

VITAKKA/VITARKA AND VICĀRA

Stages of samādhi in Buddhism and Yoga

The two terms *vitakka/vitarka* and *vicāra* are crucial to the understanding of the stages of *samādhi* in both the Buddhist tradition and in the influential *yoga* tradition attributed to Patañjali. However, at present interpretation is often dominated by notions derived from later commentarial sources. Such notions, although in themselves of great interest, create an artificial appearance of difference between the two traditions which is probably unjustified. It suffices to note the marked difference in English renderings of these two words in translations from Sanskrit and from Pali.

This is exacerbated by the, no doubt inevitable, tendency to treat the Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions as if they operated in complete isolation from one another. In fact it is clear that each has both influenced and been influenced by the other in numerous ways. Buddhist origins are obviously from a milieu in which both orthodox and heterodox Brahmanical ideas and practices were ubiquitous. Not surprisingly influences from and reactions to Vedic traditions pervade the early Buddhist texts. Subsequently, after Buddhism's rapid growth and early creative period, influences are for a while mainly, but not exclusively, from Buddhism to Brahmanism. After the formation of classical Hinduism and during the gradual decline in importance of Buddhism and Jainism which took place from the Gupta period onwards, it is clear that Buddhism borrows much more than it contributes. No doubt this is what one would expect, but it seems surprisingly little recognised.

The present issue is a case in point. Influences from Buddhist sources (to my mind, very frequent) on the *Yoga-sūtra* are often minimized or ignored.¹ In the particular example with which we are concerned here the *Yoga-sūtra* is often seen as having a distinctive analysis of the stages of *samādhi*. I think this is a mistake, partly due to focussing on later Buddhist literature rather than on the canonical account. The reason for this is possibly the fact that the canonical material often needs to be approached through the early *abhidhamma* literature which is less studied than the *sutta* material.

The most important source for this purpose is the first book of the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*, the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*. This gives mnemonic registers for both *vitakka* and for *vicāra*. For the nature and function of these registers I refer the reader to my article: "Pali Oral Literature".² It is

sufficient to note that these registers give us a clear picture as to what these terms were understood to mean at this time once the *suttanta* contexts to which they refer have been examined.

VITAKKA IN THE DHAMMASAṄGAṆI

The *dhammuddesa* for *vitakka* in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* is as follows:

1. *takka*
2. *vitakka*
3. *saṅkappa*
4. *appanā*
5. *vyappanā*
6. *cetaso abhiniropanā*
7. *sammā-saṅkappa*

Unusually for the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* the complete register for *vitakka* is already to be found in a single location in the *nikāyas*, namely in the *Mahācattārīsaka-sutta*.³ This discourse is an *abhidhamma*-style analysis of the Eightfold Path. In fact the *sutta* reads suspiciously as if it were itself based on the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*, but if so it is difficult to explain why no additional sources can be found for some of the terms. We must then assume that this *sutta* is the source of this *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* register and presumably of much of the methodology of the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*, but it is surprising that no additions have been made. Perhaps the list was already too established in the tradition to allow of amendment. It would be interesting to know if the corresponding *sutta* preserved in Chinese contains the same passage.

Taking the terms of the register in order:

1. *Takka*

This occurs in a number of contexts in the earlier literature, but can always be rendered by 'speculation'. The more specific later meaning of (systematic) logic would be anachronistic, while the translation sometimes given of 'doubt' is incorrect for the *nikāyas*. The context which the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* or its source probably has in mind is one which occurs in the *Brahmajāla-sutta*:⁴

... some mendicant or brāhmaṇa is speculative (*takkin*) and inclined to investigation (*vīmaṃsin*). He says that which is beaten out by speculation, that which is attended by investigation

In the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* we find the statement that one should not believe anything by reason of speculation (*takka-hetu*).⁵ Another important *sutta* formula also occurs in the *Brahmajāla-sutta*:⁶

There are, monks, still further truths (*dhamma*) -- deep, hard to see, hard to comprehend,

peaceful, excellent, outside the sphere of speculation (*atakkāvacara*), subtle, (only) to be known by the wise — which the Tathāgata makes known after having himself comprehended them by his higher knowledge and after having directly experienced them.

Similar passages occur in several contexts concerned with the truth assessment of views or wisdom.⁷ Finally in the canonical accounts of the request of Brahmā Sahampati the same set of epithets is applied to the *dhamma* which the Buddha has reached.⁸

To go by the position of right view as last in the list it would seem that an ascending order is intended. If so, the implication is probably meant to be that speculation is a rather weak and inferior form of thinking. Certainly the commentaries have little difficulty in interpreting these contexts in terms of their understanding of *vitakka* as the fixing of the mind on an object of thought or sense.⁹ For them speculation is merely a form of weak *vitakka* whose object is constantly changing. So the term *takka-pariyāhata* recalls the commentarial definition of the function (*rasa*) of *vitakka* as *āhanana-pariyāhanana*: “for by means of this the *yogāvacara* makes the object struck by *vitakka*, struck around by *vitakka*”.¹⁰ In the present context it would be easy to interpret *takka-pariyāhata* as meaning that the speculative complex of ideas which arises in weak mentality requires application of the mind from many different angles.

2. *Vitakka*

The word *vitakka* occurs frequently in definitions and explanations of *samādhi* or *jhāna*, but is not explained in that context. Apart from this I have collected about forty other passages from the four *nikāyas*; there are probably some more. It is clear that it can always be rendered as ‘thinking’ or ‘thought’, although it is unlikely that this would have the same significance as the concept does for us today. Of course this is even more unlikely among a community containing many contemplatives. It may therefore be the case that thought was already pictured as essentially the activity of bringing different objects into firm focus before the mind’s eye — be those objects thoughts or mental pictures. Such a view of the matter would after all be very natural to people with a very highly developed eidetic faculty.

