

The Treatise on the Path to Liberation (解脫道論) and the *Visuddhimagga*

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Abstract:

The present paper examines the *Treatise on the Path to Liberation*, 解脫道論, (Taishō 1648) from the perspective of the *Visuddhimagga*. The first part of the article offers a brief survey of the importance of the *Visuddhimagga*, followed by an examination of the possible association of the Path to Liberation with the Abhayagiri monastery. Then some significant differences between the two works are taken up, followed in the final part of the article by an evaluation of these differences.

Introduction:

The *Visuddhimagga* compiled by Buddhaghosa, "the most famous commentator of the Theravāda school",¹ is a work whose central importance for the Theravāda tradition can hardly be underestimated. As the "principle non-canonical authority of the Theravāda", the *Visuddhimagga* offers "a concise but complete encyclopaedia of the Buddhist teachings".²

The deep regard which this work and its author evoked over centuries of Theravāda history is reflected in a tale found in the Ceylonese chronicle *Mahāvamsa* (37.28-240). The *Mahāvamsa* reports that when Buddhaghosa had completed the *Visuddhimagga*, *devas* intervened and hid his work, forcing him thereby to write it again. Once he had completed the task for a second time, the *devas* again took away the fruits of his labours, so that he had to write it a third time. Once he had finished the third version, the *devas* restored the other two copies. Upon examination, it was found that the three versions did not differ from each other at all.

I. The Treatise on the Path to Liberation

The high esteem of Buddhaghosa's skill in compiling the *Visuddhimagga*, evident since the time of the *Mahāvamsa* and still prevalent in traditional Thera-

¹ Law 1973: 404; for recent research on Buddhaghosa and his work cf. Endo 2008 and Pind 1992; for a critical assessment of Buddhaghosa's role cf. Kalupahana 1992: 206-216.

² Ñāṇamoli 1991: XXIII and Adikaram 1946: 4.

vāda circles today, suffered a considerable set-back when another work of a closely similar character was discovered in the Chinese canon. This work is the Treatise on the Path to Liberation, 解脫道論.³ According to the information given at the outset of this work, the Treatise on the Path to Liberation was compiled by the arahant Upaṭiṣya/Upatissa, while its translation into Chinese was undertaken by Saṃghapāla, Saṃghavarman or Saṃghabhara (僧伽婆羅), active in the early sixth century. In addition to the Chinese translation, an extract from the same work has been preserved in Tibetan.⁴

The language and the geographical provenance of the original text of the Path to Liberation, upon which the Chinese translation was based, have so far not been determined with certainty.⁵ What can be said with more certainty, however, is that in many respects the Path to Liberation shows close similarities to the *Vi-suddhimagga*.

Of particular relevance to the relationship between these two works is an instance where Buddhaghosa refers to the opinion of "some", who propose that cha-

³ The Treatise on the Path to Liberation is found in the Taishō edition at T 32, no. 1648, p. 399c-461c (Nanjio no. 1293). The Chinese rendering of the title as 解脫道論 would correspond to *Vimuktimārga-sāstra* or *Vimuktimārga-nirdeśa* in Sanskrit.

⁴ This extract is found in the Derge edition no. 306 or in the Peking edition no. 972 under the title *Rnam par grol ba'i lam las sbyangs pa'i yon tan bstan pa zhes bya ba*, corresponding to *Vimuktimārga-dhutagaṇa-nirdeśa* in Sanskrit. The translation of this extract, which describes the ascetic practices, is attributed to Vidyākara-prabha, who was active in the ninth century. The Tibetan text has been edited by Sasaki 1958 and Bapat 1964. Bapat 1944 (cf. also Bapat 1964: XV) notes that in some editions of the Tibetan canon the *Vimuktimārga-dhutagaṇa-nirdeśa* contains a spurious passage with some *sūtra* quotations from otherwise unrelated works, probably the result of a copyist's error who may have inadvertently taken over material from the *Sūtrasamuccaya*. Extracts from the *Vimuktimārga* can also be found in the *Samskṛtāsamskṛta-viniścaya*, a compendium of tenets of various schools that has similarly been preserved in Tibetan (for a survey of this text cf. Skilling 1987: 7). A Pāli version of the Path to Liberation, 'found' in the Asgiriya monastery in Sri Lanka and published in Sinhalese script in 1963, has turned out to be inauthentic, cf. Bapat 1972, Bechert 1989 and Endo 1983.

