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Meditation in an Indian Buddhist Monastic Code

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Asian Languages and Cultures

by

Jeffrey Wayne Bass

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Meditation in an Indian Buddhist Monastic Code

by

Jeffrey Wayne Bass

Doctor of Philosophy in Asian Languages and Cultures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Gregory R. Schopen, Chair

This dissertation centers on an attempt to bring questions of a sociological nature to the modern academic conversation on the place of meditation in Indian Buddhism. It also involves a shift away from *sūtra* and commentarial literature to *vinaya* literature. My primary source for examining the treatment of contemplative practice in the Indian tradition is the *Kṣudrakavastu*, the largest section of the monastic code (*S. vinaya*) of the Mūlasarvāstivādins. Narratives found in the *Kṣudrakavastu* can offer a new perspective on the practice of meditation in north Indian Buddhism from the beginning of the Common Era to the fifth century. Here we find that meditation was not as central to the religious tradition as we might expect, given the emphasis

that meditation has received in modern discussions of the Indian tradition. To begin with, in Mūlasarvāstivādin hagiographical accounts that include instances of enlightenment—and a great many of them do—meditation is almost never mentioned as the immediate cause. In the overwhelming majority of instances in which enlightenment occurs, the followers are said to have been hearing the *dharma* preached by the Buddha, or by a senior monk or nun. We find no evidence that periods of meditation were built into the daily schedule of the monks, and meditation is never presented as an obligatory practice. Furthermore, meditation is most often discussed as occurring outside the monastery. And the meditation specialists who leave the monastery to practice are consistently depicted as a liability to the larger community. The picture that emerges from our source is one of a monastic community centered on the recitation of texts, rather than the practice of meditation. Finally, I argue that the meditation monks described in Mūlasarvāstivādin literature may have played a role in the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India.

The dissertation of Jeffrey Wayne Bass is approved.

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2013

FOR PROFESSOR SCHOPEN:

IL MIGLIOR FABBRO

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It's not easy to know where or how to begin the opportunity to acknowledge all those who have contributed to this project. It might be apropos to begin with the two individuals who got everything started: my mom and dad. Dad gave me a love of science, and mom gave me with a love of religious stories. I am very much a marriage of the two. They have always given their fullest support and enthusiasm for all of my endeavors, academic or otherwise.

My graduate work started at the University of Tennessee, and I am deeply indebted to the professors I worked with in the UT Religious Studies department—particularly Professors Rachelle Scott, Miriam Levering, Johanna Stiebert, Gilya Schmidt, John Hodges, and Tina Shepardson. They were all very patient and supportive towards this fledgling scholar.

From UT, I moved to the University of California, Los Angeles for my PhD. work. It has been a tremendous honor for me to work and study at UCLA. The professors and the staff have been a constant source of guidance, inspiration, and encouragement. I would like to thank the staff of the Asian Languages and Cultures Department—especially Ronke Epps and Shan Shan Chi-Au. This office, and these ladies in particular, were instrumental in helping me secure two years of teaching-free funding—first with the Graduate Research Mentorship Fellowship in 2008-09 and then with the Distinguished Teaching Assistant Award in 2012-13. Neither of these two funding opportunities would have been possible without the help of the ALC office staff, and this project would not have been possible without such funding.

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are both exemplary teachers and leaders in the academic community, and both were professional (and personal) advisors to me. My work with the Mythology course of the Freshman Cluster program also helped inform my analytical approach to Mūlasarvāstivādin narratives.

I should thank my fellow graduate students at UCLA. They gave me a wealth of good advice and—perhaps more importantly—good humor. Jason McCombs, Caleb Carter, Tyler Cann, David Hull, Nathaniel Isaacson, Hanmo Zhang, and Matthew Cochran from the Asian Languages and Cultures department could always be counted on to distract me from my work. Karen Muldoon-Hules was an endless and invaluable source of advice and encouragement. Shayne Clarke, though he exited the stage just as I entered, was also a source of inspiration.

I would like to thank Professor Robert Kritzer of Kyoto Notre Dame University for his help in understanding a few key passages of the *Garbhāvākraṅti* section of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. He is an expert on this section and was exceedingly helpful in its translation. His essays were also helpful in getting a handle on the content.

In his introduction to *The Crucible*, Arthur Miller said of John Proctor—the play’s protagonist—that “In his presence a fool felt his foolishness.” The same can be said of *all* the professors I have worked with at UCLA. Professor Robert Buswell was generous with his guidance and with his sources of funding. He provided me and the other graduate students with a sense of security, knowing that if we did the work, he would find a way to keep us funded. Also, Professor Buswell’s book on Korean Zen was invaluable in helping me approach my own sources. This book has been and will continue to be required reading for many of my courses. For me and the other graduate students at UCLA, Professor William Bodiford serves as an untouchable model of scholarship. His course on modern religions in Japan was both humbling and enlightening. Professor Robert Brown introduced me to the world of ancient Indian art, and

for this I am exceedingly grateful. Professor Jennifer Jung-Kim was also a source of guidance and encouragement for me. She and I have had many epic battles on the Scrabble board, and I'm sure there are many more to come. Professor Stephanie Jamison could always be counted on to enlighten and entertain. Her knowledge of Sanskrit and sense of humor are unmatched.

In my graduate career, I have had the good fortune to find myself under the guidance of two very competent mentors. I do not know if this is the result of good luck or good karma. Either way, I am grateful to these two men above all. For the most part, my career as a scholar is indebted to them. They both exemplify the very best connotations of the word *professor*.

First, while I was at the University of Tennessee, I found myself under the watchful (and unflinching) eyes of Professor James Fitzgerald. In a classroom fitted with 50 desks, he taught Sanskrit to me and one other student over the course of two years. I found out later that he never got paid for those classes. He taught us because he loved the material and we wanted to learn it. Professor Fitzgerald has a well-deserved reputation for being a very demanding teacher. His pedagogy dictates that positive feedback is, for the most part, useless; students only really learn when their mistakes are laid bare. Each time he returned one of my papers to me, it was drenched in red ink from top to bottom. Now, as I look back, I am so grateful to Professor Fitzgerald for taking the time to show me the mistakes I was making. It made me a better writer, a better scholar, and, I believe, a better person. I am very thankful for the time he invested in me.

Finally, my deepest appreciation goes to Professor Gregory Schopen. I will never forget the night Professor Schopen called to invite me to UCLA. When he told me who he was and why he was calling, I was so excited that I barely managed to stammer a response. (He, of course, found this exceedingly humorous.) At the University of Tennessee, Professor Rachelle Scott had taught me the relevance of Professor Schopen's work and instilled in me an almost godlike

image of the man. And while his unmatched reputation as a scholar may evoke connotations of aloofness, in reality he is funny, friendly, generous and unassuming. All of his students—graduate and undergraduate—would agree. I and my fellow graduate students were frequent guests at his house—talking about India and *arhats* until well into the evening hours. He fed me and offered me a room in his house on more than one occasion. The things Professor Schopen taught me cannot easily be counted. He taught me Classical Tibetan and Brahmi scripts. He taught me how to navigate the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* and how to execute the pick and roll. He taught me that sometimes basketball is more important than Buddhism.

It is with sincerest admiration and gratitude that I dedicate this work to him.

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Introduction

0.1—Introduction: Meditation in Ancient Indian Buddhism

0.2—Previous Scholarship

0.3—Our Source—The *Kṣudrakavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*

0.4—The Word “Meditation” and What it Indicates

0.5—Questions and Method

0.6—The Chapters

0.1 Introduction: Meditation in Indian Buddhism

This study represents an effort to contribute to the modern academic conversation on meditation in Indian Buddhism. It is different from previous studies on ancient Buddhist meditation for two reasons: First, our main source for this study is the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. As we will see, scholars have tended to favor *sūtra* and commentarial literature when exploring meditation in the Indian tradition. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* represents a rather different genre of Buddhist literature, a genre that was closely bound to the practical and material concerns of monks. *Vinaya* literature can therefore offer a new perspective regarding the place of meditation in Buddhist monastic life. Second, the questions guiding this study are both sociological and philosophical, while studies on meditation in the Indian tradition tend to focus on the latter. Though our discussion will inevitably lend insight on the role of meditation in Mūlasarvāstivādin philosophy and soteriology, this is not our only concern, nor even necessarily the main one. Here, we will also focus more specifically on meditation as a religious practice that operated within the context of monastic life. When was it practiced? Where? And by whom? As

we move through the study, it will become clear that Mūlasarvāstivādin soteriological and sociological concerns were often inextricably linked and perhaps at times opposed.

In its most basic form the question guiding this study is: What role did meditation play in the lives of the monks who composed this *vinaya*? One popular understanding regarding Indian Buddhism is that meditation was an essential part of monastic life, and that it was widely and frequently practiced for the sake of the attainment of *nirvāṇa*, or some other ultimate felicity. With this study, we seek to nuance this understanding of meditation by looking at a variety of stories from ancient India that address the practice of meditation and the complexities that surrounded it. We will see that the monastic community was in no way unified on this subject. We will see that this practice carried with it a variety of social and logistical complications, many of which were unique to the ancient Indian, and often specifically brahmanical, social context. Because of such complications, monks who held the practice of meditation above the general well-being and prosperity of the larger monastic community were often censured and made to look foolish in Mūlasarvāstivādin literature.

We will also see that one widely held assumption about Indian Buddhism is problematic. This is the notion that meditation was understood by monks to be the only, or even the primary means to enlightenment and liberation. In the Indian tradition, conceptions of “liberation” and “extinction” were linked to a host of religious activities, including recitation, veneration of the Buddha and his relics, and the observance of monastic precepts. Meditation was just one of many practices that operated within the complex matrix of the monastic program, and in our sources it is never flagged as the *only* means to enlightenment. In fact, tales that feature moments of enlightenment very rarely mention meditation as a preliminary exercise.

Before we begin, there is one important qualification that should be made regarding the aim of our study. Here, we seek to explore the practice of contemplation in some of our oldest sources for the study of Buddhism. We are not, however, hoping to say anything certain about the role of meditation in the “original” tradition, as so many studies on Indian meditation have sought to do. Rather, the aim here is to explore how meditation came to be understood and employed by one Buddhist community several centuries after the Buddha’s death. More specifically, we will look at the period around the beginning of the first millennium—and perhaps slightly before—to the 5th century of the Common Era. This is the time period in which we know our primary source—the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*—circulated within in the Indian monastic community.

0.2 Previous Scholarship

The practice of meditation has captured the attention and the imagination of the modern West, becoming an attractive and even marketable feature of the ancient Buddhist tradition.¹ Certain aspects of Buddhist meditation resonate with Western scientific values and these have been emphasized as a way of making the tradition accessible to a Western audience. The number of Buddhist centers in the United States numbers in the thousands, and most of these centers offer meditation courses to their followers. Buddhist meditation has even worked its way into modern medical practices. ABCNews reports, after a brief recounting of the Buddha's enlightenment,

Today, 2500 years later, a growing number of American doctors and healthcare workers are teaching people who are ill how to apply Buddha's epiphany to their lives.²

The University of California, Los Angeles even has a Mindful Awareness Research Center (MARC), dedicated to studying the effects of meditation on human health.³ This department sponsors weekly meditation sessions and online meditation courses.

¹ For an engaging discussion on the commodification of *yoga* in the West see J.R. Carrette and R. King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005).

Though the commodification of Eastern traditions is addressed throughout the work, see especially Chapter 3: "Spirituality and the Privatisation of Eastern Wisdom Traditions."

² Ephrat Livni, "Meditation as Medicine on the Rise," *ABCNews*, July, 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/story?id=118179&page=1#.UVskSpNJNu4>.

Given the attention that meditation has received in popular Western representations of Buddhism it should come as no surprise that we find a host of academic studies on meditation in the Indian tradition. Edward Conze, Johannes Bronkhorst, Rupert Gethin, Paul J. Griffiths, Tillman Vetter, Luis Gómez, and Alexander Wynn are only a few of the many scholars who have contributed to this field. The methodology and objectives of these studies vary widely. Nevertheless, there are patterns regarding the kinds of questions they ask, the assumptions they make, and the sources they use.

Academic studies on meditation in the Indian tradition can be grouped into two general categories—*philosophical* and *historical*. Philosophical studies seek to explain the inner workings of meditation theory and practice as they are presented in the texts of various schools. This usually involves an analysis of the relationship between meditation and doctrinal elements of the tradition. In other words, one approach to meditation that scholars have taken is to look at the relationship between Buddhist soteriological theory and meditation as a soteriological practice. One example of this kind of study is Paul J. Griffiths' work *On Being Mindless: Buddhist Meditation and the Mind-Body Problem*.⁴ Here, Griffiths examines how “the attainment of cessation” (P. *nirodhasamāpatti*)⁵—an advanced meditative mind state that is praised in

³ More details about the ends and means of this department and its program can be found at www.marc.ucla.edu.

⁴ Paul J. Griffiths, *On Being Mindless: Buddhist Meditation and the Mind-Body Problem* (La Salle, Ill: Open Court, 1986).

⁵ Throughout this study the original language from our sources will be noted in the following way: S. = Sanskrit, P. = Pāli, T. = Tibetan.

mainstream Buddhist literature—influenced the doctrine of the Theravāda, Vaibhaṣika, and Yogācāra schools. In his introduction he writes:

[A] useful method of gaining access to the rationale and significance of key Buddhist doctrines might be to examine their connections with those meditative practices with which they almost always operate in symbiosis.⁶

Griffith's statement perfectly exemplifies the aim of these philosophical studies in Indian Buddhist meditation. They seek to analyze or clarify the relationship between doctrine and contemplative practice in the earliest schools of Buddhism.

Examples of these philosophical studies are numerous. In 1997, Rupert Gethin published an article exploring the relationship between meditation and Indian Buddhist cosmology—another aspect of doctrine.⁷ Edward Conze's *Buddhist Thought in India*⁸ serves as a more general, comprehensive examination of the relationship between doctrine and meditative practice. Conze's underlying assumption in this work is, in his own words, that Buddhism “treats the experiences of Yoga as the chief raw material for philosophical reflection.”⁹ Thus, according to Conze, the entire doctrinal or philosophical dimension of Buddhism is an articulation or

⁶ Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*, xiv.

⁷ Rupert Gethin, “Cosmology and Meditation: from the Agganna-Sutta to the Mahayana,” *History of Religions*, 36/3 (Feb 1997): 183-217.

⁸ Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India: Three Phases of Buddhist Philosophy* (London: 1962; repr., Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1967).

⁹ Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India*, 17.

translation of the experiential dimension, which is essentially found in meditative experience.¹⁰ Other studies that are guided by this same philosophical approach have been conducted by L.S. Cousins¹¹, Herbert Guenther¹², Lambert Schmithausen¹³, and Donald Swearer,¹⁴ to name only a few.

Historical treatments of Indian Buddhist meditation seek to chart the evolution of various beliefs and practices concerning meditation that arose in Buddhism's history in India. Often this involves an attempt to shed light on the Buddha's original teaching. One widely read study of

¹⁰ Here, my understanding is indebted to Ninian Smart and his method of analyzing and exploring religion via seven "dimensions"; see Smart, *Religions of Asia* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1993), particularly pages 16-27.

¹¹ L. S. Cousins, "Buddhist Jhāna: Its Nature and Attainment according to the Pāli Sources," *Religion* 3 (1973): 115-131; repr. in *The Early Buddhist Schools and Doctrinal History: Theravāda Doctrine. Buddhism: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, ed. Paul Williams, Vol. 2. (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), 34-51.

¹² Herbert Guenther, *Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidharma* (Lucknow: 1957; repr. Berkeley, CA: Shambhala, 1976).

¹³ Lambert Schmithausen, "On the Problem of the Relation between Spiritual Practice and Philosophical Theory in Buddhism," in *German Scholars on India 2* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Ser. Off, 1976), 235-250.

¹⁴ Donald K. Swearer, "Control and Freedom: The Structure of Buddhist Meditation in the Pāli Suttas," *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Oct., 1973), 435-455.

this kind is Johannes Bronkhorst's *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*.¹⁵ Therein, Bronkhorst tries to untangle the earliest Buddhist teachings concerning meditation by eliminating those practices which can be found in the literature of other Indian religious traditions, specifically Jain and Hindu. He looks at meditation techniques that are in some instances rejected in Buddhist canonical texts, but praised in others. He argues that those practices—again, at times rejected, at times accepted in canonical literature—which can be found in non-Buddhist literature, must represent an instance wherein a non-Buddhist contemplative technique was assimilated into Buddhist practice. We can, according to Bronkhorst, therefore gain a better understanding of those techniques that were originally Buddhist by disregarding the techniques that were borrowed from other traditions.