Apart from the above-mentioned accounts of *jhāna* and the like, *vitakka* occurs most frequently in passages referring to the three skilful thoughts or the three unskilful thoughts or all six together i.e. thought connected with desire or with desirelessness, with aversion or with non-aversion and with cruelty or non-cruelty.¹¹ Less commonly it is found as part of a series.¹² (There are of course many similar sequences which do not include *vitakka*

at all.) In a number of places it means simply thought or thinking in a fairly general sense.¹³ A few less usual contexts connected with *samādhi* can be added.¹⁴ Also we are told that *vitakka* and *vicāra* are the activities which fashion speech: "when one has thought and examined (*vicāretvā*), afterwards one utters speech."¹⁵ There is also one discourse which applies the genre of riddle and answer to the subject of *saṅkappa-vitakkā*.¹⁶ It is clear from this and one other passage that *saṅkappa* and *vitakka* are not always identical in meaning.¹⁷

3. *Saṅkappa*

This should perhaps mean thought formation rather than thought, but not surprisingly it does not in practice seem greatly differentiated in its use from *vitakka*. For example, in a number of contexts the same division into three unskilful and three skilful types is found.¹⁸ In a general sense of 'thinking' we find 'remembering thoughts' (*sara-saṅkappa*) used a number of times in ways obviously related to the usage of the three unskilful thoughts.¹⁹ Several times we have expressions like 'due to that' (e.g. fame and gain) 'he is happy and his purpose is fulfilled (*paripuṇṇa-saṅkappa*)'.²⁰ This appears to be the only context where the translation 'purpose' is required, although it is a possible alternative in some cases, and may perhaps be appropriate in some passages where *saṅkappa* and *vitakka* are juxtaposed or differentiated.

Finally the use of *saṅkappa* as part of a series needs to be mentioned.²¹ This is closely parallel to similar uses of *vitakka*. It is especially frequent to juxtapose *saññā* with either *vitakka* or *saṅkappa*. It is emphasized that *saññā* arises dependent upon the sense objects and corresponding *saṅkappa* arises dependent upon *saññā*, but the converse is not the case. This seems to mean that only if there is say a visual stimulus (*rūpa-dhātu*) can there be recognition of the visual object (i.e. *rūpa-saññā*); only if a visual object has been recognised can there be thoughts about what has been seen (*rūpa-saṅkappa*). The precise degree of introspective acuteness envisaged is unclear.

4. *Appanā*

This occurs only in the one *nikāya* context previously mentioned. In commentarial usage it signifies the absorption accompanying strong concentration. The word may already occur in this sense in a doubtful passage in the *Petakopadesa*, a treatise which may not be long after the early *abhidhamma* works in date.²² In the *nikāyas* verbal forms of *appeti* occur only in the sense of 'to flow into (e.g. the sea)' < *apyeti*.²³ There are, however, a

number of *Vinaya* passages where it appears to mean ‘to fix’ < *arpayati*.²⁴ The same derivation is implied in *Vibhaṅga* passages which use it in the sense of ‘made to go away’ i.e. ‘removed’.²⁵ This is the standard etymology in the later tradition, both in Pali and in Buddhist Sanskrit, no doubt rightly.²⁶ It is perhaps just possible that the meaning of *appanā* in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* register is influenced by the sense of ‘flowing into’ but on the whole it seems adequate to take it as meaning ‘fixing’.

5. *Vyappanā*

This also appears only in the *Mahācattārīsaka-sutta* as far as the *nikāyas* are concerned, but *vyappita* is found in the same *Vibhaṅga* context mentioned above in the sense of ‘completely gone’. The commentary is no doubt right to interpret this as either augmentation with a prefix for stylistic adornment or an intensified form of *appanā*.²⁷ So it should probably be translated as ‘firm fixing’.

6. *Cetaso abhiniropanā*

This too does not appear elsewhere in the *nikāyas*. It is usually taken as deriving from *abhi* + *ni* + causative of RUH — literally, ‘transferring the mind onto (an object)’. This is probably correct, but it is worth noting that BHSD gives a form *abhinirūpayati*, which suggests an alternative derivation from RŪP. It is this which must be intended by the *Netti-pakarāṇa* (*abhiniropeti*) and the *Petaḥkopadesa* (*niropayitabba*) in their explanation of *nirutti*.²⁸ In the latter case it can be translated: ‘should be given this form’. This would offer an alternative rendering for the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* register of ‘mental forming’ or ‘mental defining’. However, *abhiniropanā* occurs in the *Paṭisambhidā-magga* as the standard epithet for *sammā-saṅkappa* and also for *vitakka*.²⁹ It is also found in one passage in which it defines the activity of resultant mind element; here it must refer to the fixing of a sense object in the mind.³⁰ Although the date of the *Paṭisambhidā-magga* is not known, it must be earlier than the latest of the canonical *abhidhamma* works.

7. *Sammā-saṅkappa*

As the second link in the Eightfold Path this has an important place. The *nikāyas* define it in exactly the same way as the three skilful *vitakkas* or *saṅkappas*.³¹ Likewise *micchā-saṅkappa* is defined in exactly the same way as the corresponding types of skilful thought. So a translation by ‘purpose’ can be ruled out — *vitakka* cannot mean purpose. Moreover there are contexts in which such a meaning is hardly possible:

But although there really is another world, he has the view that there is no other world — that is his wrong view; but although there really is another world, he forms the thought (*sankappeti*) that there is no other world — that is his wrong thought (*micchā-sankappa*); but although there really is another world, he utters speech to the effect that there is no other world — that is his wrong speech.³²

Here the sequence is clear. If one's way of seeing is flawed, then the way in which one's thought will take form in the understanding will be flawed and likewise the way in which one expresses that understanding in speech.

VICĀRA IN THE DHAMMASAṄGAṆI

The *dhammuddesa* for *vicāra* in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* is as follows:

- | | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. <i>cāra</i> | 2. <i>vicāra</i> | 3. <i>anuvicāra</i> |
| 4. <i>upavicāra</i> | 5. <i>cittassa anusandhanatā</i> | 6. <i>anupekkhanatā</i> |

Again taking them in order:

1. *Cāra*

This occurs in a few passages in opposition to *vihāra* — 'wandering' as opposed to 'abiding in one place', but such general uses do not seem very relevant to the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*.³³ It is possible that some usage which I have not been able to identify is referred to here — perhaps *cāra* as the second member of some compound. More probably it is used here simply to indicate a mobile aspect of thought — its 'wandering'; this would be appropriate in opposition to 'fixing' as the chief feature of *vitakka*.