⁵ Nagai 1919: 70 assumed that the text originated from Ceylon or Cambodia. Bapat 1937b: LIV, however, highlighted the absence of any reference to Ceylonese names or places; the use of transcriptions of medical terminology that points to Sanskrit originals; and the existence of the above-mentioned extract on the ascetic practice preserved in Tibetan translation. These together prompted him to assume an Indian origin for the work. Yet, the absence of references to Ceylonese names or places might be due to the nature of the work, which unlike the *Visuddhimagga* does not contain stories (this was pointed out by Kheminda in Ehara 1961: XXXVIII; on these narrations cf. also Winternitz 1920: 165-166). Furthermore, the use of Sanskrit medical terminology does not appear to have been uncommon in Ceylon (this argument was also raised by Kheminda in *ibid.* and again by Crosby 1999: 510). In later times, other works of Ceylonese provenance have also been rendered into Tibetan (see the survey in Skilling 1993), so that the existence of a Tibetan translation would not in itself exclude Ceylonese origins for the original text. Hence the question of the provenance of the Treatise on the Path to Liberation remains, for the time being, unresolved.

racter types are the outcome of previous habits, the elements and humours.⁶ Dhammapāla in his commentary on the *Visuddhimagga* explains that the reference to 'some' intends Upatissa, and that this position is adopted in the Path to Liberation.⁷ His identification is correct, as these three factors as conditions for character types are indeed listed in the Path to Liberation.⁸ On the basis of the testimony of Dhammapāla, it seems that Buddhaghosa was aware of at least this aspect of the Path to Liberation. This is rather significant, as it would imply that "the *Visuddhimagga*, which hitherto has been considered to be entirely [Buddhaghosa's] own work, is in reality a revised version of Upatissa's *Vimuttimagga*".⁹

II. The School Affiliation of the Path to Liberation

In order to evaluate the relationship between the *Visuddhimagga* and the Path to Liberation, a central question to be solved would be the school affiliation of the latter.¹⁰ Notably, in the case of several other instances where the *Visuddhimagga* differs from the Path to Liberation, the commentary on the *Visuddhimagga* by Dhammapāla indicates that the tenets in question were upheld by the Abhayagiri monastery. Bapat (1936: 38-40) notes four such cases:

- 1) According to Buddhaghosa, the ascetic practices should be reckoned as wholesome (except in the case of an arahant, when their undertaking is to be qualified as "undetermined", *avyākata*). Buddhaghosa considers "those" who hold that the ascetic practices cannot be classified in this manner as lacking an understanding of the true nature of the ascetic practices.¹¹ Dhammapāla explains that the reference to "those" intends the followers of the Abhayagiri monastery.¹²

⁶ Vism 102: '*tisso cariyā pubbāciñṇanidānā dhātudosanidānā cā 'ti ekacce vadanti.*

⁷ Vism-mhṭ I 123: '*ekacce' ti Upatissatheraṃ sandhāyāha, tena hi Vimuttimaggē tathā vuttaṃ* (page references to Vism-mhṭ are throughout to the Burmese edition).

⁸ T 32, no. 1648, p. 410, a12: 「答初所造因緣，諸行界爲因緣，過患爲因緣」；a correspondence first noted by Ñāṇatiloka 1931: VIII.

⁹ Nagai 1919: 80. Malalasekera 1994: 86-87 expresses doubts about a dependency of the *Visuddhimagga* on the Path to Liberation, and Hazra 1998: 539 believes that "it is impossible for us to decide whether he [i.e. Buddhaghosa] had some definite work before him, which he merely revised" (though it is not clear to what extent this statement was made with awareness of the Path to Liberation, as neither in his detailed survey of the *Visuddhimagga* nor in the index a reference to this work can be found). Yet, von Hinüber 1996: 124 notes that "contrary to the tradition, however, Vism had a predecessor, which is extant only in Chinese and partly in Tibetan translations, the *Vimuttimagga* by an otherwise unknown Upatissa"; and Norman 1983: 120 concludes that "there seems no doubt that Buddhaghosa made use of this earlier text [i.e. the Path to Liberation] when writing his own work".