In his recent work *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*, Alexander Wynne analyzes the account of the Bodhisattva's meditation training in the *Aryapariyesana Sutta*. Therein, the Bodhisattva learned meditation techniques from two teachers. Wynne argues that these accounts are historically factual, and asserts that while the Buddha rejected his teachers' views on ultimate liberation, traces of their meditative techniques are evident in his later teachings.¹⁶ Another historical study, similar to Wynne, and Conze's, comes to us from Winston King. In *Theravāda Meditation*, King tries to shed light on the Buddha's original teachings on meditation by tracing them back to their earliest Indic roots. He offers an analysis of the similarities and differences between Upaniṣadic and Buddhist contemplative theories and practices.¹⁷

¹⁵ Johannes Bronkhorst, *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*, (Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1986).

¹⁶ Alexander Wynn, *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁷ Winston King, *Theravāda Meditation* (University Park: Penn State U Press, 1980).

*

The most far-reaching and influential assumption that marks these and other studies on Indian meditation is that meditation was widely practiced by Indian monks.¹⁸ Edward Conze—a pioneer in the translation of Buddhist texts—repeatedly asserted that meditation was the essence of the Indian tradition. In 1959 he produced an anthology of excerpts from Buddhist texts titled, appropriately enough, *Buddhist Scriptures*.¹⁹ His introduction on the section titled *Meditation* begins in the following way: “With Hindus, Taoists, Sufis, and Christian contemplatives the Buddhists share the belief that the higher spiritual life can be lived only in and through meditation.”²⁰ In his work *Buddhist Meditation*, Conze states that “[M]editational practices constitute the very core of the Buddhist approach to life... As prayer in Christianity, so meditation is here the very heartbeat of the religion”²¹ In an essay on similarities between Eastern and Western philosophies, Conze writes, “[E]ach and every [Buddhist philosophical] proposition must be considered in reference to its spiritual intention and as a formulation of meditational experience acquired in the course of the process of winning salvation.”²² Again, he

¹⁸ See, for example, Swearer, “Control and Freedom,” 435. Winston King, “Sacramental Aspects of Theravāda Buddhist Meditation,” *Numen*, Vol. 36, Fasc. 2 (Dec. 1989), 248-256, see especially p. 249. Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*, xiii.

¹⁹ Edward Conze, *Buddhist Scriptures*. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1959.) Unfortunately, this work is no longer in print.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

²¹ Edward Conze, *Buddhist Meditation* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956), 11.

²² Edward Conze, “Buddhist Philosophy and Its European Parallels,” *Philosophy East and West* 13, no.1, January 1963, 9-23, see p. 11.

writes: “In Buddhism the meditational practices are the well from which springs all that is alive in it.”²³ Conze was himself a meditator, and these statements clearly reflect his own personal experience within the tradition.

But Conze is not the only scholar who has understood meditation to sit at the heart of the Indian tradition. Donald Swearer also asserted that meditation was the *sine qua non* of Buddhism: “Of all forms of religious practice, none exemplifies Buddhism better than the practice of meditation.”²⁴ In his introduction to *On Being Mindless*, Paul Griffiths wrote: “It is upon meditative practice that the religious life of the Buddhist virtuoso is based and from such practice that Buddhist philosophical and soteriological theory begins.”²⁵

The preceding quotes generally center on the relationship between Buddhist doctrine and meditation, and present doctrine and meditation as inseparable elements of the tradition. In other studies, we see the idea that monastic practice was centered on meditation. In his description of the early tradition, Karl Potter wrote:

Although those who do not choose or cannot follow the monastic precepts are allowed the ability to proceed far along the path, their ability to do so is severely limited;

²³ Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Bros., 1959), 95.

²⁴ Swearer, “Control and Freedom,” 435.

²⁵ Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*, xiii.

the requirements of everyday life regularly interfere with the meditation, the peaceful contemplation which is central to the path of liberation.²⁶

Here, again, the assumption is that monastic life was oriented around the practice of meditation.

Generally speaking, meditation has held a special place in the minds of Westerners, and this is not without reason. The Indian tradition contains a wealth of philosophical, lexical, and procedural data on different kinds of contemplation, and there is much evidence to support the idea that it was an important and widespread feature from the tradition's inception. We need not look far to find a few examples from Buddhist literature that demonstrate this point. In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* of the Pāli Canon, a widely studied Buddhist text that will be referenced frequently in our study, the Buddha calls the practice of “establishing mindfulness” (P. *satipaṭṭhāna*) “the only way (P. *ekāyanomagga*) for the purification of beings and the realization of *nirvāṇa*.” The Noble Eightfold Path (S. *āryāṣṭāṅgamārga*) has become perhaps the most popular and well-known articulation of Buddhist doctrine and practice. And three of its eight “limbs” (S. *aṅga*) are grouped under the heading “right concentration” (S. *samyaksamādhi*). The *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, our primary source, contains a stenciled phrase asserting that “the two activities of a monk are meditation and recitation” (S. *dve bhikṣukarmaṇī dhyānam adhyayanam ca*), a phrase we will visit throughout this study.

But meditation is not the only practice lauded in Indian Buddhist literature. Therein we find a wide range of important religious activities—reliquary worship, renunciation, meritorious giving, scriptural recitation, veneration of the wise, etc. And many of the texts that survive from

²⁶ Potter, Karl H. “The Buddhist Way to Liberation,” in *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy, Vol. VII: Abhidharma Buddhism to 150 A.D.*, eds. Karl H. Potter et al. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 59.

India do not center on meditation, but on these other practices. So why would Western scholars emphasize the contemplative features of the religion over other features? This tendency is due in part to certain philosophical and academic developments in the early twentieth century. In his vastly influential work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, philosopher and psychologist William James marked all religious expression as an attempt to translate ineffable experiences that occur “in the single private man.”²⁷ Absolute truth, according to James, is related only in the experience itself. In many ways this work is an apologetic for all religious thinking. James protected religion by assigning it a place that was entirely safe from scientific empiricism and the skepticism it engendered. That place was the immediate experience of the individual. James’ work was met with stellar reviews and it is still in print after over 100 years. James’ work had a profound effect on Western understandings of all religious traditions—East and West.

We can see James’ influence most clearly in Buddhist studies. Scholars have treated meditation-centered texts such as the *Visuddhimagga*, *Abhidhammattha-sangaha*, and the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* extensively for their insights into mind states engendered by meditation. These texts are understood to be “firsthand accounts” of the mystical experience that serves as the larger tradition’s locus.²⁸ This emphasis on experience influenced not only Western understandings of Buddhism but also influenced Eastern understandings of their own religious tradition. Western thinkers such as William James and Carl Jung explored the possibility of a

²⁷ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: 1902; repr. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985), see pages 20-21, 29.

²⁸ See Robert Sharf, “Experience” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998): 94-116, 96. In this work, Sharf treats James’ influence on the academic handling of religious traditions in detail.

universal religious experience that served as the basis for all religious expression. These thinkers influenced Zen teachers in Japan, who in turn taught Western students. The writings of Phillip Kapleau, Alan Watts, and Robert Aitken are all examples of how this circular movement of ideas affected Western understandings of Zen.²⁹

We can see the influence of the rhetoric of experience on Southeast Asian forms of the tradition as well. In his work on modern Theravāda, George Bond discusses how “the rhetoric of experience” is one of the key features in the establishment of authority in modern meditation movements of Southeast Asia.³⁰ Modern Theravāda meditation movements—headed by lay-followers such as S.N. Goenka and Godwin Samararatne—privilege experience and meditative attainment over the social position of a monk. In fact, S.N. Goenka has been known to deliver “*dhamma* talks” to large communities of monks. The authority by which he delivers these talks is his own experience in meditation.

Modern scholars have problematized this emphasis on experience in the study of religion. Michael Carrithers argued that James’ ideas are deeply rooted in the Christian conversion

²⁹ Philip Kapleau’s popular work *Three Pillars of Zen*, for example, centers on accounts of the transformative experiences of Zen meditators. Philip Kapleau, *Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

³⁰ George Bond, "Reinterpreting the Path: Two Case Studies of Lay Meditation Movements in Sri Lanka," in *Approaching the Dhamma: Buddhist Texts and Practices in South and Southeast Asia*, eds. Anne Blackburn and Jeffrey Samuels (Seattle: Buddhist Pariyatti Books, 2003), 167-189.

experience.³¹ Wayne Proudfoot argued that this emphasis is a modern innovation intended to legitimize religious thought by freeing it from grounds of authority such as metaphysical speculation and clerical status, both of which came under close scrutiny in the modern scientific world.³² Robert Sharf, who cites Conze extensively, problematized the category of “experience” itself:

Buddhist philosophical literature is thus [via James] presumed to constitute, among other things, a detailed map of inner space, charted with the aid of sophisticated meditation techniques that allow Buddhist yogis to travel the breadth of the psychic terrain. Accordingly, many of the key technical terms relating to Buddhist praxis, including *śamatha* (concentration), *vipaśyanā* (insight), *samādhi* (trance), *samāpatti* (higher attainment), *prajñā* (wisdom), *smṛti* (mindfulness), *srotāpatti* (stream-entry), *kenshō* (seeing one’s nature), *satori* (understanding), and even *makyō* (realm of illusion), are interpreted phenomenologically: they are assumed to designate discrete “states of consciousness” experienced by Buddhists practitioners in the midst of their meditative practice.³³

But this understanding of meditation as the essence of Indian Buddhism is not only a result of how scholars have understood and approached “religion.” It is also the result of a

³¹ Michael Carrithers, *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka: An Anthropological and Historical Study* (Delhi: Oxford, 1983), 18.

³² Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), see Proudfoot’s Introduction.

³³ Sharf, Robert H. "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience." *Numen* 42.3 (1995), 228-283, see 230-32.

preference for certain kinds of Buddhist literature, to the exclusion of others. This is another pattern we find in studies on Indian Buddhist meditation. In terms of their choice of sources, scholars have drawn almost exclusively from *sūtra*, commentarial literature, and *abhidharma* texts³⁴—particularly the first two. Their choices of source material, of course, reflect the questions they bring to the literature. They are asking philosophical questions and so they tend to look for the answers in philosophical literature.

Still, there is an irony in the fact that scholars are talking about activities—specifically, contemplative practices—that would have been performed almost exclusively by monks, yet they are not considering the one body of literature that is exclusively monastic—the *vinaya* genre. For this study, I am asking questions of a slightly different nature than the philosophical and historical studies I have cited above. Here, our inquiries are as much sociological as they are

³⁴ For a study that treats *abhidharma* and meditation, see Guenther, *Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidharma*. See also the introductory materials to Potter's *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy, Vol. VII: Abhidharma Buddhism to 150 A.D.* Other works on the relationship between *abhidharma* and meditation come from within the tradition. See Nyanaponika Thera, *Abhidhamma Studies: Buddhist Explorations of Consciousness and Time*, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1998). See also Bhikkhu Bodhi's Introduction to his translation of and commentary on the *Abhidhammatthasangaha*: Bhikkhu Bodhi, ed. and trans., *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma (Abhidhammatthasangaha)*, (Seattle, WA: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999). Finally, the Burmese monk Ledi Sayadaw was very influential in the field of *abhidharma* and meditation. See Ledi Sayadaw, *The Manuals of Dhamma*, (Maharashtra, India: Vipassana Research Institute, 1999). Griffiths' *On Being Mindless* also makes use of the *Abhidharmakośa*.

soteriological. And I am looking for answers and insights in a different category of Indian literature—the Mūlasarvāstivādin monastic code.

0.3 My Source—The *Kṣudrakavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*

The present study on Indian meditation is unique for the simple reason that our primary source comes from a different genre of Buddhist literature—*vinaya* literature. For this study, we will turn to the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*—a monastic code (*S. vinaya*) that was probably redacted in its entirety sometime in the first few centuries of the Common Era. However, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* is an enormous text. It spans around 8,000 leaves in its Tibetan translation. And so we will rely primarily, though not exclusively, on one section—the *Kṣudrakavastu*. This section of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* survives only in its Tibetan translation. It is the longest section of the Mūlasarvāstivādin monastic code, taking up two full volumes in the Tog Palace Manuscript (Kanjur volumes 9—Ta (ᠲᠠ), and 10—Tha (ᠲᠠ),) and two full volumes in the Derge printing (Kanjur volumes 10—Tha (ᠲᠠ), and 11—Da(ᠲᠠ)). In both manuscripts the *Kṣudrakavastu* spans nearly 1,000 leaves printed front and back. Though small portions of the text have been translated into English, most of them by W. Woodville Rockhill,³⁵ no complete translation of this text exists.

The title *Kṣudrakavastu* literally means “the section on minor things.” Alexander Csoma de Kőrös, the Hungarian philologist, was one of the first Westerners to survey the entire Tibetan

³⁵ See W. Woodville Rockhill, *The Life of the Buddha and the Early History of His Order* (London: Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1907). For his translations from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, Rockhill was working with the “East India Office copy of the Bkah.hgyur,” but the edition is unspecified; see vi of Rockhill’s Introduction.

recension of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. In his analysis of the *Kṣudrakavastu*, he took its name—again, “the section on minor things”—quite literally. He wrote,

The title of this and of the preceding volume (miscellaneous minutiae on religious discipline [Csoma de Kőrös’ translation of the title]) evinces the nature of the materials to be found here. They are of little consequence, except a few allusions to events, persons, customs, manners, places or countries. These volumes are mostly filled with religious instructions, rules for the conduct of the priests, and their several transgressions.³⁶

Csoma de Kőrös conducted his analysis of the Tibetan *vinaya* in the early 1800’s, before he or any another Westerner had access to a wide range of Buddhist literature. And now that we have a more comprehensive view of the Indian literary tradition, it is easy to see that the contents of this *vastu* are anything but insignificant, despite its humble name. This section of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* contains a host of material that is central to the Indian tradition. It contains many popular narratives, including accounts of the Buddha’s descent to Saṃkaśya from the heavens and the conversion of Nanda, the Buddha’s half-brother. Both of these narratives are widely attested in Indian art. It also contains two large sections that are widely found in *sūtra* literature—the section on “entering the womb” (S. *garbhāvākṛānti*) and the section on the Buddha’s death.³⁷ It contains the hagiographies of some of the Buddha’s most celebrated

³⁶ Alexander Csoma de Kőrös, *Analysis of the Dulva: A Portion of the Tibetan Work Called the Kah-Gyur*, (1836); see pages 222-223. An online version of this entire work is available at http://www.archivum.kcst.hu/studies/01-studies_175-227.pdf.

³⁷ However, as we will see in Chapter I, technically speaking, the labeling of at least the first of these two sections—the section on “entering the womb” (S. *garbhāvākṛānti*)—as a “*sūtra*” is

followers, including Jytoiška, Katyāyana, and Dharmadinnā. The popular account of Ānanda’s enlightenment after the Buddha’s death is found therein. The *Kṣudrakavastu* also contains an entire section devoted exclusively to rules made only for nuns. These are stories that Mūlasarvāstivādin monks would have been familiar with.

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Before saying more about the *Kṣudrakavastu*, let us look at *vinaya* literature more generally. What are these monastic codes and why would the insights on the practice of meditation that they lend differ from those offered by *sūtra* literature? The Sanskrit term *vinaya* is derived from the construction *vi* + \sqrt{ni} , meaning “to lead away” or “to tame” or “to discipline.”³⁸ In the Buddhist context, the term refers either to the Buddha’s teachings regarding the behavior of his followers, or the body of literature in which the rules governing the behavior of monks and nuns are framed, articulated, and explained. Like all *vinaya* collections,³⁹ the Mūlasarvāstivādin *vinaya* contains a list of rules (*S. prātimokṣa*) that we might think of as the core of the monastic behavioral program. This is a list of hundreds of offenses, stratified from the most severe down to the least severe. The Mūlasarvāstivādin *vinaya* has 253 core rules for the monks (*S. bhikṣu*) and 364 for nuns (*S. bhikṣuni*). Beyond these, there are hundreds of supplementary rules, not included in the core list.

problematic because the section lacks some of the usual literary conventions that mark *sūtra* literature.

³⁸ Monier Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2003,) (first printed in 1899); s.v. *vi* + \sqrt{ni} .

³⁹ For more on the *vinaya* collections that survive today, see section 0.4—Questions and Method, below.

Most rules of the *vinaya* are framed by a narrative explaining the circumstances that lead to its establishment within the community. The narratives are frequently followed by a commentary on the rule, offering more precise definitions for the terms used to articulate the rule, and/or providing exceptions. Stories dealing with the core rules of the *prātimokṣa* are found in the *vibhaṅga* section of the *vinaya*. Stories that explain supplementary rules are found in the sections called *vastus*, or *khadhakas* in Pāli. As I said, our main source, the *Kṣudrakavastu* contains literally hundreds of these rules. The subject of these rules ranges widely, covering areas of monastic practice not addressed in the core list of rules—from dietary restrictions to the kinds of cloth that monks can wear.