2. *Vicāra*

Literally interpreted, this might mean either 'constant wandering' or 'that which causes the (mind) to wander in different directions'. In practice it almost always occurs in conjunction with *vitakka*, while in the *nikāyas* *vicāreti* is usually found with *vitakketi*. This is nearly always in contexts associated with *jhāna* or *samādhi*. At least once, however, it is part of a list.³⁴

3. *Anuvicāra*

Although the noun does not occur in the *nikāyas*, the verb *anuvicāreti* is found in a few passages, always preceded by *anuvitakketi*. This would of course literally mean 'causing to explore', but it is clear from the *Majjhima-nikāya* passages that the use of these two verbs together is intended merely to indicate the repeated application of *vitakka* and *vicāra*; *anu* is here

simply a prefix indicating repetition.³⁵ The *Āṅuttara-nikāya* usage is similar, although it almost always occurs there in the phrase: . . . *dhammaṃ cetasā anuvitakketi anuvicāreti manasānupekkhati* ‘. . . applies *vitakka* and *vicāra* with the mind to the *dhamma*, mentally examines the *dhamma*.’³⁶

4. *Upavicāra*

The verb *upavicarati* (used in close conjunction with the noun) means ‘to frequent’. The noun means that which the mind frequents and hence a sphere of activity or range of interest.³⁷ Its inclusion in the *Dhammasaṅgāṇi* register is obviously based upon the formula sometimes referred to as the eighteen *manopavicāra*:³⁸ “After seeing a visible object with the eye one frequents a visible object which is the basis for pleasant feeling” — the number eighteen is reached by utilizing three types of feeling in conjunction with six senses. This list is found in contexts concerned with the same kind of process that we find described in stages five to eight of the dependent origination formula. So it is closely related to the use of *vitakka* and *vicāra* as part of a series.

5. *Cittassa anusandhanatā*

This may mean either ‘explorativeness of mind’ or ‘a state of constant uniting of the mind’. The former seems the most likely of the various senses of the Sanskrit verb, while the latter is the interpretation of the commentary: “it is a state of constant uniting of the mind because it constantly unites the mind to the object and holds it, just as one joins an arrow to the bowstring and holds it there.”³⁹ This is not impossible, but in view of the sixth item of the register, investigation or exploration seems more likely. Only a verbal form occurs in the *nikāyas* and only in one doubtful context.⁴⁰

6. *Anupekkhanatā*

This means ‘careful examination’ or ‘constant examination’. *Anupekkhati* occurs in the *nikāyas* in two formulae. One was cited above under *upavicāra*. The other, which is much the more frequent, may be translated: “*dhammas* are heard much, remembered, practised aloud, mentally examined (*manasānupekkhita*), well penetrated with insight.”⁴¹

THE TWO REGISTERS

The two registers may then be translated as follows:

vitakka:

1. speculation
2. thought
3. thought formation
4. fixing
5. firm fixing
6. applying the mind
7. right thought formation.

vicāra:

1. wandering
2. wandering about
3. repeated wandering about
4. frequenting
5. explorativeness of mind
6. constant examination.

In the first case the complete register is derived from a single *Majjhima-nikāya* passage and three items occur only there. The others are used fairly widely. For *vicāra* convincing *nikāya* contexts exist for at least items 3, 4 and 6 of the register.

THE LATER PALI TRADITION

Vitakka and *vicāra* occur in a number of passages in the later canonical literature, but these do not add significantly to our understanding of their meaning.⁴² Important information is however to be found in several paracanonical works and in the commentarial literature. These can be taken in approximate chronological order:

1. *Peṭakopadesa*

This is probably the oldest Pali work we have outside the Canon itself. It shows relatively little influence from the *abhidhamma*, presumably because it is in effect a general commentary on *suttanta*. *Vitakka* is defined as the first alighting (of the mind on an object), while *vicāra* is the exploration (*vicaraṇa*) of what has been understood (by *vitakka*).⁴³ It goes on to explain in terms of the initial perception of someone coming in the distance. *Vitakka* understands that it is a man or a woman and recognizes colour and shape. Those thinking (*vitakkayanto*) further investigate (*uttari upaparikkhanti*) as to whether the person is virtuous or otherwise, rich or poor — this is *vicāra*. The next sentence is corrupt, but appears to associate *vitakka* with fixing (*appeti*⁴⁴) and *vicāra* with exploring and conforming (or following).

There follows a simile in which *vitakka* is compared to the striving of a bird (on taking flight) while *vicāra* is compared to the subsequent stretching out of the wings (in flight) which does not involve so much effort. The intention appears to be to indicate both the subsequent nature of *vicāra* and

its greater subtlety. Later commentaries specify the difference as between the trembling of the mind at the time of first arising and a subsequent calmer mode.⁴⁵

Several subsequent passages are corrupt, but some further points are clear. Another simile is given which contrasts silent recitation with (subsequent) contemplation. In view of what follows the reference is probably to contemplation of the thirty two parts of the body. The two terms are related to the four discriminations (*paṭisambhidā*) and to the stages in the development of insight knowledge.⁴⁶ In the latter case at least *vicāra* is compared to the higher stages. “For one established in the two, bodily and mental suffering does not arise; bodily and mental happiness does arise. Mental happiness produced by *vitakka* in this way is joy (*pīti*); bodily happiness is simply bodily.”⁴⁷

2. *Milindapañha*

Some additional points and similes are given in the *Milindapañha*.⁴⁸ These must be quite early as this portion of that work is cited by Buddhaghosa and others with specific mention of Nāgasena. *Vitakka* is given the characteristic (*lakkhana*) of fixing (*appanā*) and this is explained as similar to a carpenter fixing a thoroughly prepared piece of wood in a joint. *Vicāra* has the characteristic of pondering over and over (*anumajjana* — literally repeated rubbing or threshing). It too is illustrated by a simile. “Just as, O king, a bronze gong, which has been struck, afterwards sounds repeatedly and echoes on.⁴⁹ *Vitakka*, O king, should be seen as like the striking; *vicāra* should be seen as like the sounding repeatedly.”