¹⁰ The present and the following section are extracted from an entry on the *Vimuttimagga*, forthcoming in the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, Sri Lanka.

¹¹ Vism 80: *yesam pi kusalattikavinimuttaṃ dhutaṅgaṃ, tesam atthato dhutaṅgaṃ eva n'atthi.*

¹² Vism-mhṭ I 104: '*yesan'ti Abhayagirivāsike sandhāyāha.*

The Chinese translation of the Path to Liberation does indeed consider it inappropriate to reckon the ascetic practices as either wholesome, or unwholesome, or undetermined.¹³ Though the position taken in the Chinese version would thus fit Buddhaghosa's criticism, the Tibetan *Vimuktimārga* extract disagrees in this respect, as it classifies the ascetic practices as "wholesome".¹⁴ Thus the Tibetan version would agree with the position taken by Buddhaghosa, since he also maintains that the ascetic practices are "wholesome", only adding the category "undetermined" in order to cover the case of an arahant.

- 2) In the context of a discussion of the first *jhāna*, Buddhaghosa dismisses a particular perspective on the significance of the stages of access, full absorption and reviewing held by "some", whom Dhammapāla identifies as the followers of the Abhayagiri monastery.¹⁵ A view corresponding to what has been dismissed by Buddhaghosa is advocated in the Path to Liberation.¹⁶
- 3) When treating the aggregate of form, Buddhaghosa rejects the opinion of "some" that torpor should be included under form.¹⁷ Dhammapāla explains that this view was held among the inhabitants of the Abhayagiri monastery.¹⁸ The Path to Liberation does include torpor in its listing of the components of the aggregate of form.¹⁹
- 4) In regard to the progress from stream-entry to once-return and from once-return to non-return, Buddhaghosa refers to "those" who believe that the attainment of fruition issues in the next stage of awakening if insight has been established. Buddhaghosa counters that in this case a non-returner would become an arahant, [then] an arahant a Paccekabuddha, and [then] a Paccekabuddha a Buddha.²⁰ Dhammapāla explains that Buddhaghosa's reference to "those" intends the inhabitants of the Abhayagiri monastery.²¹ According to Bapat (1936: 40), the view criticized by Buddhaghosa is "exactly the same" as a position taken in the Path to Liberation. Yet, the relevant passage in the Path to Liberation only explains

¹³ T 32, no. 1648, p. 406, b19: 「此不應說善，不善，無記」。

¹⁴ Bapat 1964: 76: *dge ba*, corresponding to *kuśala*.

¹⁵ Vism 148: *tatra paṭipadāvisuddhi nāma sasambhāriko upacāro, upekkhānubrūhanā nāma appanā, sampahaṃsanā nāma paccavekkhaṇā 'ti evam eke vaṇṇayanti*; Vism-mhṭ I 172: '*eke 'ti Abhayagirivāsino*.

¹⁶ T 32, no. 1648, p. 417, a8: 「云何清淨修行，謂諸善資具，云何捨增長，是謂安定，云何爲歡喜，是謂爲觀。

¹⁷ Vism 450: *ekaccānaṃ matena 'middharūpan'ti evaṃ aññāni pi rūpāni āharitvā*.

¹⁸ Vism-mhṭ II 104: '*ekaccānan'ti Abhayagirivāsīnaṃ*.

¹⁹ T 32, no. 1648, p. 445, c25: 「眼色」。The same position recurs also in the *Vimuktimārga* extract in the *Saṃskṛtāsamskṛta-viniścaya* in Skilling 1994: 189, which includes *gnyid* in its listing.

²⁰ Vism 700: *ye pana vadanti: 'sotāpanno 'phalasaṃpattim samāpajjissāmī 'ti vipassanaṃ paṭṭhapetvā sakadāgāmī hoti, sakadāgāmī ca anāgāmī 'ti, te vattabbā: evaṃ sati anāgāmī arahā bhavissati, arahā paccekabuddho, paccekabuddho ca buddho*.