The *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* also contains several biographical accounts from the Buddha's life, and the lives of his closest and most esteemed followers. In rare instances, non-narrative sections appear in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, offering procedural details on topics such as the handling of disputes between monks and how violations of the rules are to be handled.

The *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* also contains *sūtras*, one of which—the *Garbhāvākraṅti-sūtra*—we will treat extensively in this study. However, although we do occasionally find doctrinal explanations in this *vinaya*, these treatments are rare relative to large *sūtra* collections such as the *Sutta Piṭaka* of the Pāli Canon. *Sūtras* are intended to convey points of philosophy and doctrine, often in a polemical mode. And many *sūtras* are addressed directly to lay followers. *Vinaya* literature, on the other hand, is concerned primarily with the maintenance and logistics of the monastic community. Thus, we have a better idea of who was writing these texts, for whom they were written, and why. We know that *vinaya* texts were written by ordained monks. We know that the audience of these stories was made up of ordained monks and novices.

And we know they were written in order to manage, preserve, and propagate the larger community.

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This brings us to two qualifications that should be made regarding our primary source: What time period in Indian history it represents, and who exactly within the larger Indian tradition it represents. But pinning down exactly what period in Indian history the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*—or any other *vinaya* for that matter—represents has been a controversial affair in Indian Buddhist studies. Despite much work that has been done on this topic, there is still no consensus among scholars regarding how or when to date any of the *vinayas* that survive. Two camps have emerged regarding the dating of these materials. The debate between these two camps centers on material that is shared by the various schools' recensions of the core list of rules—again, *prātimokṣa* in Sanskrit. These two camps and the different views they represent are summarized by Gregory Schopen in the following way:

Those who think the former is early, and the latter late, might want to maintain that such rules are very old and must go back to some hypothetical, 'presectarian', and utterly conjectural core *Vinaya* or set of rules. Others, who might think—like the still pertinent Vasilyev⁴⁰—that all the *Vinayas* as we have them are late, might want to suggest that such shared material could have resulted from a long process of leveling and cross-

⁴⁰ Here, Schopen is referencing V.P. Vasilyev, "Le bouddhisme dans son plein développement d'après les *Vinayas*," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 34 (1896) 318-25.

contamination carried forward by the continual itinerancy of a good part of the South Asian Buddhist monastic population.⁴¹

In other words, the first camp sees shared material within the *vinayas* as redactions from one source, and therefore representative of an earlier tradition. One scholar who falls into this school of thought is Eric Frauwallner. In different works he applied this methodology to both *vinaya* and *abhidharma* literature. In his work *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature*, Frauwallner argued that the certain sections of the *vinayas* all derived from the same source.⁴² He concluded that the original material, on which the later versions were based, was complete around 100 years after the death of the Buddha. Thus variations were the result of editing and insertion on the part of the monks of various schools who inherited the shared tradition.

The second camp reverses this logic and argues that shared material could be the result of a long process of editing and borrowing, and therefore indicative of later developments in the tradition. Shared passages in the different *vinayas* could be the result of centuries of debate that eventually resulted in a broad consensus over certain points of discipline. This view is explained in more detail by Schopen in his popular essay “Two Problems in the History of Indian

⁴¹ Gregory Schopen, “The Buddhist Nun as an Urban Landlord and a ‘Legal Person’ in Early India,” in *Devadattīyam. Johannes Bronkhorst Felicitation Volume*, ed. F. Voegeli et al. (Bern: 2012): 595-609, 596.

⁴² E. Frauwallner, *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature* (Roma: Is. M.E.O., 1956); for Frauwallner’s work on *abhidharma*, see E. Frauwallner, S.F. Kidd, and E. Steinkellner, *Studies in Abhidharma Literature and the Origins of Buddhist Philosophical Systems* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1995).

Buddhism,⁴³ and it has greatly problematized the work of scholars such as Frauwallner.

Schopen has argued on more than one occasion that *vinaya* texts can tell us little about what the monastic institution was originally, and very much about what it became.

What do we know about our primary source, the *Kṣudrakavastu* and its parent text, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*? We can track these texts back through time in the following way:

The *Āgamakṣudrakavyākhyāna*, a commentary on the *Kṣudrakavastu* was translated in the 11th century.⁴⁴ The *Kṣudrakavastu* was translated into Tibetan in the 9th century, The Chinese translation of the entire *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* dates from the early 8th century. Gilgit manuscripts of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* that survive from India date to the 5th and 6th century. But these facts tell us little about the date of its actual composition or compilation in India. Generally, scholars place the composition of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* somewhere between the 2nd century CE and the 5th century—the Kuṣāna period of Indian history.⁴⁵ Gregory

⁴³ Gregory Schopen, “Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism: The Layman/Monk Distinction and the Doctrines of the Transference of Merit,” *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1985): 9-47; repr. in *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: U of Hawai’i Press, 1997): 23-55; see section III.

⁴⁴ See Gregory Schopen, “The Urban Buddhist Nun and a Protective Rite for Children in Early North India,” in *Pāsādikadānām. Festschrift für Pāsādika* (Indica et tibetica 52), ed. M. Straube et al. (Marburg: 2009): 359-380; see n. 20.

⁴⁵ On the date and place of origin of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, see Gregory Schopen, “The Bones of a Buddha and the Business of a Monk,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 27 (1999): 279-324; repr. in *Figments and Fragments of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India: More Collected Papers*

Schopen cites evidence that pushes the date of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* back further. He ties linguistic features of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* to the epigraphical language used in the early centuries of the Common Era.⁴⁶ As we will see in Chapter III, there is much evidence in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* to suggest that its composition occurred alongside the nascent period of Mahāyāna Buddhist texts in India. And this fact gives us reason to suspect that most of the stories contained therein were already formed by the 2nd century of the Common Era. Given the preceding evidence, we will take the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* to represent monastic Buddhism in Northwest India from the beginning of the Common Era to the 5th century CE. Fortunately for us, this represents a time for which we have an abundance of evidence for Indian Buddhism. In this period we find a spate of remains from the tradition—textual, archeological, and epigraphical.

Though we know that authorship and audience centered on the monastic community, understanding more precisely *who* our source represents is also a bit tricky. To begin with, there is no consensus among scholars as to the exact monastic community the text represents. Eric Frauwallner holds that the Mūlasarvāstivādins constituted an early Buddhist community based in Mathurā, and that they were independent from the Sarvāstivādin school, which he

(Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005): 63-107, see pages 75-77 and the literature cited there. See also Schopen, "Art, Beauty, and the Business of Running a Buddhist Monastery," in *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters: Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004): 19-44, 20.

⁴⁶ See Gregory Schopen, "On Sending the Monks Back to Their Books: Cult and Conservatism in Early Mahāyāna," in *Figments and Fragments*: 108-153; see pages 136-137.

locates in Kaśmir.⁴⁷ However, both Étienne Lamotte and A.K. Warder have argued that the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* was compiled within the Sarvāstivādin school.⁴⁸ As has been suggested, the answer is probably something in between these two positions.⁴⁹ The text most likely arose from disputes between the Sarvāstivāda school of Mathurā and that of Kaśmir over details in the monastic code. The Mathurā school's designation of their recension of the *vinaya* as the “root” (S. *mūla*) text is almost certainly polemical, used to assert that the Kaśmir school was derivative. One way or another, we know for certain that the text represents a sizable mainstream monastic community that operated in the Northern regions of India. Judging by the extent to which later artists and authors drew from its contents, we also know the work itself received a good amount of attention after its compilation.

Beyond the question of whether the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* sits within or without the Sarvāstivādin school, there are other factors to note when considering *who* our text represents. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* is enormous, containing literally thousands of narratives of varying lengths and on a variety of monastic concerns. It is unreasonable to imagine that every monastery in Mathurā had access to the entire work. Consider for a moment the fact that, if we take his account to be accurate, it took the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hien years of wandering from

⁴⁷ Frauwallner, *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature*, 28-36.

⁴⁸ Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 178; A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970); see pages 393-394.

⁴⁹ Charles Willemsen, Bart Dessein, Collett Cox, *Sarvāstivāda Buddhist Scholasticism* Leiden: Brill, 1998; see page 88.

monastery to monastery to find a written copy of the *Mahāsāṃghika-vinaya*.⁵⁰ It is likely that what we have with the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* is a compilation of stories generated in various monasteries in the region and then collected at the kinds of councils (*S. saṃgīti*) frequently described in classical Buddhist literature. This means we have no real idea of the breadth of each individual story’s audience. There are, of course, exceptions to this—stories that are widely attested in Buddhist literature and art, such as The Descent at Sāṃkāśya. But it is easy to imagine that many of the minor rules and frame narratives contained in sections like the *Kṣudrakavastu* were first composed in small monasteries in response to local difficulties and then assimilated into the larger collection of stories. Although it is safe to imagine that a small percentage of Indian monasteries did have access to a full version of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, we can only determine which parts would have been referenced frequently by comparing the text to art, epigraphy, and material shared between the various monastic codes.

Anne Blackburn’s work on medieval Sri Lankan Buddhism may help explain why the preceding point—regarding what must have been a limited accessibility to the *full Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*—is an important one to consider. In a study entitled “Looking for the Vinaya” Blackburn draws a distinction between *formal* and *practical* canons in Theravāda Buddhism.⁵¹ The formal canon refers to what we normally think of as a Buddhist canon—in the context of Blackburn’s work, the Pāli *Tipiṭaka*. The practical canon, however, refers to those

⁵⁰ Fa-hien and James Legge, *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms: Being an Account by the Chinese Monk Fâ-Hien of His Travels in India and Ceylon (A.D. 399-414) in Search of the Buddhist Books of Discipline* (Oxford: 1886; repr. New York: Dover Publications, 1965).

⁵¹ Anne Blackburn, “Looking for the Vinaya: Monastic Discipline in the Practical Canons of the Theravāda” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 22.2 (1999): 281-310.

texts that are actually studied, memorized, or referenced in any given Buddhist monastery. In her work, Blackburn found that some monasteries in medieval Sri Lanka had access to only small portions of the *vinaya*. Most of their behavioral prescriptions were drawn from the small sampling of the *Sutta Piṭaka* that was available to them. Blackburn’s work nuances our understanding of the *vinaya* as a sort of comprehensive program upon which all monastic behavior was based. It points to a certain caution that must be exercised when discussing the *vinaya* and its use in India. Many of the stories we find in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* may very well have been known to only a small percentage of the community it represents.⁵²

This having been said, it must be understood that in order to be included in the larger *vinaya* collection, stories and rules had to have been articulated and redacted by the larger community at some point. And so they would have to resonate in some way with the monastic vision of Mūlasarvāstivādin officials. Furthermore, in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, we find no shortage of strong views that can be corroborated by more than one narrative. When we consider the matter in this way we see that *vinaya* literature can tell us a lot about the residing vision some monks kept concerning their community and what it ought to be and do. These texts reveal an ongoing dialogue within the monastic community about what the community ought to represent and how its members should act.

The narratives in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* do not represent journalistic accounts of Indian history. They are stories, fictional accounts that, as Schopen puts it, “might begin: ‘Once

⁵² See also Steven Collins, “On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon,” *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 15 (1990): 89-126.

upon a time...’⁵³ In these stories we find many literary devices common to oral and written literature—stock characters such as the infamous Group-of-Six-Monks (*S. śadvārgika*), blueprint narrative situations that are employed again and again but with varying detail, stock phrases and descriptions that repeat word for word from story to story. What, then, can these literary creations tell us about the reality of ancient Indian monastic practice? In examining this question, Schopen writes:

Seen from at least this angle [*vinaya* as literary creation] such accounts would seem to be of very little value. But if they are taken to be what they undoubtedly are the situation changes. These are stories told by North Indian monks in the early centuries of the Common Era to other North Indian monks, and for them to have fulfilled their functions they would have to have been believable, and the details they contain would have to have been recognizable and familiar... They are only narrative elements, not ideal doctrinal elements, and therefore there is no good reason for them to have been tendentious.⁵⁴

Schopen’s observations become even more pointed when we consider them in light of Patrick Olivelle’s note regarding rules in Indian *Dharmaśāstric* literature:

⁵³ Gregory Schopen, “On Monks and Menial Labors: Some Monastic Accounts of Building Buddhist Monasteries,” in *Architetti, Capomastri, Artigiani: L'Organizzazione dei Cantieri e della Produzione Artistica nell'Asia Ellenistica. Studi Offerti a Domenico Faccenna nel suo Ottantesimo Compleanno* (Serie Orientale Roma 100), ed. P. Callieri (Rome: 2006): 225-45; see p. 226. For more on the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* as Indian literature, see Schopen, “The Learned Monk as a Comic Figure: On Reading a Buddhist Vinaya as Indian Literature,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, (2007) 35: 201-226, see p. 204, ft. 10.

⁵⁴ Gregory Schopen, “Monks and Menial Labors,” 226-27.

In law, as in moral discourse, we know that injunctions are leveled against existing and often prevalent practice; we can, therefore, be certain that these rules presuppose precisely their opposite.⁵⁵

Let us consider these two quotes relative to specific examples from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. Injunctions against monks consuming foods such as garlic and mangoes—both of these restrictions are found in the *Kṣudrakavastu*⁵⁶—indicate that at one time monks had the desire to eat, the opportunity to eat, or were in fact eating garlic and mangoes, and that this was perceived as a problem by other monks. In fact, garlic was widely avoided in *yogic* traditions as a “hot” food.⁵⁷ The historical details surrounding the problem may or not be conveyed by the narrative found in the *vinaya*, there is no way for us to tell. But it does tell us that a potential for conflict surrounded this dietary issue and that some monks felt the need to limit the community’s behavior in this way. The monks and nuns in stories that address the eating of garlic and mangoes are, of course, literary abstractions, made to represent one facet of monastic life. But

⁵⁵ Quoted by Schopen, “The Buddhist Nun as Urban Landlord,” n. 10; see Patrick Olivelle, *Language, Texts, and Society. Explorations in Ancient Indian Culture and Religion* (New Delhi: M. Manoharlal, 2005), 252.

⁵⁶ In this study, I will be referring to two recensions of the Tibetan *vinaya*: Derge = *The Tibetan Tripitaka. Taipei Edition*, ed. A.W. Barber (Taipei: 1991); Tog = *The Tog Palace Manuscript of the Tibetan Kanjur*, Vols. 1-109 (Leh: 1975-1980). References provide section, original volume letter, original folio number (with side “a” or “b”), and line. For the rule against eating garlic, see *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 64b.6-65b.2. For the rules against eating mangoes, see *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 9b.6-11a.6.

⁵⁷ See, for example, the entry on *grñjana* in Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*.

they embody the very real struggles, anxieties, and ideals of Indian monks. So even if *vinaya* literature does not offer us a historical record, it can provide very specific information regarding the vision of monasticism born by certain elite, educated monks. Monks responsible for the composition and propagation of these texts bore the moniker *vinayadhara* (T. 'dul 'dzin pa), indicating their specialization in texts that were meant to govern the behavior of the larger community.

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Before moving on, there are two other sources I should mention here, albeit briefly, that will help tremendously in our analysis. I will frequently reference the *Mahāvvyutpatti* (T. *bye brag tu rtogs par byed pa chen po*)—a Sanskrit-Tibetan lexicon. This work was composed in Tibet in either the late 8th or early 9th century in an effort to standardize the translation projects in operation in Tibet at the time. Given that such a large portion of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* survives only in Tibetan, the *Mahāvvyutpatti* is, in many instances, our best source for determining which Sanskrit terms the Tibetan texts are translating.

I will also make frequent use of *Āgamakṣudrakavyākhyāna* (T. *lung phran tshogs kyi rnam par bshad pa*) by Śīlapālita. This commentary on the *Kṣudrakavastu* was written in Sanskrit and translated into Tibetan in the 11th century. The date of its composition in India is unknown. Thus, Śīlapālita's chronological proximity to the tradition he describes is uncertain. He was, however, certainly closer to the tradition than we are today by at least one millennium, and his explanation of certain key passages of the *Kṣudrakavastu* will carry a good amount of weight in our discussion.

These are our sources—the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* and its surrounding documents. They represent the voice of monks who sought to preserve and propagate the monastic

community in India. As I said, this literature is rather light on doctrine. But it offers us a chance to glimpse into a more detailed and nuanced picture of how meditation operated within the Mūlasarvāstivādin community. As Schopen has repeatedly shown, often the vision of monastic life presented by *vinaya* authors and redactors stands in contrast to the idealized view of Indian monastics that has become popular. This inconsistency points to a host of work waiting to be done on the *vinaya* and the recasting of the Indian tradition in Western scholarship.

0.4 Questions and Method

In *Early Buddhist Monachism*, Sukumar Dutt wrote,

Buddhism has too often been approached not from this historical standpoint, but rather from the philosopher's point of view, exaggerating the evolution of ideas and minimizing the material factors that made that evolution possible and determined its character.