3. *Vimuttimagga*

This work is now extant only in Chinese, but is clearly an important source of the *Visuddhimagga*. Its account contains most of the material in the *Peṭakopadesa* passage with the addition of a version of one of the similes from the *Milindapañha* and an analysis of *vitakka* and *vicāra* in terms of their characteristic, *rasa*, *paccupaṭṭhāna* and *padaṭṭhāna*.⁵⁰ This last is a standard method of analysing *dharmas* in the commentarial literature and, as Ñāṇamoli has suggested,⁵¹ is probably in part derived from the sixteen *hāras* of the *Peṭakopadesa*.

4. *The Works of Buddhaghosa*

A detailed treatment of these two terms is found in three of the works attributed to Buddhaghosa.⁵² All three are plainly based on a simplification and tidying up of the *Vimuttimagga*. It is unlikely that Buddhaghosa had

direct access to the *Peṭakopadesa*; material in his writings derived from that source is clearly secondhand. In fact even the simile from the *Milindapañha* is normally cited as a bell, just as in the *Vimuttimaggā*, whereas in the *Milinda* itself it is a gong.⁵³ The *Dhammasaṅgaṇi commentary* gives the bell, but also cites the *Milinda* directly, either from memory or from a different version, as there are some variations from the text we have — most notably the gong is cited as a drum.

Of the three commentaries the *Vinaya commentary* is fairly close to the *Vimuttimaggā* version with relatively little additional information but omitting some of the less comprehensible ideas from the *Peṭakopadesa*. Probably the most important addition is the new simile of the bee — *vitakka* is compared to a bee with its mind following a scent that drops straight onto a lotus while *vicāra* is compared to the bee's wandering over the lotus after it has alighted.

The fullest account is given in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi commentary*. The *Visuddhimagga* gives a rewritten and simplified version of this. Both give a series of new similes. If someone is firmly gripping a dirty metal vessel with one hand and rubbing on (*anumajjana*) powder or oil with a cloth, then *vitakka* is like the hand which grips firmly and *vicāra* is like the hand which rubs. If a potter who is making a vessel has spun the wheel with the blow of a stick, then *vitakka* is like the hand which presses down (to hold the clay) and *vicāra* is like the hand which moves about here and there (to shape the clay). Similarly *vitakka* applies (the mind) (*abhiniropana*) just like a fixed pin which has been fastened in the middle when someone is drawing a circle. *Vicāra* ponders over (*anumajjana*) (the object) just like the pin which circumscribes the circle.

Elsewhere *abhiniropana* and *anumajjana* are given as the respective characteristics of *vitakka* and *vicāra*. This must come from an old commentarial passage (giving exegesis of the word *Tathāgata*) which describes the characteristics of various *dhammas*.⁵⁴ Closely related to this is a rewritten version of the *Peṭaka*'s simile of the bird. *Vitakka*, which "occurs by way of applying the mind to its object", is compared to the movement of a large bird flying in the sky which takes the air with both wings and then holds its wings steady; for *vitakka* becomes one-pointed and then enters absorption (*appeti*). *Vicāra* which "occurs by way of pondering over the object", is compared to the movement of the bird when it swiftly moves its wings in order to take the air; for *vicāra* ponders over the object. The *Dhammasaṅgaṇi commentary* specifically attributes this simile to the [old] *atthakathā*.⁵⁵ The same work is the only one to give another simile — just as one goes up

into (*ārohati*) a royal palace depending upon a friend or relative who is a courtier, so the mind takes up (*ārohati*) an object in dependence upon *vitakka*.

NORTH INDIAN BUDDHIST TEXTS

The *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*⁵⁶ defines *vitarka* as *cittaudārikatā* ‘grossness of mind’ and *vicāra* as *cittasūksmatā* ‘subtlety of mind’. The *Abhidharmāvatāra* gives a similar definition⁵⁷ which must be fairly old, since it appears also in the *Jñānaprasthāna*⁵⁸ — one of the latest of the Sarvāstivādin canonical texts — and in the *Abhidharmahrdaya*.⁵⁹ This application of the distinction between gross and subtle does not appear in the Pali tradition before the *Vimuttimaggā* and is therefore probably of Sarvāstivādin origin. Noticeably, whereas the *Vimuttimaggā* probably gave it in the form ‘grossness of mind, etc.’, Buddhaghosa refers simply to grossness, etc. This is significant in the light of the discussion in the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*, where Vasubandhu criticizes the above definition. As he points out, grossness and subtlety are relational terms (in *abhidharma*) and should extend as far as the highest level of existence (i.e. the *bhavāgra*). In other words each *dhyāna* or attainment is subtle in relation to the one below and gross in relation to the one above — a process extending to the fourth formless *jhāna*. The intended implication is that this is incompatible with the canonical account where neither *vitarka* nor *vicāra* are present in the higher *dhyānas*. The Pali tradition avoids this problem by making *vitakka* and *vicāra* gross and subtle in relation to one another rather than the causes of the mind’s grossness and subtlety in general.⁶⁰

The *Abhidharmāvatāra*⁶¹ and the *Abhidharmadīpa*⁶² declare that *vitarka* is the cause of the activity of the five (sensory) consciousnesses which are gross, while *vicāra* is favourable to the activity of mind consciousness (*manovijñāna*). They also describe *vitarka* as differentiating the type of sensory feature (*viśayanimittaparakāravikalpin*) involved and as having its activity stirred up by the wind of labelling (*saṃjñā*) i.e. it is stimulated by the constant flow of labelled sensations. Yogācārin authors give definitions which are slightly more reminiscent of the Pali *Abhidhammapiṭaka* and the *Peṭakopadesa*. It suffices to quote the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*:

What is *vitarka*? It is a mental murmuring which searches about (for the object) in dependence either upon volition (*cetanā*) or upon understanding (*prajñā*). But that is grossness of mind. What is *vicāra*? It is a mental murmuring which investigates (the object) in dependence either upon volition or upon understanding. But that is subtlety of mind.⁶³

STAGES OF SAMĀDHI IN THE YOGA-SŪTRA

The parallelism between the description of *samprajñāta-samādhi* in the *Yoga-sūtra* and the traditional descriptions of the *rūpa-jhānas* in Buddhist sources has long been noted.⁶⁴ Careful examination of the text of the *Yoga-sūtra* (Yogas) and its *bhāṣya* suggests that the resemblance is even closer than has always been appreciated. Two passages are relevant for this purpose. The first of these (Yogas i 17) reads:

vitarka-vicārānandāsmītā-rūpānugamāt samprajñātaḥ |

It is called [the cessation⁶⁵] which clearly comprehends [its object] as a result of being accompanied by forms⁶⁶ of *vitarka*, *vicāra*, bliss and a sense of I.

The commentators are agreed that this indicates four distinct stages, which may be tabulated, after the *bhāṣya*, as follows:

TABLE I

1. <i>sa-vitarka</i>	} <i>vitarka</i> <i>vicāra</i> bliss sense of I
2. <i>sa-vicāra</i>	} <i>vicāra</i> bliss sense of I
3. <i>sānanda</i>	} bliss sense of I
4. <i>asmitā-mātra</i>	} sense of I

Such a series poses no problems and is, as we shall see, in good agreement with the Buddhist sources.

The *bhāṣya* to this passage defines *vitarka* as: *cittasyāḷambane sthūla ābhogaḥ* "gross directing of the mind to an object." *Vicāra* is correspondingly subtle. This is quite close to some of the Buddhist definitions we have seen and strikingly different to the more typical definition of the later commentaries which sees grossness and subtlety in terms of the object of the mind rather than as a feature of the mind itself. However this should

not be overstated. It is certainly a fundamental assumption of both *abhidharma* and Sāṃkhya-yoga that higher states of consciousness are both themselves more subtle and possess subtler objects. The point is rather that in adapting material of ultimately Buddhist origin the Yoga tradition tends to shift it from the rather psychological bias of *abhidharma* towards a more cosmological orientation.

In fact this definition in terms of the subtlety of the object is in part derived from a passage later in the same chapter of the *Yoga-sūtra* to which we must now turn:

śabdārtha-jñāna-vikalpaiḥ saṃkīrṇā sa-vitarkā samāpattiḥ [42]
smṛti-pariśuddhau sva-rūpa-śūnyevārtha-mātra-nirbhāsā
nirvitarkā [43]
etayaiva sa-vicārā nirvicārā ca sūkṣma-viṣayā vyākhyātā [44]
sūkṣma-viṣayatvaṃ cālīṅga-paryavasānam [45]

42. The attainment with *vitarka* is associated with concepts arising from knowledge of the meanings of words.⁶⁷
43. When mindfulness (*smṛti*) is pure [the attainment] without *vitarka* reveals only the object and is as if empty of its own nature.
44. By this has been explained [the attainment] with *vicāra*, whereas [the attainment] without *vicāra* may be explained as having subtle objects.⁶⁸
45. Moreover the sphere of subtle objects ends with that which has no distinguishing marks [i.e. *prakṛti*].

The commentators are a little misleading here. Their discussion is in terms of the *savitarka/nirvitarka*, *savicāra/nirvicāra* terminology, creating a new set of four *samāpattis*. If this is taken literally, it creates problems in reconciling the new set with the version from the *bhāṣya* set out in Table I. In the light of the Buddhist information that interpretation is almost certainly correct.⁶⁹ Yet there is no place for a *nirvitarka-samādhi* distinct from *savicāra-samādhi*.

According to the commentaries to i 44 *savicāra-* and *nirvicāra-* (*samāpatti*) are *sūkṣma-viṣayā*; *savitarka-* and *nirvitarka-* are *sthūla-viṣayā*. This can be interpreted as a single pair — these last are gross and all higher stages of *sabīja-samādhi* are subtle. However, on further investigation an alternative solution appears possible. The redactor of the *Yoga-sūtra* may rather have been thinking in terms of a series of stages. A is gross in

relation to the subtlety of B, which is itself gross in relation to the subtlety of C, yet again gross in relation to D, and so on.

In the light of the general nature of this type of yogic practice, this second explanation seems much more plausible. Some examples of this kind of usage are cited in the *Visuddhimagga* from traditional sources.⁷⁰ Here the first *jhāna* is gross (*olārika*) where the second is subtle (*sukhuma*), but the second is gross where the third is subtle and the third is gross where the fourth is subtle. Many other examples could be cited from abhidhammic contexts.

If we understand the *Yoga-sūtra* in this way, we can derive the following table:

TABLE II

1. <i>sa-vitarka</i>	gross	<i>vitarka</i> <i>vicāra</i> bliss sense of I
	↓	
2. <i>nirvitarka</i> = <i>sa-vicāra</i>	subtle	<i>vicāra</i> bliss sense of I
	gross	
	↓	
3. <i>nirvicāra</i> = <i>sānanda</i>	subtle	bliss sense of I
	gross	
	↓	
4. * <i>nirānanda</i> = <i>asmitā-mātra</i>	subtle	sense of I
	gross	
	↓	

This interpretation makes more plausible the translation adopted for *Yogas* i 44 (see note 68). Obviously the terms *nirvitarka* and *nirvicāra* can also be taken as referring to all higher levels of *samādhi* beyond the first (or second) in the table as these too lack *vitarka* and *vicāra*. Equally all higher levels and mental objects can be described as subtle, not only the one immediately above. Correspondingly even the lowest level can be described as possessing *vicāra*.⁷¹

It should also be mentioned that the influence of the Buddhist account of

the four *dhyānas* is already evident in one passage of the *Mahābhārata*, as pointed out by V. M. Bedekar.⁷²

BUDDHIST SOURCES

It is clear that at the time of the formation of many of the classical *abhidhamma* schools in the second and third centuries B.C., several different lists of factors of *samādhi* were extant in different *suttas*. By far the most important of these was the list contained in the standard formula for the four *jhānas*:

1. First *jhāna* — *savitakkaṃ, savicāraṃ, vivekaṃ, pītisukhaṃ*;
2. Second *jhāna* — *ajjhataṃ sampasādanam*,⁷³ *cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ, samādhijaṃ, pītisukhaṃ*;
3. Third *jhāna* — *upekkhako viharati, sato ca sampajāno sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṃvedeti, upekkhako, satimā, sukhavīhārī*;
4. Fourth *jhāna* — *adukkhaṃ, asukhaṃ, upekkhāsatiṭṭhisuddhi*.