²¹ Vism-mhṭ II 519: '*ye panā'ti Abhayagirivāsino sandhāyāha*.

that non-returners who attain fruition will not become arahants straightaway, because their insight lacks the required strength.²² This presentation could either imply that fruition attainment needs to be conjoined with insight in order to lead to full liberation, or else that fruition attainment by its very nature excludes the possibility of developing insight that is sufficiently strong to lead to the final goal. Moreover, the actual view quoted by Buddhaghosa concerns the progression from stream-entry to non-return, whereas the Path to Liberation only addresses progress from non-return to full liberation.

In sum, of the altogether four instances mentioned by Bapat, in the first case the Tibetan version disagrees with the Chinese text, while the last case seems uncertain. This leaves two unambiguous cases where views upheld in the Path to Liberation are criticized by Buddhaghosa and are associated by Dhammapāla with the Abhayagiri monastery (above cases 2 and 3).

An additional passage of relevance would be Buddhaghosa's criticism of attempts to relate the nature of the sense-organs to an excess of a particular element.²³ Dhammapāla does not identify the source of the version of this view that is found in the Path to Liberation,²⁴ as he only indicates that an alternative position on the same matter, also criticised in the *Visuddhimagga*, was upheld by the Mahāsāṃghikas.²⁵ Yet, judging from Gunawardana (1979: 29) it seems as if the position taken in the Path to Liberation has been identified as an Abhayagiri tenet in a Sinhalese sub-commentary on the *Visuddhimagga*, written in the thirteenth century.

These instances certainly point to a considerable degree of affinity between the Path to Liberation and views attributed to the Abhayagiri monastery. Yet, that the Path to Liberation "contains some minor points accepted by the Abhayagiri Monastery does not necessarily imply that it had any special connexion with that centre".²⁶ Points that mitigate against coming to a firm conclusion about the school affiliation of the Treatise on the Path to Liberation would be:²⁷

- the indications given in the commentary on the *Visuddhimagga* or in the Sinhalese sub-commentary are not confirmed by another external source;
- Dhammapāla does not relate Upatissa or the Path to Liberation to the Abhayagiri monastery, but mentions them separately in different contexts;
- several views proposed in the Path to Liberation and criticized by Buddhaghosa

²² T 32, no. 1648, p. 461, a16.

²³ Vism 444.

²⁴ T 32, no. 1648, p. 445, c29.

²⁵ Vism-mhṭ II 91.

²⁶ Ñāṇamoli 1991: XLI.

²⁷ Cf. in more detail Crosby 1999 and Norman 1991.

are not associated by Dhammapāla with the Abhayagiri monastery;²⁸

- not all of the positions that Dhammapāla attributes to the Abhayagiri monastery are found in the Path to Liberation.²⁹

Thus what can be safely concluded, at the present state of our knowledge, would only be that the Path to Liberation shows a partial overlap with positions that according to the testimony of commentaries on the *Visuddhimagga* were held by the inhabitants of the Abhayagiri monastery.

III. Significant Variations between the Path to Liberation and the *Visuddhimagga*

Though at the present state of our knowledge the question of the school affiliation of the Treatise on the Path to Liberation does not seem to find a definite answer, it remains beyond doubt that, in spite of the basic structure and mode of presentation in the *Visuddhimagga* being closely similar to the Path to Liberation, a number of points can be found where Buddhaghosa's presentation differs.³⁰ Such instances clearly show that, however much Buddhaghosa may have been aware of and even relied on the Path to Liberation, he also made it a point to present a different perspective on a number of issues. Out of these differences, in what follows two particular themes will be examined more closely: the way in which the quality of wholesomeness is handled in the two versions, and the scheme used in the Path to Liberation and in the *Visuddhimagga* to describe the progress of insight.

III.1) The Notion of Unwholesomeness

The Path to Liberation distinguishes between three types of "conduct", *sīla*: wholesome, unwholesome and undetermined.³¹ The *Visuddhimagga* does not include this threefold presentation in its analysis of *sīla*,³² but refers to it only in a by-the-way manner as a threefold distinction found in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, which Buddhaghosa considers to be not relevant to his discussion of *sīla*.³³

²⁸ Cf. the survey in Bapat 1937b: XXXVII-XLII.