Hence it is that the ancient Buddhist Sangha, through which Buddhism actually developed, has received far less than its due share of attention. But it is in the growth and development of the Buddhist Sangha that the history of Buddhism remains embodied, and apart from the organization of monastic life and community, ancient Buddhism is at best an abstraction, interesting more to the philosopher than to the scientific historian.⁵⁸

My questions center on the Indian monastic community (*S. saṃgha*)—its organization and material concerns. More specifically, I am interested in how the practice of meditation played out in the lives of monks—its place in monastic life and its relationship to other dimensions of religious practice. Thus, the broad question guiding my study is this: What insights can the *Kṣudrakavastu* offer regarding the redactors' understanding of the role of meditation in the life of a Buddhist monk?

More specifically, I am interested in asking: Who was actually meditating? What function(s) was meditation understood to serve beyond those oriented around Buddhist

⁵⁸ Sukumar Dutt, *Early Buddhist Monachism* (London: 1923; repr. New York: Asia Publishing House, 1960).

soteriological goals? Was there a consensus among monks as to the value of meditation in the religious life? If not, what were their different views? How often is meditation actually prescribed? How does the practice of meditation relate to other monastic practices such as celibacy, textual recitation, and the observance of monastic precepts? How might the practice of meditation relate to ritual and performance aspects of monastic life? Another set of questions I have relates to the kinds of techniques prescribed. Can the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* tell us anything about the Indian tradition's ongoing conversation on the importance of calm (S. *śamatha*) versus (S. *vipaśyanā*) meditation? More generally, can it shed light on scholastic treatments of meditation theory and practice found in *abhidharma*, *sūtra*, and commentarial literature?

As we will see, questions of a sociological nature are often closely linked to those of a soteriological nature. Inevitably, in looking at meditation in the *vinaya*, we will uncover insights on Indian Buddhist soteriology, more specifically, Mūlasarvāstivādin soteriology. Thus, we are also interested in the “evolution of ideas”—as per Dutt—regarding Indian monks' understanding of liberation and how it is attained. For example, in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* the status of monkhood was an absolutely necessary prerequisite for the attainment of the highest, most exalted degree of liberation available to the Buddha's followers—the state of an *arhat*. This soteriological view—that the state of an *arhat* is inextricably bound to the state monkhood—lends itself to a sociological interpretation. It ensured that ultimate authority on the tradition remained within the social domain of the monks.

As another example, it is clear in our sources that “contemplation of the repulsive” (S. *aśubhabhāvana*) was one of the more popular contemplative techniques of the Mūlasarvāstivādin program. “Contemplation of the repulsive” inevitably involves bodily filth in some way—either

through literal contact with a body, or through the knowledge of a text that enumerates various bodily constituents. It also frequently involves images of and associations with death. These topics carry strong negative associations in the context of brahmanical society. Thus, this practice carried sociological complications with it—complications that effected where and how Mūlasarvāstivādin monks practiced. So one of the themes we will see throughout this study is the close relationship between Mūlasarvāstivādin conceptions of liberation and the social matrix in which these conceptions were manifest.

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Those are our questions. What of our method? In the previous section, I discussed the value of monastic literature (*S. vinaya*) and the voice it represents. So this study is primarily philological in nature. And while philology has come under a good bit of criticism in post-modern academia,⁵⁹ it still remains our chief, and in some cases the only means by which we can begin to understand ancient religious traditions.⁶⁰ Here we seek to recover long-vanished worlds and ancient cultural contexts from the close study of historical texts. Such hopes depend upon the assumption that the past can be recovered and that modern philology can give us a greater awareness of the realities of the past in the present. I believe that it can. And though our understanding may only be fragmentary, it is still more complete than it would be otherwise.

⁵⁹ On the current state of Indian philology and language studies, see Pollock, Sheldon. "The Real Classical Languages Debate" *The Hindu*, 27 November 2008,

http://www.columbia.edu/cu/mesaas/faculty/directory/pollock_pub/real_classical_languages.pdf.

⁶⁰ See the Introduction to Sean Alexander Gurd (ed.), *Philology and its Histories* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2010), 1-19.

However, the study of Indian Buddhism greets the modern philologist with a host of challenges. To begin with, there remains from ancient India a daunting mass of textual evidence. The Mahāyāna tradition alone produced hundreds of *sūtras* that survive in a variety of languages. And the textual output of the Mahāyāna tradition is dwarfed by the mainstream tradition that came before and ran parallel to it. Furthermore, this textual evidence comes to us in a variety of languages and scripts. And very little of what remains from ancient India has been translated or even studied. The very notion of generating a study that takes into account each and every bit of surviving textual evidence is an impossibility. A quick survey of the *vinaya* genre alone demonstrates the preceding points. Part or all of the *vinaya* collections of six Buddhist schools survive today. Four of these *vinayas*—those of the *Mahāsaṃghikas*, the *Sarvāstivādins*, the *Dharmaguptakas*, and the *Mahīśāsakas*—survive only in Chinese. The entire *vinaya* of the Theravādins survives in Pāli, and the Mūlasarvāstivādin *vinaya* survives in Tibet, with some Chinese, Sanskrit, and Prakrit fragments. Only three of these *vinaya* collections are still in use today—the Theravādin *vinaya* in Southeast Asia, the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* in East Asia, and the Mūlasarvāstivādin *vinaya* in Tibet and Mongolia. So the *vinaya* genre alone is enormous. And this fact becomes even more pointed when we consider that within the *vinaya* genre sits the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, which, as I noted, spans over 8,000 pages in its Tibetan translation.

The daunting size and linguistic variety of our textual sources from India played a decisive role in the shaping of this study. Rather than attempting to examine all surviving *vinaya* materials, or even the entire *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, in a cursory way, I wanted to look at one text in detail. Therefore, for this study, the *Kṣudrakavastu*, which is itself enormous, will serve as a kind of cross-section for the larger voice of the Mūlasarvāstivādin community. This approach has allowed for a close examination of the material. It also allowed me to treat individual terms

exhaustively, looking at their use in a variety of contexts within the *Kṣudrakavastu*. So while stories from many sections of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* will be referenced, generally they will only enter our study when they can illuminate some feature of the *Kṣudrakavastu*, which has been examined from beginning to end.

0.5 The Word “Meditation” and What It Indicates

The Sanskrit term *yoga* is used throughout classical Buddhist literature. According to tradition, like his contemporaries in ancient India,⁶¹ the Buddha offered a “spiritual regimen” (S. *yoga*) by which his followers could “join” (S. \sqrt{yuj}) themselves to a transcendent ideal.⁶² In the Buddha’s case, this ideal was the “extinction” (S. *nirvāṇa*) of an imagined “self” and the suffering it inevitably experiences. This study centers on one set of practices found within a particular version of the Buddha’s spiritual program. In modern English, we group these practices under the word “meditation,” and we generally assume that we understand the kinds of practices this term indicates. But for now, let us look closely at the English word “meditation” and some of its connotations. As we will see, the transposition of this modern word onto ancient religious practices can be problematic for a number of reasons. So from the outset, for the purposes of this study, we must be clear and concise about what the term “meditation” indicates.

⁶¹ The *Dīgha Nikāya* (1.47) of the Buddhist Pāli Canon lists the teachings of six other spiritual teachers. Each of these teachers was, presumably, like the Buddha, the leader of a group of ascetics and lay followers.

⁶² This word *yoga* comes from the Sanskrit root \sqrt{yuj} and—like the English cognate “yoke”—means to fasten or bind. In ancient India, *yoga* was understood to 1) bind the practitioner to a spiritual regimen, and consequently 2) bind the practitioner to the divine, however it was conceived.

Our English word “meditation” has a wide breadth of meaning. It comes to us from the Latin word *meditatio*, and its verb *meditari*, meaning basically “to think, or ponder.” The Oxford English Dictionary defines “meditation” as:

The action or practice of profound spiritual or religious reflection or contemplation; *spec.* a variety of private devotional exercise consisting of the continuous application of the mind to the contemplation of a particular religious text, truth, mystery, or object.

Also: an instance of this.⁶³

This definition of “meditation” from the OED could be used to describe a multitude of religious practices, both Eastern and Western. And while the word “meditation” is certainly the most appropriate English term to apply to many of the mental exercises we find described in classical Buddhist literature, there are, not surprisingly, a number of problems with the application of this modern Western term to the ancient Indian context.

As the OED definition makes clear, notions of reflection and thought necessarily include an object to ponder, a “text, truth, mystery, or object” to contemplate. And it is true that most forms of meditation described in Buddhist literature make use of various objects for concentrating the mind. As a few examples, “contemplation of the repulsive” (S. *aśubhabhāvana*) requires the meditator to focus on the constituents of the human body and their nature. “Mindfulness of the breath” (S. *anapanasmṛti*) uses in and out breath as an object. In the practice of “recollection” (S. *anusmṛti*)⁶⁴, the meditator is asked to focus the mind on one of six

⁶³ J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989), s.v. “meditation.”

⁶⁴ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *anusmṛti*.

important doctrinal elements—the Buddha, his teaching (S. *dharma*), his community of followers (S. *saṃgha*), morality (S. *śīla*), generosity (S. *dāna*), or the gods (S. *deva*).

However, Buddhist meditation theories and their doctrinal underpinnings problematize the understanding of meditation as a practice that necessarily involves the contemplation of an object. We see this particularly in the central Buddhist tenant of no-self (S. *anātman*). The *Diamond Sūtra* (S. *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*) is one Indian text that had a wide influence on the tradition in East Asia.⁶⁵ And one of its main themes is the illusory nature of all forms and concepts, particularly the concept of the self as a subject that can fully understand, or even benefit from any object. This *sūtra* admonishes its listeners to set aside all objects of thought, particularly the self, for the sake of realizing enlightenment directly and fully. In other words, according to the *Diamond Sūtra* the enlightened mind is one that is entirely free of conceptions or objects, and the subject/object bifurcation is presented as the primary obstacle to enlightenment.

We find this same problem in other Buddhist models of spiritual attainment. The four “formless states of meditative absorption” (S. *arupadhyaṇa*) are part of the prominent mainstream *dhyāna* model, which we will treat in detail later in this study. These advanced meditative states are attained once mental activity has been attenuated to the point that there is no longer a material object of experience. The same is true of another mind state exalted in classical

⁶⁵ It was, for instance, a seminal text in the development of Ch’an Buddhism in China. See Philip B. Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch: The Text of the Tun-Huang Manuscript with Translation, Introduction, and Notes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967).

Buddhist literature—“the attainment of cessation” (*S. nirodhasamāpatti*), wherein subject/object based consciousness ceases.

The understanding of meditation as a form of thought or contemplation is also problematic for the reason that it tends to imply that the practice is strictly a form of rational inquiry. Admittedly, the understanding of Buddhist meditation as a kind of rational, scientific exploration is supported by some Buddhist scriptures. And this is an understanding of Buddhist meditation that modern scholars have been eager to embrace. We find, for example, in one introductory text:

Liberation can only be worked out in the laboratory of one’s own body and mind, in the immediate actualities of our mental and physical experience. “This I declare, Oh friend,” said the Buddha,

*“within this body, six feet long, endowed with perception and cognition is contained the world, the origin of the world and the end of the world, and the path leading toward the end of the world.”*⁶⁶

Nevertheless, a broad application of this view to all Buddhist meditation practice is problematic for two reasons.

First, it excludes one of the most common features of meditation and meditative attainment found throughout classical Buddhist literature: the strong relationship between meditation and the attainment of supernatural power. In the Pāli canon we find that through meditative practice the following miracles can and will occur:

⁶⁶ Huston Smith and Philip Novak, *Buddhism: A Concise Introduction* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), 80, italics theirs.

[F]rom one's own body arises another body that has the constituents and shape of a material body but is made of mind. And one applies and directs this mind to the acquisition of wondrous powers... Although this person is one, he becomes many, or having become many becomes one again; he becomes invisible, and then visible again.⁶⁷

And this view is by no means exclusive to Pāli literature. As we will see, in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* the Buddha and his monks use meditative states to fly, create replicas of themselves, control the weather, shoot fire from their heads and water from their feet, travel to the heavens, and exhibit a host of other miracles. In Indian narratives, meditation frequently endows the religious specialist with the ability to defy natural laws. So the view that meditation is only a *passive*, objective examination of the laws of the universe is problematic in the ancient Indian context because meditation is one of the most popular means by which monks and nuns *actively* subjugate those laws. In Chapter II, we will look more closely at the relationship between meditation and supernatural power in Mūlasarvāstivādin literature.

Second, the view of meditation as rational inquiry alone is problematic because it tends to exclude the ritualistic dimensions of Buddhist contemplative practice. In ritual, actions and procedures are necessarily kept in stasis, preserved, and maintained for the sake of evoking some supernatural outcome or intervention—as with transubstantiation and its salvific power, or the effect of burnt oblations in Vedic ritual. Meditation is a spiritual pursuit, intended to bring about some fundamental change in the consciousness of the practitioner, by which ultimate reality—Christ, God, *brahman*, emptiness, etc.—is experienced more fully. From this contact with an

⁶⁷*Dīghanikāya* 1, 77-78. Here I am using Luis Gómez's translation of this passage found in Gómez, "Meditation," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. Buswell (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2004): 520-530, 520.

unalterable reality, the practitioner gleans some transformative benefit. But when we look at meditation in the Buddhist world—how and when it is practiced—we see that it is often subsumed in a ritual context in such a way that “meditation” and “ritual” become indistinguishable. Throughout the various traditions, meditation is framed within ritual contexts and activities such as the chanting of a *sūtra*, or the propitiation of local spirits. In meditation manuals such as the *Visuddhimagga* we see actions, postures, and behaviors prescribed in meticulous detail, as with ritual.⁶⁸ We find rituals in the Zen tradition that require the maintenance of a pure meditative mind state, which is understood to be essential to the ritual’s efficacy. These rituals are used to summon rain or bestow objects such as images and talismans with magical power.⁶⁹ Here the division between “meditation” and “ritual” is skewed to such an extent that thinking of contemplative practice only in our own Western terms is seriously misleading.

There is another feature of many Western representations of Buddhist meditation that necessitates a precise definition of the term before it can be analyzed effectively. Because meditation has become such a popular facet of the tradition, there is a tendency—both from monks operating within the tradition and from secular scholarship—to project meditation into every aspect of Buddhist religious practice. Let us look first at how this operates within the tradition. Modern strands of Buddhism that emphasize meditation often employ a relatively malleable conception of the practice, and meditation is portrayed as something that can and

⁶⁸ Sharf, “Ritual,” in *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, ed. Donald Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 260.

⁶⁹ See William Bodiford, *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1993), 116-117.

should be undertaken in any circumstance. This is particularly true of those strands of modern Buddhism that encourage their lay followers to meditate. We find, for instance, the assertion from Thai monk Ajahn Jumnien that “everything in life can be meditation.”⁷⁰ Chinese monk Hsing Yum writes, “Putting on clothes and eating can be meditation! Walking and sleeping can be meditation! Even going to the bathroom can be meditation!”⁷¹ Modern monastic exegetes such as Korean Zen monk Hyun Gak see the Buddha’s repetitive, methodical action in the first chapter of the *Diamond Sūtra* as *the* essence of the entire work. Hyun Gak thus encourages his lay followers to conduct their daily affairs—washing their feet, eating, putting away their bowls, as it were—in a contemplative mode.

It is likely that these modern meditation teachers are employing this approach to meditation practice for two reasons. First, they are speaking to a Western audience, an audience for whom meditation has become the most palatable and attractive aspect of the Buddhist tradition. Second, they are speaking primarily to lay-followers, for whom extended periods of meditation are difficult to manage. Thus, as I said, they present meditation as a malleable practice that can be undertaken in any circumstance. Their objectives are, of course, entirely different than our own, but the understanding of meditation they promote creates a real danger for this study. With this understanding of meditation, the parameters of the term are far too broad to allow for precise analysis.

⁷⁰ See the interview with Ajahn Jumnien in Jack Kornfield, *Living Buddhist Masters*, (Santa Cruz, CA: Unity Press, 1977), 282.

⁷¹ Hsing Yum, *For All Living Beings: A Guide to Buddhist Practice* (Los Angeles: Buddha's Light Pub., 2010), 85.

We find this tendency to portray meditation as a kind of all-encompassing religious practice in scholarly sources as well. In *The Foundations of Buddhism*, an introductory text to the tradition, Rupert Gethin writes,

[I]t is clear that much of ordinary, everyday Buddhist devotional practice takes the form of some kind of recollection of the Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha, and also the other recollections of good conduct, generosity, and the gods. For Upatissa and Buddhaghosa such recollection practice constitutes the preliminary stage of calm meditation. There is, then, a real sense in which nearly all Buddhists—lay and monastic—can be considered ‘meditators’.⁷²

The underlying message here is, of course, that if one is a Buddhist one must be engaged in meditation somehow. But if Gethin’s statement holds true for Buddhism, why would it not also hold true for every other religious tradition that encourages reflection on the power of its chief god, the wisdom of its founder, or the truth of its sacred text(s)? Thus, Christians, Mormons, Muslims, Hindus, and Taoists might all be considered “meditators.”