The *Vibhaṅga*, an early canonical *abhidhamma* work, formulates (in its *Suttantabhājanīya*) the factors which make up each *jhāna* as follows:⁷⁴

TABLE III

First <i>jhāna</i>	{	<i>vitakka</i> <i>vicāra</i> joy and happiness one-pointedness of mind ⁷⁵
Second <i>jhāna</i>	{	<i>sampasādana</i> joy and happiness one-pointedness of mind
Third <i>jhāna</i>	{	equipoise (<i>upekṣā</i>) mindfulness (<i>sati</i>) clear comprehension happiness one-pointedness of mind
Fourth <i>jhāna</i>	{	equipoise mindfulness one-pointedness of mind

The list given in the *Abhidharmakośa* differs only for the fourth *dhyāna*, where it has: 1. neutral feeling; 2. *upekṣāparisuddhi*; 3. *smṛtiparisuddhi*; 4. *samādhi*.⁷⁶

Also in early sources was a division of *samādhi* into three kinds:⁷⁷

1. With *vitakka* and *vicāra*;
2. Without *vitakka* but with *vicāra*;
3. With neither *vitakka* nor *vicāra*.

The list posed problems for systematic analysis, as the second kind cannot be precisely equated with any one of the four *jhānas*. Early schools resolved the problem in one of two different ways. The Sarvāstivādins and others introduced an intermediate stage or *dhyānāntara* between the first and second *dhyānas*. The Vibhajjavādins/Theravādins preferred to adopt an alternative list of five *jhānas* for purposes of *abhidhamma* analysis and distributed the factors as follows:⁷⁸

TABLE IV

First <i>jhāna</i>	{	<i>vitakka</i> <i>vicāra</i> joy happiness one-pointedness of mind
Second <i>jhāna</i>	{	<i>vicāra</i> joy happiness one-pointedness of mind
Third <i>jhāna</i>	{	joy happiness one-pointedness of mind
Fourth <i>jhāna</i>	{	happiness one-pointedness of mind
Fifth <i>jhāna</i>	{	equipoise one-pointedness of mind

Another ancient list divided similar material into three sections:⁷⁹

1. *Samādhi* with *vitakka* and *vicāra*, with only *vicāra*, with neither;
2. *Samādhi* with and without joy;
3. *Samādhi* with *sāta* or with equipoise.

It seems clear that two distinct stages are to be found in the sources. In the early material we find a less standardized situation with the experience of

samādhi at the centre of the stage and the classification into types more varied and perhaps more experiential in nature. Only later arises the attempt to harmonize this material into a single list, as is done in the Sarvāstivādin tradition. In this respect the Theravādin device of an alternate set of five *jhānas* preserves more faithfully an earlier variety.⁸⁰

IN CONCLUSION

For the canonical *abhidhamma*, *vitakka* at its weakest results in a tendency to speculate and fix upon ideas. More strongly developed it is the ability to apply the mind to something and to fix it upon a (meditative) object. *Vicāra* at its weakest is simply the tendency of the mind to wander. More highly developed it is the ability to explore and examine an object. In one way we can say that *vitakka* is 'thinking of' something, whereas *vicāra* is 'thinking about' that same thing, but in fact the latter is probably intended to refer more to what we would now describe as the mind's associative faculty.⁸¹

A *samādhi* with *vicāra* but without *vitakka* is a state of mind in which the mind freely associates about a meditative object without *deliberately* thinking of anything specific. It must obviously be preceded by one with *vitakka*. If it were not, then the mind would simply wander to any kind of object and soon lose (or never acquire) the kind of focus and unification required for *samādhi*. The situation is different once a *samādhi* with *vitakka* is sufficiently strongly developed. Then *vitakka* can drop away because that focus is well enough established not to need further reinforcement.⁸²

The later texts do not depart radically from this understanding. Such differences as we do find are simply due to the need to conform to the requirements of theory. For the Vaibhāṣikas and Buddhaghosa this means conformity to strict momentariness and precise definition as distinct *dharmas*. For the *Yoga-sūtra*, and even more for its commentaries, the stages of *samādhi* need to be related to the levels of Sāṃkhya evolution.

NOTES

Abbreviations of names of texts are those used in the Critical Pali Dictionary unless otherwise indicated.

¹ A useful presentation of part of the case for such influences in: Johannes Bronkhorst, *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*, Stuttgart, 1986, chapter six.

² In Philip Denwood and Alexander Piatigorsky, *Buddhist Studies — Ancient and Modern*, London, 1983, pp. 1–11. Some of the material in the first part of this article was included in a draft version of that paper.

³ M III 73.

⁴ D I 16; 21; 23; 29; a similar formula at M I 68, etc.; 520.

⁵ A I 89, etc.; 193 ff.; II 191 f.

⁶ D I 12 etc.

⁷ M I 487; II 172 f.; A II 189 f.; Sn 885 f.

⁸ D II 36 f.; M I 167; S I 136; Vin I 4.

⁹ Sv-pt I 188 ff.; Sv I 106 f.

¹⁰ E.g. Dhs-a 114.

