa* in no more than seven lives.²⁵⁾

Before examining this technique in the *dhyāna sūtras*, it is necessary to note that the sixteen bases and the six means represent historically different practices. It is quite obvious that both methods lead the practitioner to very high stages of spiritual achievement. It is very hard to imagine that a practitioner who has reached *paṭinissagga* or *darśanamārga* needs to return to such elementary techniques like counting or mere mindfulness of the length of breathing respectively. Judging from a logical viewpoint, we are bound to say that the two techniques are independent and seem to lead to approximately equiv-

25) The six means are also treated in the *Abhidharma mahāvibhāṣā-śāstra* 阿毘達磨大婆沙論 (T27, 134c26–135b17), the *Samyukta abhidharmahṛdaya-śāstra* 雜阿毘曇心論 (T28, 934a23–b10), the *Abhidharma nyāyānusāra-śāstra* 阿毘達磨順正論 (T29, 673c10–674a24). In the Theravāda tradition, the *Vī-suddhi-magga* divides the same practice into eight stages called “the mental [training] methods” (*manasikāravīdhi*) (cf. *op. cit.*, pp. 278–87). For others sources, see below.

alent stages of spiritual achievement. The sixteen bases go back to the earliest stratum of Buddhism, while the six means date not earlier than the 2nd or 1st century BC. The Pāli *suttas* contain no reference to anything similar to the six means²⁶⁾ or *gaṇanā* in the sense of breathing counting.²⁷⁾ The seven fundamental Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma treatises contain no mention of the six means, but we must bear in mind that breathing and *ānāpānasmyti* do not get an extensive treatment here. It is, therefore, unclear whether the six means did not exist at the time of the compilation of the oldest of these texts or whether they were still a minor practice unworthy of the attention of the Sarvāstivādin masters. The earliest mention or, at least, the record of what appears to be the earliest form of this practice is found in the *Vimutti-magga* 解脱道論 (T32, 430b17–29). The dating of this text is very difficult, yet the 1st century AD seems to be the most probable date.²⁸⁾ Its author Upatissa refers to “the four ways of practicing the mindfulness of breathing” 四種修念安般 as the teaching of “the ancient masters” (*pubbācariya* 先師), which suggests that the technique was older than the date of the composition of this treatise. Furthermore, we have here only four methods of practice, i.e. 算, 隨逐, 安置, and 隨觀, which correspond to the first four stages of the six means. Not only that we do not have the last two steps, but “observation” 隨觀 refers here to the mindfulness of such psychological states as joy 喜, rapture 樂, etc., and not of the four great elements. All these facts prove that we have here a very early model of the six means, which I would ven-

26) Cf. Tamaki Kōshirō 玉城康四郎, “Fundamental Problems concerning the *Ānāpāna-samādhi*” 入出息念定の根本問題 in *Collected Essays of Buddhist Studies Presented in Honor of Professors Itō Shūjō and Tanaka Junshō* 伊藤眞城・田中順照兩教授頌徳記念仏教学論文集, Tōhō Shuppan, 1979, p. 80.

27) I owe this information to Ven. Sumanasāra Thera who also suggests the possibility that breathing counting was borrowed from Hinduist practices.

28) Cf. Nakamura Hajime, *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Bibliographical Notes*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1987, p. 116.

ture to place somewhere in the 1st century BC. Since the six means/eight methods practice is shared by both the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda traditions, it is possible that the primitive pattern dates from a period prior to their schism. Of course, there is also the possibility of its being created by one sect and borrowed by the other, but this must have happened at very early date, too. However, if we accept the first alternative, then the origin of this practice may be placed as early as the 2nd century BC. There is no doubt, however, that this practice was originally an auxiliary exercise devised by the Abhidharma masters.