Clearly this conception of Buddhist meditation as an all-encompassing religious practice has become fairly popular. But for the purposes of our study, the idea that anything a monk does can be considered “meditation” will quickly lead to dangerous, unmanageable territory. The *Kṣudrakavastu*, after all, does little more than present story after story regarding the actions of Buddhist monks. Employing this malleable understanding of meditation would leave us to sift through episode after episode, in search of which actions might bear some reflective or contemplative element.

⁷² Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 179.

It is my hope that the preceding discussion sheds at least some light on the complications involved in transposing a modern English term and its connotations onto practices that were invented over 2,000 years ago in a historical, cultural, and linguistic context far removed from our own. For this study, we cannot designate a religious practice as “meditation” simply because it *might* be interpreted as such. This would place far too broad a range on what we could potentially analyze. As an example, consider the veneration of burial mounds (S. *stūpa*), a common practice in Mūlasarvāstivādin monastic life. In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, this practice is not generally spoken of in terms of contemplation. But if we allowed a broad interpretation of “meditation”—as per those cited above—to hold sway in our study, we would be forced to explore *stūpa* worship and a host of other religious activities that may or may not have included some degree of reflection. My argument here is not that we need one universal understanding of the term “meditation” that will eliminate ambiguity in all studies of Buddhist contemplative practice. The term is too broad to entertain such a possibility. But before we can analyze the *Kṣudrakavastu* effectively, we must delimit the term to avoid a tangle of conjecture.

Many scholars who focus on meditation have also encouraged caution when considering the Sanskrit words that Buddhists themselves used to indicate formal “meditation.” Herbert Guenther writes,

While it will be readily understood that ‘meditation’ has always played a major role in what is generically termed Buddhism, what the Buddhists themselves understood by ‘meditation’ is not so readily apparent.⁷³

⁷³ Herbert Guenther, “‘Meditation’ Trends in Early Tibet,” in eds. Whalen Lai and Lewis R. Lancaster, *Early Ch’an in China and Tibet* (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1983): 351-66, 352.

Gethin also remarks,

Obviously the question of which Buddhists ‘meditate’ depends on how one defines ‘meditation’... [I]t is not entirely clear which Buddhist technical term the English word ‘meditation’ corresponds to.⁷⁴

The difficulties alluded to by these two scholars are, no doubt, linked to the term meditation itself, its ambiguity, and the connotations that we have discussed previously. Again, the word has a wide breadth of meaning, and it would be difficult to pin down exactly what it denotes in any religious tradition, including ancient Buddhism.

Nevertheless, given our sources we are fortunate in that we only have to take into account the language employed by one Indian community in one general time period. And here we intend to designate as “meditation” only those practices that the authors of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* unambiguously designated as “meditation.”⁷⁵ There are two Sanskrit words in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* that clearly indicate what we would call “meditation.” These two words are *yoga* and *dhyāna*. Oddly enough, the word *yoga* in Mūlasarvāstivādin sources is not nearly as general as it is in the larger Indian religious tradition. For Mūlasarvāstivādin authors the term *yoga* referred specifically—and perhaps exclusively—to the technique we know as “contemplation of the repulsive,” *aśubhabhāvana* in Sanskrit.⁷⁶ According to instructions given

⁷⁴ Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 179.

⁷⁵ For a further discussion on the complexities of the English word “meditation,” see Alan Sponberg, “Meditation in Fa-hsiang Buddhism,” in *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*, ed. Peter N. Gregory, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986): 15-48.

⁷⁶ See Schopen, “On Monks and Menial Labor,” n. 52. Therein, Schopen refers to a section of the *Poṣadhavastu* that we will treat in detail in Chapter I: Technical Terminology.

in the *Poṣadhavastu* it occurred while the practitioner was seated, it occurred in silence, and it involved focusing the mind on the various constituents of the body. We will explore this form of meditation in Mūlasarvāstivādin sources in much more detail throughout this study, but particularly in Chapter I.

The second term was used to refer to meditative practices more generally. This second term is *dhyāna* (T. *bsam gtan*). Edgerton provides this glossing of *dhyāna*: “*meditation or contemplation; ‘mystic trance’*.”⁷⁷ Monier-Williams’ treatment of the word is no more specific: “*meditation, thought, reflection, (esp.) profound and abstract religious meditation.*” These definitions are somewhat fitting given that, as we will see, the Mūlasarvāstivādins also spoke of *dhyāna* in rather vague terms.

However, in the work of Luis O. Gómez—another frequent contributor to the conversation on Buddhist meditation—we find a more nuanced treatment of *dhyāna*. He glosses the term as:

[A]shift in awareness typically carried out intentionally, in silence, and while holding the body in a static position (most characteristically sitting with legs crossed).⁷⁸

Gómez’s treatment of this term is ideal for our purposes for a number of reasons. In fact, each aspect of Gómez’s definition points to an important feature of the Mūlasarvāstivādin understanding of the word *dhyāna* and resonates with what we will see in the *Kṣudrakavastu* and other sections of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. These three features will play an important role in our analysis of the term *dhyāna* in Chapter I. For now, let us look at each one briefly.

⁷⁷ Franklin Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), s.v. *dhyāna*.

⁷⁸ Luis Gómez, “Meditation,” in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, 520.

First, it is carried out intentionally. This, as I take it, indicates that the practitioner understands himself or herself to be engaged in the practice of *dhyāna*, deliberately and directly, and not in a secondary or accidental way. This designation alone immediately presents a host of insights regarding the role of meditation in the Mūlasarvāstivādin monastic program. This means, for instance, that meditation was seldom cited as the practice that immediately preceded the moment of enlightenment for a monk or nun. In Mūlasarvāstivādin sources, enlightenment most often occurs when a monk or nun is hearing the *dharma* explained by a member of the community who has already attained awakening.

Second, according to Gómez's definition, *dhyāna* is carried out in silence. This too is an important distinction that resonates directly with what we find in our sources. A common trope of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* that points to *dhyāna* as an activity to be undertaken in silence relates to where the practice generally occurs. In story after story monks remove themselves from the physical space of the monastery in order to practice *dhyāna* in the forest. Also, as we will see, excessive noise is frequently cited as one reason that monks have trouble practicing meditation.

Third, and finally, *dhyāna* is carried out while holding the body in a static position, most characteristically while seated. In the *Kṣudrakavastu* and other parts of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, the Sanskrit word *paryāṅka* is frequently used in conjunction with the practice of *dhyāna*. Monier-Williams defines *paryāṅka* as “a particular mode of sitting on the ground (a squatting position assumed by ascetics and Buddhists in meditation).”⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *paryāṅka*. See also Franklin Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, s.v. *paryāṅkin*, but Edgerton's gloss is not as specific.

Of all Sanskrit words associated with meditation, *dhyāna* is used in the *Kṣudrakavastu* more than any other, perhaps more than all others combined. This may be because the term itself was used to refer to seated contemplation in general, rather than to a specific technique. Nevertheless, we know that when Mūlasarvāstivādin authors used the term *dhyāna* they used it to indicate some kind of contemplative practice that included the three features outlined by Gómez. So, for the purposes of this study, we will appropriate the specifics of the Sanskrit term *dhyāna* as outlined by Gómez for the term “meditation.” Meditation will therefore denote a practice that includes the following features:

- 1) It is undertaken intentionally. In other words, the practitioner understands him or herself to be engaged in meditation primarily, if not exclusively.
- 2) It occurs in silence.
- 3) It occurs while one is seated.

Not surprisingly, there is a set of lexical terms that we find used in association with the term *dhyāna*. For example, we find the Sanskrit term *manasi karoti* (T. *yid la byed pa*), which literally means “to fix the mind on something.”⁸⁰ This term most often occurs in the context of the practice of *dhyāna*, and is even used as a synonym for *dhyāna*, though this is rare. Another important term that we find associated with *dhyāna* is *cittaikāgratā* (T. *sems rtse gcig pa*), which means “attaining one-pointedness of mind.” These terms will also receive their fair share of attention in our study. However, as we will see, in Mūlasarvāstivādin sources “making effort in the mind” (S. *manasi karoti*, T. *yid la byed pa*) and “attaining one-pointedness of mind” (S. *cittaikāgratā*, T. *sems rtse gcig pa*) are not only used in association with meditation. They are

⁸⁰ See Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sankrit Dictionary*, s.v. *manasī-karoti*.

also associated with textual recitation. We will address this point and its implications directly in Chapter II.

0.6 The Chapters and General Conclusions

We begin by looking closely at the language that the composers of our *vinaya* used to talk about meditation. In Chapter I: Technical Terminology, we will isolate four Sanskrit terms that figure prominently in the conversation on Mūlasarvāstivādin contemplative practice. The first of these is *dhyāna*, which can denote either the practice of meditation in general or advanced meditative mind states. We begin with an examination of *dhyāna* because this will make one of our main points clear: Meditation was not the defining feature of the Mūlasarvāstivādin religious program. We can see this if we look closely at moments in which enlightenment occurs; for in such instances, meditation is rarely mentioned. Furthermore, deep meditative mind states, also called *dhyāna* in Sanskrit, are generally presented as the domain of those monks or nuns who are already enlightened, rather than a precursor to their enlightenment. Another way that we can understand this is that, in our sources, profound meditative attainment is more often presented as a kind of superpower, rather than an aspiration of monks are not yet enlightened.

The second term we will treat is *aśubhabhāvana*, which in our sources is synonymous with *yoga*. *Aśubhabhāvana* denotes one specific technique of meditation. It can be translated as “contemplation of the repulsive,” and involves focusing the mind on the various constituents of the body. Such focus may be cultivated through the mental enumeration of these various constituents, or through direct attention to one’s own body or the body of another. Our sources make it clear that this technique was the most popular and widespread form of meditation practiced by Mūlasarvāstivādin monks. This should come as no surprise, given two facts: First, members of the monastic order were expected to observe complete celibacy. This would have

presented the community with a number of practical challenges, challenges we will discuss at length below. Second, “contemplation of the repulsive” was a meditative technique that was intended specifically to help counteract one’s natural impulses of desire. The technique therefore would have helped monks adhere to the monastic program. Generally, we think in terms of individuals becoming monks for the sake of perfecting meditation. But here we might also think in terms of monks meditating in order to perfect their monastic training. As we will see, such training was an absolutely necessary prerequisite for the highest attainments and status of the tradition.

The next two terms that we will look at are *pratisaṃlāyana*—“entering into privacy,” and *smṛtyupasthāna*—“establishing mindfulness.” These terms are also telling, but for different reasons. Modern scholars have generally examined these terms in the context of seated contemplation. However, in Mūlasarvāstivādin sources, they are seldom related to seated meditation. For example, in the *Kṣudrakavastu*, “establishing mindfulness” (*S. smṛtyupasthāna*) is most often used to encourage deportment and cleanliness among the monks during their routine activities. As we will see, such encouragement was closely linked to the monastery’s relationship with current and potential donors.

For Chapter II: The Vocation of a Monk, we will turn more squarely to the day-to-day business of the Mūlasarvāstivādin monk or nun. We will look at other practices in their monastic program and how these practices related to meditation. Our sources make it clear that recitation and the observance of rules were particularly important for Mūlasarvāstivādin monks. We find stories in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* wherein the practice of meditation either interferes with recitation or leads a monk to break his monastic vows. In instances where this occurs, meditation is clearly marked as a subordinate practice, one that must not interfere with the recitative and

disciplinary dimensions of the religious program. In Chapter II we will also look at the close relationship between meditation and supernatural power. In many instances in which a monk or nun meditates in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, the practice is undertaken for the sake of summoning and displaying magical power.

In Chapter III: Monks Who Meditate, we will look at one group within the Mūlasarvāstivādin community that specialized in meditation. This group, known as *prahāṇika* monks and nuns, appears frequently in our literature. And in most instances where they appear, they are presented as deviants. These monks have a lot to tell us about the development of the tradition in India. This becomes clear when we look at the relationship between the *prahāṇika* and the Mahāyāna tradition in India.

All in all, our source does not privilege the practice of meditation the way that many modern scholars have. In our sources it is clear that meditation was only one of many practices that operated within the matrix of the monastic program. Other practices, such as recitation and the observance of rules, are more than once presented as more valuable and important than meditation was. These two practices—recitation and the observance of rules—played an essential role in Mūlasarvāstivādin mental training.

Much of our analysis in Chapters II and III will center on notions of geographical and cultural space. Our stories make it clear that North Indian monasteries were generally not suitable for long periods of seated, silent meditation. Therefore, monks who wished to cultivate this skill had to remove themselves from the geographical space of the larger community for relatively long periods of time. This in turn lead to a separation of cultural space between monks who specialized in meditation and the larger community. And it may be because of this cultural

divide between the two groups that mediating monks are frequently depicted as deviants in our source, which was written by monks concerned with the monastery.

This fact that monks had to leave the monastery in order to meditate indicates a need to revise our way of thinking about meditation in the Indian tradition. If meditation was such an inextricable part of monastic life, why could it not occur inside the monastery?

Mūlasarvāstivādin literature makes it clear that these monasteries would not have been conducive to long periods of silent meditation. They came with a host of religious and administrative responsibilities, lay followers coming and going, monks leaving to fill obligations to the laity, and many sources of noise. The forest was, perhaps, the only place where long periods of meditation could occur without interruption.

This is not to say the Mūlasarvāstivādin monks did not meditate. Clearly some of them did. In our source, meditation is often lauded and encouraged. But meditation was painted as a practice that may or may not have engaged in. It is never cited as obligatory, as is recitation and the observance of rules. So in the following pages we seek to paint a clearer and more nuanced picture of how meditation operated within the Mūlasarvāstivādin religious program.

Chapter I: Technical Terminology

1.0—Introduction

1.1—*Dhyāna*—As the General Practice of Meditation

1.2—*Dhyāna*—As Advanced Meditative Mind State

1.3—*Aśubhabhāvana*—Its Prominence in the Mūlasarvāstivādin Tradition

1.4—*Pratisaṃlī*—The Value of Rest and Privacy

1.5—*Smṛtyupasthāna*—Minding Your Manners in an Indian Monastery

1.0 Introduction

Often, the vastness and complexity of a religious tradition can be demonstrated by a thorough investigation of a single word or phrase used within that tradition. When we isolate one term and explore its various uses we can detect the motives and means of different voices within the tradition. This approach can be particularly enlightening when applied to a tradition such as Indian Buddhism wherein we find an enormous body of evidence—textual, archeological, and epigraphical—such that no scholar could possibly reconcile his or her ideas with every piece of evidence available. Thousands of texts and inscriptions in a variety of languages—“classical” Chinese, “classical” Tibetan, and at least four forms of Indic languages—form the body of evidence we find that could help us understand the history of Indian Buddhism. Clearly, these words were redacted over many centuries by a number of adherents operating within the Indian tradition, and their meanings were subject to change, as was the larger tradition. Here, we will isolate phrases associated with meditation within the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition—particularly instances found in the *Kṣudrakavastu*—and explore their usage in detail.

We will look at four Sanskrit terms in all. The first two are clearly related to meditation as we characterized it in the Introduction and will lend insight into the practice of seated, silent contemplation in the Mūlasarvāstivādin community. These two terms are *dhyāna* and *aśubhabhāvana*. *Dhyāna* itself has two meanings, one rather vague and the other quite specific. First, *dhyāna* refers to the practice of meditation in general. In all instances, this practice conforms to the three characteristics outlined in our introduction—it is practiced intentionally, in silence, and while seated. Second, more specifically, *dhyāna* refers to a series of stratified meditative attainments. When we look at the relationship between these two meanings of *dhyāna* we find that the practice of meditation itself played a relatively small role in Mūlasarvāstivādin soteriology. Perhaps as a consequence of this, the attainment of *dhyānas*—in the second sense, as deep meditative states—is generally portrayed as a kind of superpower obtained by those who are already enlightened.

The second term that relates to meditation in Mūlasarvāstivādin sources is *aśubhabhāvana*. The term refers to what is popularly known as “contemplation of the repulsive,” a technique that centers on an effort to cultivate a sense of disgust towards the physical world. This meditative technique is treated more extensively than any other technique in Mūlasarvāstivādin literature. In our sources, *aśubhabhāvana* was synonymous with the Sanskrit term *yoga*, and this fact alone tells us a lot about the technique’s popularity. In one narrative, *aśubhabhāvana* is lauded by the Buddha as a sure means to enlightenment. Furthermore, as we will see, it seems that this form of meditation was associated with *dhyāna* itself.