²⁹ This is the case for an affirmation of the momentary concurrence of telepathic knowledge and its object, Vism 432: *tattha keci 'khaṇapaccuppannaṃ cittaṃ cetopariyañāṇassa ārammaṇaṃ hotī 'ti vadanti*; Vism-mhṭ II 66: *'keci' ti Abhayagirivāsino*; where neither the view nor the accompanying simile about throwing a handful of flowers into the air occurs in the corresponding section of the Path to Liberation, T 32, no. 1648, p. 443, b.

³⁰ A more detailed comparison of the two works can be found in Bapat 1937b.

³¹ T 32, no. 1648, p. 401, a26: 「謂三種戒。善戒，不善戒，無記戒」。

³² Vism 10.

³³ Vism 14 in reference to Paṭis I 44, where this is the only mode of reckoning types of *sīla*. The

The notion of unwholesome types of *sīla* occurs not only in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, but also in the discourses, where a treatment of *akusala sīla* can be found in the *Samaṇamañḍikā-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, the Discourse to the Carpenter *Pañcakaṅga, 五支物主經.³⁴ The two versions agree that *akusala sīla*/不善戒 stands for unwholesome bodily and verbal actions, which have their origin in a mind under the influence of passion, anger or delusion.

Another relevant passage would be the *Kukkuravatika-sutta*'s description of an observance, *sīla*, undertaken by some contemporary ascetics. This observance consists in behaving like a cow or like a dog, the *go-sīla* and the *kukkura-sīla*. Though an *Āgama* parallel to this discourse has so far not been identified, the *Saṅgītiparyāya* (阿毘達磨集異門足論) introduces an exposition similar to the *Kukkuravatika-sutta* with a reference to an observer of the cow-conduct, 牛戒.³⁵ The observances of behaving like a dog or like a cow are also mentioned in the *Yogācārabhūmi* (瑜伽師地論),³⁶ and in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-(upadeśa-)śāstra* (大智度論).³⁷ Since according to the *Kukkuravatika-sutta* such *sīla* will lead to a lower rebirth,³⁸ it can safely be assumed that the dog-observance and the cow-observance are instances of *akusala sīla*. The Path to Liberation refers in fact to these two observances as instances of *sīla* under the influence of delusion.³⁹

The theme of the scope of *akusala* recurs again in relation to the ascetic practices where, as already mentioned above, the suggestion that ascetic practices could be unwholesome meets with Buddhaghosa's criticism. In his discussion, Buddhaghosa takes up a potential counterargument based on a discourse in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*, which envisages that someone might undertake ascetic practices out of evil wishes.⁴⁰ The position taken in the Path to Liberation would do justice to this reference, whereas Buddhaghosa's counterargument is mainly based on his etymology of the term *dhutaṅga*, whereby he comes to the conclusion that one who undertakes ascetic practices must necessarily be engaging in wholesome activity.⁴¹ In view of the canonical support for instances of "conduct", *sīla*, and "ascetic practices", *dhutaṅga*, that can be reckoned as "unwholesome", *akusala*, the position taken by Buddhaghosa almost gives the impression as if his presenta-

Path to Liberation not only agrees with Paṭis in this and other instances, but at times also con-cords with explanations given in the *Peṭakopadesa*, cf. Bapat 1937a and Hayashi 2003-2005.

³⁴ MN 78 at MN II 25: *akusalā sīlā* and MĀ 179, T 1, no. 26, p. 720, c20: 「不善戒」.

³⁵ T 26, no. 1536, p. 396, a8.

³⁶ T 30, no. 1579, p. 312, b11: 「計持狗戒以爲清淨。或持牛戒」; cf. also the Sanskrit version in Bhattacharya 1957: 157, which speaks of the *kukkura-vrata* and *go-vrata*.

³⁷ T 25, no. 1509, p. 226, a17: 「牛戒 ... 狗戒」.

³⁸ MN 57 at MN I 388.

³⁹ T 32, no. 1648, p. 402, a19: 「癡戒若成則爲牛狗」.

⁴⁰ AN 5.181 at AN III 219.

⁴¹ Vism 80.

tion intentionally sets a contrast to the way the issue was handled in the Path to Liberation.