The second stage in the historical development of the six means practice is reflected in the *As* and the *SYb*. In both *sūtras*, we find that the practice has now all the six stages, but the newly added steps are, however, explained in a manner different from the *Kośa*. The *As* text describing the last two stages of “the six aspects” 六事 (**ṣaḍvastu*) is extremely corrupt and our interpretation is in danger of taking a later Chinese gloss for the original *sūtra*, but it seems that “turning away” 還 corresponds to the stage of “practicing the Way” 行道 (T15, 165a28) and “purification” 淨 represents “entering the Way” 入道 (T15, 165a28–b1). 還 and 淨 are also explained as “eliminating the fetters (*saṃyojana*)” 棄結 (T15, 167a19), which, if we are to believe the Chinese gloss, itself ambiguous and contradictory, would mean casting away of the physical and verbal defilements and elimination of the mental defilements respectively. Furthermore, unlike the *Vimutti-magga*, “observation” 觀 is now explained as observing the five aggregates (T15, 167a7–8). The *SYb* speaks about “four aspects” 四事, but in reality we have six stages, i.e. 息數, 相隨, 止, 觀, 還, 淨 (T15, 216a29–b23), counted in a different way. Their explanation is very summary and rather unclear. The last two stages are described as “fixing one’s attention on the tip of the nose, one must observe the breathing counting and be aware of the breathing out

and in” (T15, 216b18–19), which represents an explanation much earlier than the *Kośa*. Both the *As* and the *SYb* reflect the six aspects practice around 100 AD, when the last two stages had not been fully co-related with Abhidharma categories.

The last phase starts with the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, from the middle of the 2nd century AD on, when all the stages of the six means practice, despite certain differences between various texts, become very well defined and included within the larger frame of the Abhidharma theories of the spiritual path. Most of the differences concern the interpretation of the last two stages. The *Ds* and the *BYs* as well as most of the Abhidharma sources belong to this third phase of development of the six means. The *Ds* calls this practice “the six gates of the *ānāpānasamādhi*” 阿那般那三昧六種門 (**ānāpānasamādhi ṣaḍ-naya*) (T15, 273a18–19) and describes the fifth stage, i.e., 轉觀, as observation of the impermanence of the five aggregates which leads to the elimination of the five obstacles 五蓋 (*pañca-nivaraṇāni*). Purification is described in relation to the practice of the four fields of mindfulness 四念止 (*catvāri smṛty-upasthānāni*),²⁹⁾ which leads to the attainment of the four wholesome roots 四善根 and finally to the *Arhatship* 無學 (T15, 275b7–19). The *BYs*, which gives the most detailed treatment of the six means, holds that “interior attachment” 內貪著 disappears when counting is perfectly practiced (T15, 307c8), that “exterior attachment” 外貪著 is eliminated at the stage of pursuing 隨 (T15, 306b10), and that doubt 疑 is cut off at the stage of observation 觀 (T15, 307a29). The turning away 迴轉 is presented as the stage of cultivating wisdom 智慧 (*prajñā*) (T15, 307b16). The *BYs* considers that a purification is obtained after each of the previous levels, but purification as a stage in itself is described as the cessation of all the evils 過惡 which have constituted the base 所依 of the defiled life

29) In the *Mahāvibhāṣā* (T27, 125a23–25), it is at the stage of turning away 轉 that the adept practices the four bases of mindfulness.

(cf. T15, 307c5–17).

How did the Yogācārinś correlate the sixteen bases with the six means, which originally had been independent, parallel techniques, in actual practice? The *As*, the *SYb*, and the *BYs* as well as the *Vimuttimagga*, the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, and the *Abhidharma nyāyānusāra-śāstra* simply describe the two practices without giving any detail on how they relate to each other. The *Ds*, in a passage rather difficult to interpret (T15, 275b19–20), seems to suggest that the six means are included in the first step of breathing in and out of the sixteen bases. In a similar way, the *Visuddhi-magga* tries to include the eight mental methods into the sixteen bases, between the first and the second tetrads. Yet we must never forget that many details concerning the actual practice were transmitted orally and are impossible to reconstruct now. What we can say in conclusion is that Buddhism, as many other religions, has often found creative solutions by trying to harmonize what originally represented different or even contradictory practices.