The last two of the four terms we will look at are frequently associated with meditation in modern scholarship. However, in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* they are only associated with meditation in an indirect way at best. Forms of the Sanskrit construct *prati + sam + √lī* (S.

pratisaṃlī) are generally translated as “retreating into private for the sake of meditation.”

However, it may be that here scholars have seen what they wished to see, and assumed that monks must be going to their cells in order to contemplate. The use of this term in our sources is at times ambiguous. There is, however, a stenciled passage in which *pratisaṃlī* can only mean that a monk wishes to retire into privacy for the sake of going to sleep. Hence, it seems that *pratisaṃlī* carried, at least in some instances, the same denotation as the Sanskrit construction *sam + √lī*, which simply means “to go to bed.”

Finally, the term *smṛtyupasthāna* has been treated extensively by modern scholars, and is generally associated with seated meditation. However, in most instances where we find this term in Mūlasarvāstivādin sources, it refers not to meditation, but to the observance of deportment and cleanliness—two characteristics that would have been essential for the maintenance of a respectable monastery. Composers of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* used this term to encourage monks to demonstrate behavior that would mark the community as an appropriate source of meritorious giving.

Before we continue, it should be noted that many of the insights drawn in this chapter will relate to Mūlasarvāstivādin soteriology, particularly in the section on *dhyāna*. One of the first insights we will encounter is that meditation was only one of myriad monastic activities that made up the Mūlasarvāstivādin spiritual program. In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, beings are enlightened at every turn; and instances in which this occurs very rarely involve meditation. Yet, the attainment of deep meditative states is portrayed not as leading to enlightenment, but as a natural consequence of enlightenment. This begs the question: If Mūlasarvāstivādin monks are not becoming enlightened through meditation, how does it happen? In other words, what

constituted the Mūlasarvāstivādin soteriological program? This is one of the first questions we will address in the next section, where we will explore the term *dhyāna*.

1.1 *Dhyāna*—As the General Practice of Meditation

In this section and the next, we will look at instances of the term *dhyāna* (T. *bsam gtan*) in the *Kṣudrakavastu* and other sections of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. At the outset it should be made clear that the term *dhyāna* has two distinct uses in mainstream Buddhist literature. First, it is used to indicate the general practice of meditation, the features of which we looked at briefly in the introduction. We will examine these features in more detail in this section. Second, the term is used in a more restricted, technical sense. Here the term indicates a series of stratified meditative states or attainments, which we can render in the plural as *dhyānas*.

What we find when we look at the term *dhyāna* in Mūlasarvāstivādin literature depends on which use we examine. There are many insights to be gleaned from both. In this section, we will focus on the first—*dhyāna* as it is used to indicate the general practice of silent, seated meditation. We will see that, not surprisingly, meditation was a widely known practice in Mūlasarvāstivādin monastic training. However, though it was known, there is much evidence to suggest that it was not as widely practiced as we might think. This is not to say that spiritual attainment was not valued in our sources. Narratives in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* that include moments of enlightenment are quite frequent. And much of our discussion here will center on Mūlasarvāstivādin soteriology. But when the composers of our *vinaya* talked about the highest aim of the tradition—the attainment of the state of an enlightened and liberated being (S. *arhat*)—they never mentioned meditation (S. *dhyāna*) as the immediate cause of this experience. In fact, when the religious program of eminent monks and nuns—such as Jyotiṣka and Dharmadinnā—is discussed, meditation is seldom mentioned as an aspect of their training. The

religious program described in our texts is more akin to what scholars have called “penetrative insight,” rather than advancement in meditation. The attainment of enlightenment in our sources is more closely bound to hearing the *dharma* preached and observing monastic rules. All these facts will become clearer as we move through our analysis of *dhyāna* and through the chapters of this study.

Perhaps the most widespread use of the term *dhyāna* to indicate the general practice of meditation is found in a stenciled passage that reads *dve bhikṣukarmaṇī dhyānam adhyayanam ca* in Sanskrit. This could be translated as “the two activities of a monk are meditation and recitation.”¹ In Tibetan, the phrase reads: *dge slong gi las ni gnyis te / bsam gtan dang / klog pa yin pa /*. It occurs several times in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, with nearly identical phrasing for each instance. In Sanskrit, the term *bhikṣukarmaṇī* is a *tatpuruṣa* compound indicating the “business, or duty” (S. *karmaṇī*, T. *las*) of a “monk” (S. *bhikṣu*, T. *dge slong*). In classical Indian sources, the word *karman* is often used in regard to religious activities.² *Dhyāna*, of course, refers to meditation, the details of which we will explore below. The term *adhyayana* (t. *klog pa*) comes from the root *√adhī*, meaning “to study, read, recite.”³

¹ For a few examples, see *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 121b.7-122a.1. See also Gregory Schopen, “The Bones of a Buddha and the Business of a Monk,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 27 (1999): 279-324. For more on this phrase and its usage, see Jonathon Silk, *Managing Monks: Administrators and Administrative Roles in Indian Buddhist Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 24-25.

² See Monier-William, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *karman*.

³ *Ibid.*, s.v. *adhī*.

In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, the phrase “the two activities of a monk are meditation and recitation” is used in two general ways. First, it is deployed in narratives wherein a monk begins training. These are presented as two options for specialization. For example, in the *Vinayavibhaṅga* section, when the brahman Mahāpanthaka is admitted into the order, we read:

When the monk had taken him into the countryside, admitted him into the community and ordained him, the monk said: “The two activities of a monk are meditation and recitation. Which will you do?”⁴

Second, this phrase is deployed when monks engage in behavior that is improper for the monastic community. This occurs twice in the *Kṣudrakavastu*. One narrative begins in the following way:

The Blessed One said, “There are five blessings one accumulates from sweeping rubbish.” And the Elders, having abandoned their meditation and recitation, commenced to sweeping Jetavana.

The Buddha said: “What was said was said in regard to the provost of the monastery. Regarding the elders monks, this is not so. Rather, the activities of a monk who has

⁴ This story was redacted into the *Divyāvadāna*, where the Sanskrit reads: *dve bhikṣukarmaṇī dhyānam adhyayanam ca kiṃ kariṣyasi*. See Edward Byles Cowell and Robert Alexander Neil, *The Divyāvadāna: A Collection of Early Buddhist Legends* (Cambridge: University Press, 1886), 488. The Tibetan version of the story is found in the *Vinayavibhaṅga* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*; see Derge ‘dul ba Ja 61a.4-71b.4.

entered the well-spoken *dharma* and *vinaya* are two. They are these: meditation and recitation.”⁵

This phrase is used in the same way, again in the *Kṣudrakavastu*, when the monk Mahākaśyapa finds Nanda, the Buddha’s half-brother, longingly painting a picture of his (Nanda’s) wife.

Mahākaśyapa chides Nanda saying:

Venerable, the Blessed One said “The activities of a monk are two: meditation and recitation.” Are you sitting and painting a picture of your wife?⁶

This stock phrase tells us, at least, that meditation (S. *dhyāna*) was widely understood to be one aspect of the Mūlasarvāstivādin religious program. This understanding was common enough that our stenciled phrase could be used in a variety of narratives, presumably written by a number of different authors. Unfortunately, however, the wording here is so general that it offers little insight regarding the details of the practice. For this, we must turn to instances of the term *dhyāna* outside the context of this phrase.

⁵ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 175a.7-b.2; *bcom ldan ‘das kyis phyag ba la phan yon lnga yod do zhes bka’ stsal pa dang dge slong gnas brtan gnas brtan dag bsam gtan dang ‘don pa por te rgyal byed kyī tshal ‘phyag pa la zhugs nas / bcom ldan ‘das bka’ stsal pa / ngas dge skos las dgongs te gsungs kyī / dge slong gnas brtan gnas brtan dag ni ma yin no / ‘on kyang legs par gsungs pa’i chos ‘dul ba la rab tu byung ba’i dge slong gi las ni gnyis te / bsam gtan dang ‘dan pa’o //*.

⁶ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 121b.7; *tshe dang ldan pa bcom ldan ‘das kyis dge slong gi bya ba ni gnyis te / bsam gtan dang gdon pa’o zhes gsungs na / khyong rang gi chung ma ‘dri zhing ‘dug gam //*.

From such instances, we can clearly see that this religious practice conformed to the understanding of “meditation” outlined in the introduction to our study. As per Gómez’s definition⁷ it was carried out intentionally, in silence, and in a seated position. To demonstrate this, we turn first to a narrative from the *Kṣudrakavastu* involving a monk who was a “meditation specialist” (S: *prahāṇika*, T. *spongs ba pa*).⁸ The story begins,

This episode occurred in Rajagṛha. There was a monk who was a meditation specialist; and having gone to a place in the forest, he practiced meditation (S. *dhyāna*, T. *bsam gtan*).⁹

This brief passage tells us immediately that the Mūlasarvāstivādin practice of *dhyāna* fits the first two aspects of Gómez’s definition of the term. First, we are told that the monk set out from the monastery with the intention to engage in meditation. In Mūlasarvāstivādin stories, meditation is generally not an activity that occurs in tandem with other actions. I say *generally* because we do find a few instances in which meditation and recitation are said to occur side by side. But such instances often lead to conflict between those who are meditating and those who are reciting. Apparently meditation required a monk’s full intention and attention.

Here I would also add that the goal or intention of entering into the practice of *dhyāna* need not be the attainment of liberation, or even the cultivation of good qualities. In instances when an intention is not specified, we can safely assume that it is one or both of these. However,

⁷ See Introduction—0.5. The Word “Meditation” and What It Indicates

⁸ Mūlasarvāstivādin meditation specialists will be the focus of Chapter III of our study.

⁹ See *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge *Da* 35b.2-36a.2, or *Kṣudrakavastu*, Tog ‘dul ba *Tha* 50b.5-51b.2; *gleng gzhi ni rgyal po’i khab na’o // dge slong spong ba pa zhig yod pa yang dang dgon pa’i gnas su song nas bsam gtan byed do //*.

a monk might also enter a meditative state for the sake of verifying that he has attained enlightenment, or for the sake of summoning magical power. So meditation is something that is undertaken intentionally, but the purpose of entering into meditation is not always the same. These three purposes—cultivating spiritual merit, verifying that enlightenment has already occurred, and performing miracles—are what we find in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. Each of these three intentions will be covered in more detail below.

Second, we must assume that our meditating monk goes to a place in the forest for the sake of escaping the bustle of the monastery, and that monasteries were not set up for or conducive to meditation. In other words, he wishes to practice in silence. As we will see, monks going into the forest to meditate is a common narrative motif in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. Other Mūlasarvāstivādin stories make it clear why this would be necessary. In at least two other stories monks or nuns who attempt to meditate within the walls of the monastery are disturbed by the chanting of monks who specialize in recitation.¹⁰ And in other narratives, the monastery is simply described as too noisy for sustained meditation.¹¹

¹⁰ See *Vinayavibhaṅga*, Derge ‘dul ba Cha 188a.5-196a.6. This story involves the eminent nun Mahāprajāpatī, who is called a *prāhāṇika* (*spong ba ma* in Tibetan); she comes into conflict with the nun Dharmadinnā, who is a *sūtrāntika* (*mdo sde’i mtha’ pa*), one recites the *sutras*. See also *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, Derge Kha 151a.2-151b.2, wherein a meditation specialist (*prāhāṇika*) is reborn as a frog because he described the recitative monks as croaking frogs. We will talk about these narratives and their importance in much greater detail in Chapter II—The Vocation of a Monk and Chapter III—Monks Who Meditate.

¹¹ See the section 1.2 below on *aśubhabhāvana* and the narrative of the *Poṣadhavastu* cited there.

This is an important theme that we will revisit throughout our study, as this dynamic within the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* is very telling. The fact that monks so often leave the monastery to meditate raises several questions: Why must monks leave the monastery to engage in long periods of meditation? If meditation was an essential aspect of the Indian monastic practice, why could it not be practiced inside the monastery? Why were monasteries not built to facilitate the practice? Were there dangers associated with leaving the monastery for long periods of time? As I said in the introduction, notions of geographical and cultural space will play an important part in our discussion. The fact that monasteries could not facilitate long periods of meditation created a host of complications, and even conflict between those who wished to cultivate meditative attention and those who wished for monks to stay close to the monastery and its more normative business.

It seems the notion that many Indian monasteries were not suited for long periods of meditation was fairly widespread. The 5th century Theravāda commentator Buddhaghōṣa, who was perhaps from south Asia but wrote in and about the Sri Lankan tradition, was also aware of the natural tension between cultivation in meditation and the administration of a settled monastery. Chapter IV of Buddhaghōṣa's *Visuddhimagga* opens with a list of eighteen qualities that make a monastery unfit for meditative development.¹² These qualities range from the monastery being near a place where people gather wood to it being near a highway. Most of these have to do with the monastery being too crowded and busy.

This designation of *dhyāna* as a practice that occurs in silence is also important because it excludes the possibility that recitation can be understood as a form of meditation, at least in the

¹² Buddhaghosa, and Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *Visuddhimagga: The Path of Purification* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: 1975; repr. Seattle, WA: BPE Pariyatti Editions, 1999), see pages 118-22.

sense that we are employing the terms here. There is much evidence to confirm that, for the Mūlasarvāstivādin school, these two practices were understood to be fundamentally different. To begin with, our formula “the two activities of a monk are meditation and recitation (S. *dve bhikṣukarmaṇī dhyānam adhyayanam ca*)” tells us that the Indian monks who composed this *vinaya* understood that meditation and the vocalization and/or rehearsal of texts were two different exercises. In Chapter II, we will look more closely at the tension that existed between recitation monks and monks who specialized in meditation. As I mentioned, in two of our narratives it is clear that the meditating monk or nun is upset because the noise created by the reciters renders him or her unable to concentrate. This excludes the Mūlasarvāstivādin practice of *dhyāna* from other Buddhist contemplative practices that tend to blur the line between recitation and meditation. We find, for example, a Zen ritual in which a monk must recite the entire Heart Sūtra in one breath.¹³ Zen monks in medieval Japan cultivated this skill in conjunction with meditative attainment. Such a practice can only reasonably be understood as the intersection of recitation and meditation, and it cannot be solely classified as one or the other.¹⁴ In the Mūlasarvāstivādin school, however, the two practices were clearly distinct—with meditation (*dhyāna*) occurring in silence. As I said, the fact that *dhyāna* was to be undertaken in silence made for a host of logistical problems in these Indian monasteries.

¹³ Bodiford, *Sōtō Zen*, 117.

¹⁴ For another study on the intersection of recitation and contemplation, see Neil Dalal, “Contemplative Practice and Textual Agency in Advaita Vedānta,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 21 (2009): 15-27.

What about the third aspect of Gómez's definition of *dhyāna*? Does this practice occur in a seated posture? In his discussion of Indian iconography from the Kuṣāna period, David White has argued that the seated, cross-legged position was not associated with meditation. He writes:

I would argue that in the centuries around the beginning of the common era, the cross-legged “lotus position” was a mark of royal sovereignty: royal gods or goddesses, their priests, and kings sat enthroned in the posture atop a dias, lotus, or cushion. When Buddhas and Jīnas began to be represented anthropomorphically in Kushan-era sculpture and coinage, their cross-legged posture was originally an indication of their royal sovereignty, rather than of any meditative or yogic practice.¹⁵

The seated position certainly was associated with gods and royalty. In the reliefs carved into and around reliquary mounds (*S. stūpa*), gods and royalty are frequently shown in this posture. And it may be true that the lay followers who saw statues of the Buddha around this time did not associate the seated posture with contemplation.

However, it is certain that monks and nuns did. In our source the term *dhyāna* is often found together with the term *pariyāṅka*, which refers to the seated, cross-legged position. To cite a few examples, in the Mūlasarvāstivādin account of the death of Mahāprajāpatī, just before she enters into deep meditative states—*dhyāna* in the second sense, as stratified meditative attainments—and exhibits a variety of miracles, we read:

¹⁵ David White, *Sinister Yogis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 56.

Then, in the midst of the community of nuns, in an open space that was proper, Mahāprajāpatī sat in the cross-legged position (S. *paryāṅka*, T. *skyil mo krung phyed*). Her nuns sat in this way as well.¹⁶

In another narrative, the practice of one meditation specialist is described in this way:

In Śrāvastī, there dwelt a monk named Nandika. Because he always practiced meditation in solitary places, he became known as “Nandika the meditator.” At one time he, having assumed the cross-legged position (S. *paryāṅka*, T. *skyil mo krung phyed*), began to practice meditation (S. *dhyāna*, T. *bsam gtan*).¹⁷

As one final example, at one time a monk is described as fashioning a make-shift “yoga strap” out of his robes right before meditating:

At one time, he tied his monk-robe into a knot so that it was like a *yoga strap*...¹⁸

Here, the Tibetan term *pus khyud* is used to translate the Sanskrit *yogaṭṭa*.¹⁹ Monier-Williams glosses *yogaṭṭa* as “the cloth thrown over the back and knees of a devotee during

¹⁶ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 112a.4-5; *de nas sa phyogs bar skabs yangs pa zhig tu dge slong ma’i dge ‘dun gyi gung la skyil mo krung phyed bcas nas ‘dug go //*.