¹¹ M I 114 ff.; M III 114; 125; S I 203; II 151 ff.; III 93; A I 148; 254; 275; II 16; 76; 117; 252; III 390; 428 f.; 446; cf. also M I 118; 133; III 129 ff.; and *gehasita-vitakka* at M I 124; S I 186.

¹² D II 277; M III 124; S II 151 ff.; 153 f.; A IV 147; *saññā* and *vitakka* are juxtaposed at M I 133; A III 428; cf. also M III 129.

¹³ The eight thoughts of a great man D III 287, A IV 229; not thinking a thought connected with the body while dwelling in contemplation of the body M III 136; thinking whatever thought one desires to think, etc. A II 36 f.; the monk who is full of thought and spends his day in thoughts about *dhamma* A III 87; mindfulness of in and out breathing should be developed in order to cut off thought A IV 353; subtle defilements are thoughts connected with clan, country or reputation — after these go, *dhamma* thoughts remain A I 254; thought is the world's *vicāraṇā* S I 39 f. Some of these could be interpreted in more technical senses. Evil unskilful thoughts at A I 280 probably refers to the three kinds of unskilful thought.

¹⁴ Thought reading D III 104, A I 171, cf. D I 213; where *vitakka* and *vicāra* cease and who dwells constantly making them cease A IV 411; a place is oppressive in which they have not ceased A IV 550; *saññāmanasikāra* associated with *vitakka* are an illness for someone dwelling in the second *jhāna* A IV 415; the *jhāyin* without *vitakka* S I 186; *vitakka* and *vicāra* have ceased, are tranquilized and calmed in the second *jhāna* S IV 217, cf. A IV 409; they are movement in (the peace of) the first *jhāna* M I 454, cf. D I 37; also in lists of types of *samādhi*, see notes 77 and 79 below.

¹⁵ M I 301; S IV 293.

¹⁶ A IV 385.

¹⁷ A II 36 f.

¹⁸ D III 215; M II 24 ff.; A V 31; *kāma-saṅkappa* alone at A III 259, 145–6. The three unskilful *saṅkappas* are probably intended at Sn 818 and A I 281 — in the last case *saṅkappa* in verse corresponds to *vitakka* in prose.

¹⁹ Due to lack of mindfulness M I 453 f., S IV 190; due to not guarding the senses S IV 76 f., 136 f.; similar at M III 132 and 136 (*gehasita*).

²⁰ D III 42–6; M I 192 ff.; III 276 f. (here the meaning 'purpose' is required); A V 92; 94, 97; 99; 104.

²¹ S II 143 f.; 144 ff.; 146 f.; 147 ff.; cf. also M II 27 f.

²² Peṭ 168.

²³ A IV 199; 202; also Vin II 238 f.; Ud 53; 55; S II 184; Ap 23.

²⁴ Vin II 136 f.; III 217; 257 f.

²⁵ Vibh 195; 197; 202; 254; 259. Probably *appanā* as the name for the concluding phrases in Dhs should be understood in the same way.

²⁶ Dhs-a 142; Ps IV 132 f.

²⁷ Dhs-a 142 f.

²⁸ Nett 33; Peṭ 92.

²⁹ Paṭis I 16; 17; etc.

³⁰ Paṭis I 79.

³¹ M III 251; D II 312; S V 9; etc.

³² M I 402.

³³ S IV 189 f.; Paṭis II 19.

³⁴ A IV 147; cf. Vibh 103 f.

³⁵ E.g. M I 115 f.: there is an inclination of the mind towards whatever one frequently applies *vitakka* and *vicāra* to; cf. also M I 116: if I apply *vitakka* and *vicāra* for too long, my body would become tired; M I 144: . . . applies *vitakka* and *vicāra* by night to the affairs of the day; M II 253 f.: . . . applies *vitakka* and *vicāra* in accordance with that teaching.

³⁶ A III 87 f.; 177 f.; 361 f.; 382 f.; IV 86; A III 21 ff. = D III 242 (i.e. the *Saṅgītipariyāya*); the exception is A I 264.

³⁷ Cf. BHSD s.v. *upavicāra* and A III 363 f.

³⁸ D III 244 f.; M III 216 f.; S IV 232; A I 176; cf. Vibh 381.

³⁹ Dhs-a 143.

⁴⁰ A IV 47—51; E^c and C^e 1970 read *anusandati*; the latter cites a reading *anusanṭhāti* cf. Skt *anusamsthā* 'to follow'.

⁴¹ PTC lists twenty seven occurrences s.v. *dhata-*.

⁴² See for example: It 72; Nidd I 386; 493; 501; Paṭis I 17; 36; 136; 178 f.; Vibh 86 f.; 103 f.; 362; Kvu 412 ff. For *takka*: It 37; Nidd I 293 f.; 360; 400; 482; 498; 501; II 29; 185.

⁴³ Peṭ 142.

⁴⁴ Nānamoli (Peṭ Trsl. 190) so emends *apeti*.

⁴⁵ Sv I 144; Dhs-a 115; Vism 142.

⁴⁶ This paragraph must be compared to Nett 19—20 where there are a number of parallels. Probably the comparison in Peṭ of *vitakka* with *apariññā* and of *vicāra* with *pariññā* should read *abhiññā* and *pariññā* (or *vice versa*).

⁴⁷ So correct Nānamoli's translation.

⁴⁸ Mīl 62 f.

⁴⁹ E^c reads *anusandahati*. S^e (cited CPD) reads *anusandati*. Dhs-a has *anusaddāyati* which I follow in the translation. There may be, or have been thought to be, some connection with the *anusandhanatā* of the *Dhammasaṅgani* register but it is difficult to make sense of this. Possibly both were taken to mean 'continuing in sequence' cf. BHSD s.v. *anusamḍhi*.

⁵⁰ Vim Trsl. 86 ff.

⁵¹ Nett Trsl. liv.

⁵² Sp I 144; Dhs-a 114 f.; Vism 142 f. See also the Chinese version of Sp (trsl. P. V. Bapat and A. Hirakawa, 1970) p. 104 and Paṭis-a I 181 f.; Nidd-a I 127 f.; Moh 12.