The pattern underlying the positions taken by the two works in regard to conduct and the ascetic practices recurs again in relation to concentration. The Path to Liberation distinguishes between wrong and right types of concentration.⁴² Such a distinction is not found in the *Visuddhimagga*, whose analysis is based on the premise that concentration is by nature wholesome, since Buddhaghosa defines concentration as "one-pointedness of a wholesome state of mind".⁴³ In this case, too, the Path to Liberation appears to be more in conformity with the discourses, where references to wrong types of concentration, *micchā samādhi*/邪定, can be found in the four Pāli *Nikāyas* as well as in each of the four main Chinese *Āgamas*.⁴⁴

In fact, the *Visuddhimagga* itself speaks of wrong concentration when describing the unwholesome states that will be left behind with the different stages of awakening.⁴⁵ Thus the definition of concentration as a wholesome state of mind in the *Visuddhimagga* would not imply a denial of the existence of wrong types of concentration. Yet, by defining concentration as something that by nature is wholesome a shift of emphasis takes place that is in line with the position taken in the same work in regard to conduct and the ascetic practices.

III.2) The Progress of Insight

The Path to Liberation treats the progress of insight under the heading of the four noble truths. Thus it considers the distinguishing of name and form as an implementation of the first truth, which thereby fulfils purification of view.⁴⁶ Insight into dependent arising then fulfils the second truth and accomplishes purification by overcoming doubt.⁴⁷ The Path to Liberation proceeds by turning to the insight knowledges in its description of how the fourth noble truth is fulfilled. In this way, the Path to Liberation covers the progress of insight based on the scheme of the four noble truths.

To employ the four noble truths scheme in this way is rather apt. According to a statement in the *Mahāhatthipadopama-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, the Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant's Footprint (象跡喻經),⁴⁸ the po-

⁴² T 32, no. 1648, p. 407, b12: 「復次定有二種, 邪定, 正定」.

⁴³ Vism 84: *kusalacittakaggatā samādhi*.

⁴⁴ DN 23 at DN II 353; MN 8 at MN I 44; SN 14.28 at SN II 168; AN 10.103 at AN V 212; DĀ 10, T 1, no. 1, p. 55, a11; MĀ 102, T 1, no. 26, p. 590, a10; SĀ 271, T 2, no. 99, p. 71, c4; EĀ 23.9, T 2, no. 125, p. 614, b27.

⁴⁵ Vism 683.

⁴⁶ T 32, no. 1648, p. 454, a2: 「見清淨」.

⁴⁷ T 32, no. 1648, p. 454, a14: 「離疑清淨」.

⁴⁸ MN 28 at MN I 184 and MĀ 30, T 1, no. 26, p. 464, b20-21. Cousins 1996a: 146 comments

sition of the four noble truths is of such eminence in regard to all wholesome things that they can be compared to an elephant's footprint, which by dint of its size encompasses the footprint of any other animal. The importance of the four noble truths is also reflected in the standard descriptions of the attainment of stream-entry during a gradual instruction given by the Buddha, where it is the delivery of a teaching on the four noble truths that causes the stainless dustless eye of the *Dhamma* to arise.⁴⁹ The same pattern recurs in descriptions of the attainment of full awakening, where again the decisive break-through takes place through insight into the four noble truths.⁵⁰

Instead of adopting the scheme of the four noble truths, the *Visuddhimagga* takes the seven purifications as its point of reference. These seven purifications stem from the *Rathavinīta-sutta*, found similarly in its parallels, the Discourse on the Seven Chariots in the *Madhyama-āgama* (七車經) and the tenth discourse in the thirty-ninth chapter of the *Ekottarika-āgama*.⁵¹ Yet, whereas the four noble truths are a central aspect of the early Buddhist teachings, in the Pāli canon the seven purifications occur, besides the *Rathavinīta-sutta*, only in one other discourse, the *Dasuttara-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*. In this other occurrence, the seven purifications are part of a set of altogether nine purifications.⁵² The same is also the case for the parallel to the *Dasuttara-sutta*, the Discourse on Tens Upward (十上經) in the *Dīrgha-āgama*.⁵³