¹⁷ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 102a.5-6; *mnyan yod na dge slong dga’ ba can zhes bya ba zhig gnas pa de rtag tu dgon ba nags mtha’i gnas mal dag na bsam gtan byed pa zhig pas / de’i ming bsam gtan pa dga’ ba can zhes bya bar chags so // de gang gi tshe skyil mo krung bcas nas bsam gtan byed pa de’i tshe bdud kyi ris kyi lha dag gis gtses so //*.

¹⁸ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Da 35b.3; Tog Tha 50b.5; *des dus gzhan zhig na snam sbyar pus khyud ltar mdud pa por nas...*

¹⁹ See Lokesh Chandra, *Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary* (Tokyo: 1961; repr. Kyoto: Rinsen Book Co., 1971), s.v. *pus khyud*.

meditation.”²⁰ In his *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*, Sircar defines the *yogapaṭṭa* as a “band used by the ascetics to keep their limbs in a position of rigidity.”²¹ Use of this implement must have been fairly common among *yogis* in ancient India, as the *yogapaṭṭa* is a common feature of Buddhist and non-Buddhist art in ancient India. And in each instance where it appears the figure is seated, using the strap to keep his or her legs in the lotus position.²² So in this narrative and the others cited, *dhyāna* is a practice that occurs while seated, with the legs crossed. Thus in Mūlasarvāstivādin sources the term fits with each of the three aspects of the definition for “meditation” that we have appropriated from Gómez—it is done intentionally, in silence, and while seated.

However, though we can discern something about what the practice looked like, we still know little about what it entailed in the mind of the practitioner. This is due to the fact that, in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, *dhyāna* is presented in rather vague terms. Detailed instructions on how to practice it are never provided and exactly how the mind was engaged at this time is not made clear. There are only two known instances in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* where meditation instructions are provided. And in both of those instances the instructions are for “contemplation of the repulsive” (S. *aśubhabhāvana*), which will be the subject of our next

²⁰ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *yogapaṭṭa*.

²¹ Dineschandra Sircar, *Indian Epigraphical Glossary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966), s.v. *yoga-patta*.

²² See, for example, Thomas E. Donaldson, *Iconography of the Buddhist Sculpture of Orissa* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2001), Vol. 2, 147. See also Eva R. Jansen, *The Book of Hindu Imagery: Gods, Manifestations and Their Meaning*. (Diever, Holland: Binkey Kok Publications, 1993), 16.

section. There is evidence in our source to suggest that at least some composers of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* understood *dhyāna* and *aśubhabhāvana* to be closely related, perhaps even one and the same. Still, we know that there were other techniques besides “contemplation of the repulsive” (S. *aśubhabhāvana*) known by this community. There is a story from the *Kṣudrakavastu* in which a monk is said to engage in some meditative practice—represented by the Sanskrit *manasikāraḥ* (T. *yid la byed pa*), rather than *dhyāna*—while sitting in the cross-legged position. But the Buddha tells him he should have been practicing “contemplation of the repulsive” instead.²³ What contemplative technique he was engaged in is not made clear, but we know, at least, from the context that it was not “contemplation of the repulsive”.

So if the composers of this text knew an array of meditative techniques and objects—such as the long catalogue of meditative objects we find in commentaries like the *Visuddhimagga*—then they were silent on what these were. This vague treatment of meditative practice is not a unique feature of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, or *vinaya* literature generally for that matter. As Noble Ross Reat has observed,

It is in regard to meditative teachings that the greatest doubt regarding the teachings of the historical Buddha exists. In the first place, given the prominence of meditative practice in the early Buddhist spiritual path, remarkably little space in the *Sutta Pitaka* is dedicated to elaboration upon these practices. Such elaboration as exists is normally

²³ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 39a.6-39b.5; Tog Ta 57b.4-58b.1. We will talk in much more detail about the story in the *aśubhabhāvana* section below.

formulaic and sweeping in scope, treating the stages of a lifetime’s meditative practice in a paragraph or so.²⁴

Reat goes on to suggest that the vague treatment of contemplative techniques in classical Buddhist literature is a consequence of the fact that monks would have been given instructions that were tailored for them by their teachers. And there is evidence in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* to suggest that this may have been the case in some instances. It happens in more than one story from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* that monks are warned not to practice meditation without proper guidance and admonishment. In these stories, the monks who practice meditation without guidance end up in a disastrous situation.²⁵ We will talk more about these stories in Chapter II.

But this scarcity of precise information on the practice of *dhyāna* has other implications. Perhaps the absence of detailed instructions is only conspicuous because we expect to find them. There is another, more straightforward explanation for this scarcity of information, at least in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. Simply stated, *dhyāna* was not a practice that the composers of our texts—specialists in the monastic code (*S. vinayadhara*)—were overly concerned or occupied with. Nor was it a practice that they felt other monks *must* engage in. While the stenciled passage

²⁴ Noble Ross Reat, “The Historical Buddha and His Teachings,” in *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy, Vol. VII: Abhidharma Buddhism to 150 A.D.*, eds. Karl H. Potter et al. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996): 3-58, 52.

²⁵ For one example, see *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ’dul ba Tha 180b.1-181a.4; Tog Ta 272a.7-273a.7. This is the story of the monks Daśaputra and Pala. We will look at this story and others that insist that monks only practice meditation with guidance in section 2.2—”Go and Wash Your Bowl”: The Importance of Monastic Discipline.

we began with—“the two activities of a monk are meditation and recitation”—may have been deployed to articulate an ideal, our sources make it clear that this ideal was not what was playing out on the ground. In their literature, Mūlasarvāstivādin monks are said to engage in a host of important religious activities. They maintain their property, worship reliquary mounds (S. *stūpas*), visit laity for meals and/or sermons, tend the sick of their order, read and recite texts, and, yes, they meditate. But meditation was only one of many practices that functioned in the context of monastic life. And in Mūlasarvāstivādin religious practice, it does not hold the same place of distinction that modern representations of the tradition have assigned it.

A brief look at a counter example will help clarify the preceding point. Of “the two activities of a monk,” recitation was clearly and highly favored among this population of Indian Buddhists. There is a wealth of specific data regarding recitation in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. From these stories we can glean a good picture of where, when, how, and why recitation was practiced.²⁶ Ritual recitation was, for instance, incorporated into many common activities of monastic life, including eating and even walking in the monastery. It was, therefore, a practice that all monks would have been engaged in, or at least would have come into contact with, on a daily basis. On the other hand, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* is not only vague in terms of the technique(s) that would have been grouped under *dhyāna*, but also in terms of where, how, or when it would have been practiced. It is never presented as obligatory. Nor do we find any evidence to suggest that sessions of meditation were built into the daily schedule of the monks. In at least half of the narratives where meditation appears, those who practice it are marked as “meditation specialists” (S: *prahāṇika*, T. *spongs ba pa*), and these stories inevitably end with

²⁶ See section 2.1 below—Recitation and Meditation: A Closer Look at “the Two Activities of a Monk”.

the meditator causing trouble for the larger community. So while scriptural recitation was a central feature of the Mūlasarvāstivādin religious life, meditation is more often presented as a supplementary practice, one that a monk may or may not choose to engage in.

The vague treatment of the term *dhyāna* is not the only evidence from our sources to suggest that meditation was only a secondary practice among these monks. There is another way that we can approach the question “How important was *dhyāna* to the composers of our text?” That is by looking at the soteriological ends of the tradition and how the attainment of these ends was depicted. The highest end of the mainstream tradition—and therefore the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition—was the attainment of the state of an *arhat*. Technically speaking, an *arhat* is a being whose mental defilements have been so effaced that the residual effects his or her past actions (S. *karma*) are not strong enough to move him or her into another rebirth. Thus, at the moment of death the various constituents (S. *skandha*) that ontologically constitute that person are exhausted and final liberation (S. *parinirvāṇa*)—i.e. the extinction of the self—is attained. There are also certain milestone attainments that lead to the attainment of *arhat* status. The lowest, or least of these, for example, is the attainment of the state of a “stream-enterer” (S. *śrotāpanna*, T. *rgyun du zhugs pa*). With this attainment the practitioner is freed from rebirth in the lower realms of existence and is ensured the attainment full liberation—the state of an *arhat*—within seven lifetimes. In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, narratives in which one or more beings attain some degree of liberation are quite frequent. This occurs at least a dozen times in the *Kṣudrakavastu* alone.

Stories in which one or more beings attain liberation are important for our purposes because they allow us to see how and why Mūlasarvāstivādin monks understood this to occur. In such stories we see three clear patterns: First, the overwhelming majority of instances of

enlightenment occur while a follower is hearing the *dharma* preached by a senior member of the community. Second, the level of liberation attained is closely tied to the number of religious rules the person is observing. Third, *dhyāna* is never mentioned as the immediate cause of enlightenment. Due to the volume of narratives that follow these three patterns, a few examples will have to suffice. We might begin by looking at narratives wherein one or more people attain the lowest degree of liberation, the state of a “stream-enterer” (S. *śrotāpanna*, T. *rgyun du zhugs pa*).

The Blessed One—having understood the thoughts, the predisposition, the nature, and the character of that son of a god who was previously a monk—taught the *dharma*, fully penetrating the Four Noble Truths. And so that god who was previously a monk, having heard it, while he remained seated on that very mat, shattered with the thunderbolt of understanding the mountain of the view of the self with its twenty peaks, and directly realized the fruit of stream-entry.²⁷

This exact passage is found, with almost no variation in the story of the monks Daśapūtra and Pāla, and they too attain the fruit of stream-entry by hearing the Blessed One speak.²⁸

²⁷ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 49b.4-5; *de nas bcom ldan ‘das kyis sngon dge slong lha’i bu’i bsam pa dang / bgal nyal ba dang / khams dang / rang bzhin thugs su chud nas / gang thos nas sngon dge slong lha’i bus stan de nyid la ‘dug bzhin du ‘jig tshogs la lha ba’i ri’i rtse mo nyi shu mtho ba ye shes kyi rdo rjes bcom ste rgyun du zhugs pa’i ‘bras bu mngen sum du byas pa de lta bur ‘phags pa’i bden pa bzhi yang dag par so sor rtogs par byed pa’i chos bstan pa mdzad do //*.

²⁸ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 178a.6-7.

But stream-entry is not the highest stage of liberation attained through the hearing of *dharma* in Mūlasarvāstivādin literature. And the Blessed One is not the only one who literally “enlightens” others with his teachings. This is also done by eminent monks such as Śāriputra and eminent nuns such as Utpalavarṇā. Furthermore, the passage cited above is so common in our source that it is frequently abridged, using the standard means of abbreviation for shared passages. All of the preceding points are evident in the following excerpt:

Then, the Venerable Śāriputra—having understood the thoughts, the predisposition, the nature, and the character of the whole group—taught the *dharma* according to that understanding. A great many beings, when they heard it, attained wondrous distinctions. Some directly realized the fruit of stream-entry, some the fruit of a once-returner, some the fruit of a non-returner. As was written before up to... Some became inclined towards the community of monks.²⁹

That Mūlasarvāstivādins understood hearing the *dharma* as the most common means to enlightenment is perhaps made clearest in the *Kṣudrakavastu*’s hagiographical account of the nun Dharmadinnā, also known as Dharmadattā.³⁰ Here we will also begin to see more clearly the

²⁹ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 70a.5-70a.6; *de nas tshe dang ldan pa shāri’i bus ‘khor de dag gi bsam pa dang / bag la byal dang / khams dang rang bzhin rtogs nas de dag dang mthun par chos bstan te / srog chags ‘tham phrag mang po dag gis de thos nas lhag pa’i khyad par chen po thob pa ‘di lta ste / kha cig gis ni rgyun du zhugs pa’i ‘bras bu mngon sum du byas / kha cig gis ni lan gcig phyir ‘ongs ba’i ‘bras bu kha cig gis phyir ma ‘ong ba’i ‘bras bu zhes bya ba nas dge ‘dun la gzhol zhes bya ba’i bar snga ma bzhin no //*

³⁰ Dharmadinnā’s story in its entirety can be found at *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge Da 160b.6-170a.6; Tog Tha 239b.6-254.3.

importance of adhering to monastic rules in Mūlasarvāstivādin soteriology. Because her father disapproves strongly of Dharmadinnā entering the religious life, she is forced to engage in religious training in her own house. The nun Utpalavarṇā is Dharmadinnā's mentor.

Dharmadinnā's progression on the path to liberation is described at different intervals in the story as follows:

Then, when Dharmadinnā had given rise to great happiness, the Venerable Utpalavarṇā explained the *dharma* in such a way that one comes to understand the Four Noble Truths. Dharmadinnā, hearing this, having shattered with the thunderbolt of wisdom the twenty peaks of the belief in a permanent self, immediately realized the fruit of a stream-enterer (S. *śrotāpanna*, T. *rgyun du zhugs pa*)...³¹

Later in our story, she attains the next stage of liberation in the same way:

The community of nuns, ordering Utpalavarṇā, sent her as a messenger. Having gone there, she said, "The order of nuns gives the six rules and the six minor rules for two years. Now, having become a nun, you must act in conformity to this and that." Then, such a *dharma* teaching was heard that Dharmadinnā attained the fruit of a once-returner (S. *sakṛdāgāmin*, T. *lan gcig phyir ldog ba*)...³²

³¹ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Da 163b.1-2; *de nas ran tu dga' ba skyes pa dang / dge slong ma utpa la'i kha dog mas 'phags pa'i bden pa bzhi yang dag par rtogs par 'gyur ba de lta bu bshad nas chos sbyin mas thos ma thag tu 'jig tshogs su lta ba'i ri'i rtse mo nyi shu gyen du byung ba rdo rje ye shes kyis bcom nas rgyun du zhugs pa'i 'bras bu mngon du byas so //*.

³² *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Da 163b.4-5; *dge slong ma'i dge 'dun gyis utpa la'i kha dog ma bsgos te phrin par gtang ngo // de der song nas bu mo dge slong ma'i dge'dun rnams kyis lo gnyis su chos drug dang rjes su 'brang ba'i chos drug bslab pa'i sdpm pa byin te / khyod ni dge*

Her attainment of the state of a non-returner follows the same pattern:

The nuns sent Utpalavarṇā as a messenger. Having gone there, she said, “Oh daughter, since the practice of celibacy has been authorized by the community of nuns, you are now to be fully ordained as a nun.” Then she gave such a talk on *dharmā* that Dharmadinnā immediately directly realized the fruit of a non-returner (S. *anāgāmin*, T. *slar mi ldog pa*), and she attained miraculous powers...³³

Finally, she attains the highest state of liberation—that of an *arhat*—in this way:

Utpalavarṇā, going there, said to her, “Now, by the Blessed One, and by the two-fold community you are ordered to be fully ordained.” She received the full vows from the two-fold community. Then, she heard such a discourse on Dharma that she understood this wheel of rebirth with its five destinations, both moving and stopped. She struck down all conditioned states with their inherent disintegration, collapse, dispersal, and ruin. Then, having abandoned all impurity, she directly realized the state of a liberated being (S. *arhat*, T. *dgra bcom*). Having come to be a liberated being, she was free from desire for the three realms. To her, gold and dirt were the same. To her, all of space and the

*slong mar 'gyur gyis 'di dang 'di ni khyod kyis byos shig / ji ltar bslab pa'i gzhi bcas pa bzhin du
bsdam par gyis shig / de nas de lta bu'i chos bshad pa thos pa dang / chos sbyin mas lan gcig
phyir ldog ba'i 'bras bu mngon du byas so //.*

³³ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Da 166b.7-167a.1; *dge slong ma'i dge 'dun gyis kyang utpa la'i
kha dog ma phrin par bsgos te btang ngo / de song nas bu mo khyod ni dge slong ma'i dge 'dun
gyis tshangs par spyad pa skyed pa'i sdom pa gnang gis da ni khyod bsnyen par rdzogs par
bya'o // ci nas 'di lta bu'i chos bshad pa des thos ma thag tu slar mi ldog pa'i 'bras bu mngon du
byas nas rdzu 'phrul bsgrubs so //.*

palm of her hand were the same. To her, an axe and sandalwood were the same. She had destroyed the egg-shell of ignorance and obtained knowledge, mental powers, and the special knowledges (S. *abhijñā*). She had broken worldly desire and turned her back to praise. She was worthy of worship, veneration, and respect from the gods, including Indra and Upendra.³⁴

Notice that in this narrative Dharmadinnā's enlightenment is engendered by two factors: First, in each instance she hears the *dharma* preached by a senior member of the community, in this case the nun Utpalavarṇā. And in each instance, hearing the *dharma* causes her to progress to another stage of liberation. Second, Dharmadinnā's level of enlightenment is dependent on the number of vows she has taken. Note that in every instance after she realizes the fruit of a stream-enterer the next stage of her enlightenment is accompanied by a new set of rules she must follow. In the case of the fruit of a once-returner, it is the six rules and the six minor rules. In the case of

³⁴ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Da 167a.4-7; *utpa la' kha dog ma song ste / de la khyod ni bcom ldan 'das kyis ghang ste / dge 'dun sde gnyis kyis bsnyen par rdzogs par byas so zhes bslo'o // 'di lta bu'i chos kyang bshad de de thos pas na dge slong ma chos sbyin mas 'khor ba'i 'khor lo dum bu lnga po 'di g.yo ba dang mi g.yo bar shes te / 'dus byas kyi ngo bo thams cad 'jig pa / lung ba rnam par 'gyes pa / rnam par zhigs pa'i chos nyid kyis rab tu bcom ste nyon mong pa thams cad spangs te / dgra bcom pa mngon du byas nas dgra bcom par gyur te khams gsum gyi 'dod chags dang bral ba / gser dang bong ba 'dra ba / nam mkha' la lag mthil chags pa med pa de bzhin du mnyam pa'i sems ste'u dang tsan dan du 'dra ba rig pas sgo da'i sbubs bcom pa / rig ba dang mngon par shes pa dang / so sor rig pa rnams thob pa srid ba'i 'dod pa la chags ba dang / bkur sti la rgyab kyis phyogs / dbang po dang nye dbang po dang lhar bcas pa rnams kyis mchod pa dang / phyag bya ba dang / tshig gis snyan pa rjod par gyur to //.*

the fruit of a non-returner, it is the practice of celibacy. In the case of the state of a fully liberated being (*S. arhat*), it is the vows of full ordination. Dharmadinnā's path to enlightenment is thus stratified according to the degree to which she has committed herself to the monastic life. When she is fully ordained, she achieves the highest degree of enlightenment. Thus, it would seem that the left and the right hand of Mūlasarvāstivādin soteriology were hearing the *dharmā* and adhering to monastic precepts.