⁵³ For the bell simile, see also N. Aiyaswami Sastri, *Satyasiddhiśāstra of Harivarman*, Baroda, 1975 and 1978, I 165 and 216; II pp. 134 and 186.

⁵⁴ Sv I 63; Ps I 48; Mp I 106; cf. Sv I 121 f.; Ps II 348; Mīl 62 and note the earlier pair at Paṭis I 17.

⁵⁵ The *Visuddhimagga* (also Paṭis-a I 182 and Nidd-a I 128) cites instead the *Dukanipātaṭṭhakathā*, but this too must be the old Sinhala commentary as it is not in Mp.

⁵⁶ Abhidh-k-bh II 33.

⁵⁷ Marcel Van Velthem, *Le Traité de la Descente dans la Profonde Loi de l'Arhat Skandhila*, Louvain, 1977, p. 16. Further material cited in SWTF s.v. *audārika-pañca-vijñāna-hetu-dharman* (kindly sent to me by Dr. Siglinde Dietz).

⁵⁸ Śānti Bhikṣu Śāstrī, *Jñānaprasthāna-śāstra of Kātyāyanīputra retranslated into Sanskrit from the Chinese version of Hiuan Tsang*, Śāntiniketan, 1955, p. 53.

⁵⁹ Charles Willemen, *The Essence of Metaphysics*, Brussels, 1975, p. 27. Also p. 106 where *vitakka* is explained as "when, at the moment of engaging in concentration, one begins to produce wholesome qualities, one first reflects with coarse thoughts," while for *vicāra* we have: "when one connects and links the thoughts with subtlety."

⁶⁰ It must be noted, however, that the Vaibhāsikas probably did not intend to go so far. This is simply the implication claimed by Vasubandhu in their use of the simile of ghee in

water to defend the simultaneous presence of both *dharmas*. Note that Vasubandhu, but not the Sautrāntikas, denies the possibility of such a simultaneous occurrence since for him they are two degrees of a single *dharma*.

⁶¹ Van Velthem, op. cit., p. 16.

⁶² P. S. Jaini, *Abhidharmadīpa with Vibhāṣaprabhāvṛtti*, Second Edition, Patna, 1977, p. 81. Jaini's footnotes give a number of relevant source passages. See also the general discussion of *vitarka* and *vicāra* in the Introduction pp. 83–88. Further comments and references in: Stefan Anacker, *Seven Works of Vasubandhu*, Delhi, 1984, p. 77 f.

⁶³ Cited Jaini, op. cit., p. 81 f. Some similar passages also in the *Satyasiddhiśāstra* — Aiyaswami Sastri, op. cit., Vol II p. 185 f. cf. pp. 134 f.; 173; 246 f.; 367 ff.; 385 ff.

⁶⁴ Bronkhorst, op. cit.

⁶⁵ Supplying the noun *nirodhaḥ* from Yogas i 2 and i 12. Alternatively *samprajñātaḥ* (sc. *samādhiḥ*) cf. Yogas-bh and Bhoja.

⁶⁶ Just possibly *rūpa* here refers to the object of *samādhi*, as in some Buddhist sources. See L. S. Cousins, "Buddhist *jhāna*. Its nature and attainment according to Pali sources," *Religion* III (1973) p. 119. We would then translate: "... as a result of following a [mental] object with *vitarka* ..."

⁶⁷ Following Shlomo Pines and Tuvia Gelblum, "Al-bīrūnī's Arabic Version of Patañjali's Yogasūtra: A translation of his first chapter and a comparison with related Sanskrit texts," BSOAS XXIX (1966) p. 325 n. 234. This is a translation of the text in isolation. If one prefers to take account of the use of these terms elsewhere in Yogas (i 9 and iii 17), then the following would be preferable:

42. The attainment with *vitarka* is mixed with [erroneous] identification of the sound of the word with the object [to which it refers] and the general concept [implied by the word].

⁶⁸ Following the alternative translation given in Pines and Gelblum, op. cit., p. 325 n. 234. See Table II. The more usual translation is:

44. [The attainments] with and without *vicāra*, which have subtle objects, are explained in just the same way.

⁶⁹ The four factors given by the *Yoga-sūtra* are simply a modification of the various Buddhist lists of factors. *Ānanda* is in any case a synonym for *prīti* and *asmitā* is substituted for *upekṣā/tatramajjhataṭā* with an eye to Sāṃkhya theory (*buddhi*) — even at the price of some inconsistency with Yogas ii 3.

⁷⁰ Vism 275.

⁷¹ As with Yogas i 17 above.

⁷² "The Dhyānayaoga in the Mahābhārata (XII 188)," *Bhāratīya Vidyā* 20–21 (1960–61) 116–25. Further discussed in Bronkhorst, op. cit., p. 65 ff.

⁷³ Compare the *adhyātma-prasāda* of Yogas i 47.

⁷⁴ Vibh 257, line 30; etc.

⁷⁵ The addition of *cūtekaggatā* ≠ *samādhi* to the list is explicit in such contexts as M I 294 f.; III 25.

⁷⁶ Abhidh-k-bh VIII 8; the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (p. 68) is similar; cf. Peṭ 139; M III 25 f.; cp. also D I 196.

⁷⁷ DN III 219 = 274 ≠ SN IV 360 ≠ 362 f.

⁷⁸ Dh 33 ff.

⁷⁹ M III 162 = A IV 300.

⁸⁰ A different view: Walpola Rahula, "A Comparative Study of Dhyānas according to Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyāna," *The Maha Bodhi*, June 1962, pp. 190–99.

⁸¹ It is not as such 'sustained application of mind' nor is it 'holding the mind' on an object — these are results of *vicāra*, not its nature.

⁸² The *Dhs-m* (Ce 1938) 166 (to Dhs-a 115) describes *vitakka* in access or absorption *samādhi* as unwavering (*niccalo hutvā*) and as having entered into the object (*anupavisitvā pavattati*). The *Anuṭṭikā* explains that when it is active continuously on a single object it does not vibrate as it does with a new object.

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