The reference in the Path to Liberation to the first four purifications could easily have been the starting point for a revision undertaken by Buddhaghosa, during which he may have decided to complete the scheme of purifications. Yet, it is rather puzzling that Buddhaghosa should employ only the seven stages of purification in order to delineate the progress to insight. As a result of having recourse to the seven-fold scheme, instead of availing himself of the complete scheme of nine purifications, Buddhaghosa treats awakening under the heading of "purification by knowledge and vision".⁵⁴

that "when ... Sāriputta tells us that all skilful *dhammas* are included in the four noble truths, we should ... interpret skilful *dhammas* here as referring to meditational states". According to Ñāṇaponika 1966: 2, the imagery in MN 28 intends to convey that "the Four Noble Truths comprise ... all that is beneficial, i.e. all that is truly worth knowing and following after". On the term *kusala* and its implications cf. also Adam 2005; Carter 1984; Collins 1998: 154; Premasiri 1976; and Nanayakkara 1999. Franke 1906: 368 notes that a counterpart to the simile of the elephant's footprint can be found in the *Mahābhārata*, where it illustrates the importance of non-violence, *ahimsā*.

⁴⁹ E.g. MN 56 at MN I 380 or its parallel MĀ 133, T 1, no. 26, p. 630, c10.

⁵⁰ E.g. MN 19 at MN I 117 and its parallel MĀ 102, T 1, no. 26, p. 589, c16-17.

⁵¹ MN 24 at MN I 147; MĀ 9, T 1, no. 26, p. 430, b27; EĀ 39.10, T 2, no. 125, p. 734, b21. As already noted by Nagao 1919: 75, the title of the *Visuddhimagga* reflects this shift of emphasis from the four noble truths towards the seven purifications.

⁵² DN 34 at DN III 288.

⁵³ DĀ 10 at T01, no. 1, p. 56, a23; cf. also DĀ 11, T 1, no. 1, p. 58, c18.

⁵⁴ Vism 672; cf. also Anālayo 2005.

In the thought world of the discourses, the expression "knowledge and vision" does not necessarily imply the attainment of final liberation. This can be seen, for example, in the *Saṅgīti-sutta*'s differentiation between a type of concentration that leads to knowledge and vision and a type of concentration that leads to the destruction of the influxes.⁵⁵ While the former is to develop clarity of perception (*ālokaśāñṇā*), the latter requires meditative insight into the arising and passing away of the five aggregates. A type of knowledge and vision that has been developed through clarity of perception would certainly be inferior to the full liberation through the destruction of the influxes that can be expected from insight into the impermanent nature of the five aggregates, a form of contemplation that the discourses regularly related to full awakening.⁵⁶

Again, in the *Mahāsāropama-* and *Cūlasāropama-suttas* "knowledge and vision" refer only to a stage leading up to, but not yet identical with realisation.⁵⁷ These two discourses are concerned with the same issue that also forms the central topic of the *Rathavinīta-sutta*, the goal of living the holy life under the Buddha. Similar to the exposition given in the *Rathavinīta-sutta*, the *Mahāsāropama-* and *Cūlasāropama-suttas* make a point of highlighting that knowledge and vision should not be mistaken for the final goal.

The full scheme of nine purifications in the *Dasuttara-sutta* has the additional stages of "purification of wisdom" and "purification of liberation". Clearly, the progress of purification is only complete once the last of these nine stages has been reached, purification of liberation, *vimuttivissuddhi*/解脫淨. In contrast, the set of seven purifications in the *Rathavinīta-sutta* and its parallels is a scheme of stages that falls short of covering the final goal. According to the chariot simile found in the three versions of this discourse, just as the seven chariots serve the purpose of bringing the king to the city of Sāketa, where he has to settle some urgent matter, so too the seven purifications serve the purpose of bringing the practitioner to a level of internal purification based on which the final goal can be attained. In fact, the *Rathavinīta-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* counterpart explicitly qualify the seventh stage of purification as something that is still affected by clinging and therefore cannot be considered the final goal.⁵⁸

Thus for Buddhaghosa to rely on the scheme of purifications in order to describe the progress of insight, it would certainly have been preferable if he had employed the complete scheme of nine purifications found in the *Dasuttara-sutta*

⁵⁵ DN 33 at DN III 223, cf. also AN 4.41 at AN II 45.

⁵⁶ Gethin 1992: 56 explains that "the practice of watching rise and fall with regard to the five aggregates of grasping seems to be particularly associated with the gaining of the insight that leads ... directly to awakening".

⁵⁷ MN 29 at MN I 195 and MN 30 at MN I 202.

⁵⁸ MN 24 at MN I 148: *sa-upādāna*; MĀ 9 at T 1, no. 26, p. 430, c26: 「有餘」. EĀ 39.10 at T 2, no. 125, p. 735, a8 makes the same point in a different formulation, as it classifies each of the seven stages of purification as: 「受入」.

and its *Dīrgha-āgama* parallel, where the ninth and final stage "purification of liberation" would have been a more appropriate heading for the breakthrough to awakening as the climax of insight, instead of the seventh stage of "purification by knowledge and vision".

IV. Conclusions

On the highly probable supposition that Buddhaghosa knew a version of the Path to Liberation, the above discussed instances give the impression that Buddhaghosa at times deliberately departed from the model set by his predecessor, even if this meant that he had to depart from the canonical sources. The two main types of departures, discussed above, involve a conception of the nature of wholesomeness that seems to give more importance to externals and the employment of an incomplete scheme of purifications for describing the progress of insight.

In the thought world of the early discourses, emphasis is placed on the mental condition behind any action in order to determine its wholesome or unwholesome nature. Thus the *Sappurisa-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel take up certain desirable qualities of a monk – such as being learned, being knowledgeable in the *Vinaya*, undertaking ascetic practices, or attaining higher states of concentration – and in each case warn that such accomplishment can give rise to pride and conceit.⁵⁹ That is, from the perspective of these discourses, mere accomplishment is not in itself a guarantee of wholesome results in the case of each of these qualities. Instead, these discourses inculcate an attitude of continuous vigilance with awareness that replaces any self-complacency, thereby ensuring that any practice undertaken will serve its purpose in diminishing unwholesome qualities and increasing wholesome ones.

With the passage of time, however, such an introspective attitude can easily get lost and become replaced by an emphasis on externals of behaviour, whose adopting is assumed to automatically ensure that wholesomeness increases. Such an attitude can then find its expression in a concern with precise enacting of minutes aspects of behavioural codes according to the prescriptions given in the *Vinaya* and its commentaries, thereby running the danger of losing the purpose of such prescriptions out of sight.

Buddhaghosa's treatment of the nature of wholesomeness probably makes explicit what would have been a gradually growing tendency in the Theravāda tradition, where certain modes of conduct or behaviour, such as for example undertaking ascetic practices, are believed to be necessarily of a wholesome nature.

In the case of the progress of insight, the scheme of the seven purifications adopted by Buddhaghosa has become a paradigm within which Theravāda *vipas-*

⁵⁹ MN 113 at MN III 39 and MĀ 85 at T 1, no. 26, p. 561, b27.

sanā meditation operates.⁶⁰ Even though this scheme is rather marginal in the discourses, and the set of seven stages is moreover also incomplete, modern day Theravāda meditation traditions that differ considerably from each other on how the path of insight should be developed, or what degree of concentration is required in order to progress to awakening, unanimously adopt this scheme of purifications as the basic framework for practice.

In this way, an examination of the *Visuddhimagga* from the perspective of the Path to Liberation lays bare significant trends in the development of Theravāda Buddhism, whose gradual growth would otherwise be difficult to perceive. Thus the Treatise on the Path to Liberation stands out as a good example for the potential that the Chinese canon has to offer to Buddhist studies. Thanks to the indefatigable efforts of the Chinese translators over many centuries, the vast corpus of material translated into Chinese presents us with a treasure grove of material for deepening our understanding of developments in the history of Buddhist thought.

Abbreviations:

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i>
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
Paṭis	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
T	Taishō
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>
Vism-mhṭ	<i>Paramatthamañjūsā</i>

⁶⁰ For an insightful survey of modern *vipassanā* practice cf. Cousins 1996b; for treatments of the progress of insight cf. Mahasi 1973 and Ñāṇarāma 1983.

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