If the preceding passages leave any doubt as to the efficacy of the hearing *dharmā* and adhering to rules as a means to attaining enlightenment, consider what happens after Dharmadinnā becomes enlightened. She, having attained enlightenment by way of hearing the *dharmā*, begins to enlighten others by preaching the *dharmā*:

Then, having sat in front of those many beings, she gave a religious teaching of such a kind that the 100's of 1,000's of beings there all realized many different things. Some realized the fruit of stream-entry. Some realized the fruit of a once-returner. Some realized the fruit of a non-returner. Some, having gone forth in the training of the Blessed One, realized the state of an *arhat*. Some generated the mind of awakening of the disciples. Some generated the awakening of a solitary Buddha. And some were directed to complete and unsurpassed awakening.³⁵

³⁵ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Da 168b.3-5. *de nas chos sbyin ma nam mkha' las babs te / skye mo mang po dag gi mdun du 'dug nas 'di lta bu'i chos bshad de sems can mang po brgya stong gis thos nas khyad par cher rtogs te / kha cig gis ni rgyun du zhugs pa'i 'bras bu mngon du byas so // kha cig gis ni lan gcig phyir 'ong ba'i 'bras bu / kha cig gis ni phyir mi 'ong pa'i 'bras bu / kha cig gis ni bcom ldan 'das kyi bstan ba la rab tu byung nas nyon mongs pa thams cad spangs te dgra bcom pa mngon du byas so // kha cig gis ni nyan thos pa'i byang chub tu sems bskyed do*

Notice here, again, soteriology is linked to hearing the *dharma* and taking precepts. In this last passage, those who hear Dharmadinnā’s teaching attain a variety of degrees of enlightenment. But only those who take on the role of a monastic attain the highest degree of enlightenment—that of a liberated being (*arhat*). This fact has serious soteriological and sociological implications. A full discussion of the sociological implications will, however, have to wait until Chapter II, so that we may turn once again to our discussion of *dhyāna*.

For our purposes, what is most important is what is missing in all these accounts. Notice that nowhere in any of the passages that recount Dharmadinnā’s moments of enlightenment—in fact, nowhere in her story—is meditation mentioned as an aspect of her training. If meditation was understood to be included in her religious program, this was not made explicit by the authors of this text. And Dharmadinnā’s story is only one of a dozen or so in the *Kṣudrakavastu* and well over a hundred in the larger *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* that follow this same pattern. Moments of enlightenment do not occur in silence, at the foot of a tree. They occur while one is listening, at the foot of a master.

*

What we see here relates to a large body of scholarly work that has been done on various contradictory models of liberation found in classical Buddhist literature. Louis de La Vallée Poussin,³⁶ Lambert Schmithausen,³⁷ and Paul Griffiths³⁸ have all published studies in which they

// *kha cig gis ni rang sangs rgyas kyi byang chub tu kha cig gis ni bla na med ba yang dag par rdzogs pa'i byang chub tu'o //*.

³⁶ Louis de La Vallée Poussin, “Musīla et Nārada: Le chemin du Nirvāṇa,” *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*, 5 (1937), 189-222.

attempt to unravel soteriological contradictions in mainstream sources. In 1988, Tillmann Vetter's³⁹ released a study that looks at the practice of *dhyāna* meditation versus the development of “penetrative insight” into the Four Noble Truths (S. *catvāri āryasatyāni*), dependent origination (S. *pratītyasamutpāda*), and the three marks of existence (S. *trilakṣaṇa*). In this instance, the contradiction is simply this: *dhyāna* meditation involves the gradual elimination of objects of consciousness until the mind is settled in complete calm. From this state, the practitioner experiences reality without the influence of any thought and directly realizes the nature of suffering, its cause, and its cessation. On the other hand, penetrative insight into the Four Noble Truths, dependent origination, or the three marks is a rational exercise, which necessitates objects of thought and contemplation. In other words, *dhyāna* meditation requires the elimination of thoughts and concepts, while penetrative insight depends upon the examination and understanding of concepts. Yet both of these approaches are lauded in Indian texts as a means to enlightenment.

In his work on Indian Buddhist meditation, Tillmann Vetter wrote,

³⁷ Lambert Schmithausen, “On Some Aspects of Descriptions or Theories of ‘Liberating Insight’ and ‘Enlightenment’ in Early Buddhism,” in *Studien zum Jainismus und Buddhismus: Gedenkschrift für Ludwig Alsdorf*, eds. K. Bruhn and A. Wezler, (Wiesbaden: 1981), 199-250.

³⁸ Paul Griffiths, “Concentration or Insight: The Problematic of Theravāda Buddhist Meditation Theory,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 59 (1981), 605-24.

³⁹ Tillman Vetter, *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988).

In the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādins one disciple is related to have become released by hearing the explanation of the four noble truths, but not by meditating.⁴⁰ Vetter mentions this in his attempt to disentangle these two soteriological models—*dhyāna* meditation and penetrative insight. He is referencing a story found in the *Saṅghabhedavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*.⁴¹ However, as we have seen, in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* the instance Vetter mentions is by no means an isolated one. In fact, Vetter’s statement is a little misleading because in the *vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivādins literally thousands of disciples, usually onlookers, are said to have attained liberation by hearing the *dharma*, and *not* by meditating. In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, it is a very common for monks and nuns to become enlightened as a result of hearing the *dharma* from the Buddha or from a senior renunciant. In instances of enlightenment, meditation is very rarely mentioned.⁴² So when we look at Mūlasarvāstivādin narratives that include moments of enlightenment, it is clear that this school was more oriented around the latter approach—penetrative insight, rather than the practice of *dhyāna*. This approach, it seems, was facilitated in the Mūlasarvāstivādin school by the preaching of *dharma* and the recitation of texts.

The idea that meditation was the most important feature of the tradition is not borne out in our sources. And this is a good place for us to begin. We can now explore the role that

⁴⁰ Vetter, *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*, 36.

⁴¹ See R. Gnoli, ed. *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu* (Series Orientale Roma 49.1 & 2) (Roma, 1977-1978), Parts I and II. See I, 138.

⁴² For one instance in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* in which the practice of meditation leads to enlightenment, see the section 1.5—*Smṛtyasthāna*: Minding Your Manners in an Indian Monastery.

meditation did play in the tradition. The fact that meditation was not emphasized does not mean that our source is lacking in moments where followers attain the highest aims of the tradition. In fact, as we have seen, this is rather common. It seems, however, that the community represented in our sources met those ends via a religious program centered on rules, preaching, and the recitation sacred texts.

1.2 *Dhyāna*—As Advanced Meditative Mind States

Throughout classical Buddhist literature the term *dhyāna* has a meaning that is more systematized and technical than the term’s use to indicate general meditative practice. In this technical sense, a *dhyāna* is a meditative state characterized by unimpeded concentration, a state in which the mind has become so engrossed in an object that mental processes are minimal. As more and more mental processes are abandoned, higher *dhyānic* states are attained. There are eight such states, stratified according to 1) the order in which they are encountered, and 2) the degree of attainment they represent, the first being the least difficult to reach. These eight *dhyānic* states are analyzed in rigorous detail in a number of mainstream Buddhist *sūtras* and commentaries. In the most common model—found in the Pāli *suttas* and the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*—there are eight levels of meditative absorption (S. *dhyāna*). The first four of these states are known as the “form absorptions” (S. *rūpadhyāna*) and are simply designated as the first *dhyāna*, second *dhyāna*, third *dhyāna*, and fourth *dhyāna*. These four meditative states differ in regard to the mental factors that are present and those mental factors decrease in number as you ascend from the first to the fourth. The four states that follow are the “formless absorptions” (S. *arūpadhyāna*) and are named according to the experience encountered in that state. These last four are the Sphere of Infinite Space,⁴³ the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness,⁴⁴ the Sphere of Nothingness,⁴⁵ and the Sphere of Neither Perception nor non-Perception.⁴⁶

⁴³ S. *ākāśānantyāyatana*, T. *nam mkha’ matha’ yas skye mched*.

⁴⁴ S. *vijñānānantyāyatana*, T. *rnam shes mtha’ yas skye mched*.

⁴⁵ S. *naivasamjñānāsamjñānāyatana*, T. *‘du shes med ‘du shes med min skye mched*.

The bulk of our analysis here will center on the relationship between these two different but related meanings of *dhyāna*. In the previous section, I argued that the general practice of meditation, also indicated by *dhyāna*, was not central to Mūlasarvāstivādin representations of liberation. Given this fact, it should come as no surprise that the attainment of deep meditative states (S. *dhyānas*) is not necessarily brought about by the general practice of meditation (S. *dhyāna*). Rather, the attainment of these trance states is more often presented as a kind of superpower, demonstrated by those who have already reached enlightenment (S. *arhat*).

The fact that meditation was not central to Mūlasarvāstivādin models of liberation does not mean that monks do not attain the eight *dhyānic* states in our literature. And here we also find patterns in how such attainments are represented. It does not occur once in the *Kṣudrakavastu*—or, to my knowledge, anywhere else in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*—that any of the stratified *dhyānic* states are encountered as a precursor to enlightenment. In every instance in which attainment of the *dhyānas* is demonstrated, the monk or nun who does so is enlightened. There is only one instance in the *Kṣudrakavastu* in which an *unenlightened* monk is asked about his attainment in the *dhyānas*. This is the story of a foolish monk named Gokulika.⁴⁷ Although he is not specifically designated as a “meditating monk” (S. *prahāṇika*, T. *spong ba pa*), his story resonates in a number of ways with other Mūlasarvāstivādin stories that feature monks who specialized in meditation. First, like other meditation specialists, Gokulika is cast as a fool.

⁴⁶ S. *naivasamjñānāsamjñānāyatana*, T. ‘*du shes med ‘du shes med min skye mched*.

⁴⁷ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha—34a.3-35b.7. On my translation of this monk’s name, which is rendered as Ba Lang Gnas in Tibetan, see J.S. Negi, *Bod skad dang legs sbyar gyi tshig mdzod chen mo* (Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 2004), s.v *ba lang gnas pa*.

Second, his pursuit of meditation does not gain him any long-term benefit, such as access to the *dhyānic* states. In fact it only lands him in trouble with a king.

Gokulika's story begins as he is meditating in a sow's cave in the pleasure gardens of King Udayana. The king's assembly of women passes by the cave and they see Gokulika, who is unkempt from having lived outside the monastery for so long. Because of his long hair, long beard, and tattered old robes the women think he is a demon. They run screaming to the security of their king and tell him there is a demon nearby. Removing his sword, the king runs to defend them and stands at the mouth of the sow cave asking:

“Are you a spirit?”

The Venerable Gokulika said, “Lord, I am an ascetic.”

“What kind of ascetic are you?”

“I am a son of Śākya.”

“Are you an *arhat*?”

“Lord, I am not.”

“Well then, are you a non-returner? A once-returner? A stream-enterer?”

“Lord, I am not.”

“Well, have you obtained the fourth *dhyāna*?”

“Lord, I have not.”

“Well then, have you obtained the third *dhyāna*? The second? The first?”

“Lord, I have not.”

Because he was consumed with jealousy for his retinue of queens, the king became very angry. He said to his ministers, “Oh wise ones, because this common monk has done

something improper with my retinue of queens, quickly bring back here a great many large ants, and filling this cave completely, they will kill this ascetic!”⁴⁸

Gokulika is saved from this grisly fate by a benevolent goddess who lives in a nearby tree. But the Buddha’s community of monks is embarrassed and, consequentially, the Buddha makes a rule that monks must cut their hair, shave their beards, and generally remain well-groomed.

Again, this episode is the only instance in the entire *Kṣudrakavastu* wherein an unenlightened monk or nun—i.e. one who is not already a liberated being (S. *arhat*)—proclaims whether he or she has attained any level of *dhyānic* trance. And the answer is a resounding “no.” This king’s series of questions to Gokulika indicates that the author(s) of this text understood the *dhyānas* to represent a system of stratified soteriological states. King Udayana begins with the highest attainment possible—the state of an *arhat*—and then works his way backwards to the

⁴⁸ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha—34a.3-35b.7; *brgyugs nas bud med dag ‘dre gal ‘dug ces smras pa dang / de dag gis smras pa / lha cig phag mo’i phug tum chis so // de nas bad sa’i rgyal po ‘char byed mtshon thog te phag mo’i phug sgor bsngad nas smras pa / kwa’e ‘byung po khyod su zhig / des smars pa / lha dge spyong lags so // khyod gang gi dge spyong yin / shākya’i sras kyi dge spyong lags so / ci khyod dgra bcom mam / lha ma lags so // ‘o na khyod phyir mi ‘ong ba ‘am / lan gcig phyir ‘ong ba ‘am / rgyun du zhug yin nam / lha ma lags so // ‘o na ci khyod bsam gtan bzhi pa thob pa yin nam lha ma lags so // ‘o na khyod bsam gtan gsum pa ‘am / gnyis pa ‘am / dang po thob pa zhig yin nam / lha ma lags so zhes byas pa dang / rgyal pa btsun mo’i ‘khor la phag dog zabs phyir lhag par khros te / blon po rnam la smras pa / kwa’e sheng ldan dag dge spyong so so’i skye bo ‘dis nga’i btsun mo’i ‘khor rnam ma rung bar byas kyi rnga mo’i grog ma chen po dag ‘dir myur ltogs shig dang / de dag gis phug ‘di khyab par bkang ste dge spyong ‘di gsad par bya’o //.*

first *dhyāna*. Because Gokulika has not attained any degree of liberation, the king assumes he is still dominated by passion and that he has acted improperly with the king’s retinue.

Compare the preceding story of Gokulika, a Mūlasarvāstivādin meditation specialist, to the story of the wealthy householder Citta from the *Samyutta Nikāya* of the Pāli *Sutta Piṭaka*. Just as Gokulika is questioned by King Udayana, the householder Citta is also questioned on his attainment of the *dhyānic* mind states. When Kassapa asks if Citta has achieved any milestones in his religious practice, Citta replies,

For whatever extent I wish... I enter and dwell in the first *jhāna* [S. *dhyāna*]... Then, to whatever extent I wish... I enter and dwell in the second *jhāna*... Then, to whatever extent I wish... I enter and dwell in the third *jhāna*... Then, to whatever extent I wish... I enter and dwell in the fourth *jhāna*...⁴⁹

This story from the *Samyutta Nikāya* and the story of Gokulika from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* reflect two very different understandings of the accessibility of *dhyānas* in these two different mainstream schools—the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Theravāda schools. In the Theravāda account, these states—or at least the first four of them—are attainable by “a layman clothed in white.”⁵⁰ But in the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition they are not spoken of in terms of this kind of accessibility. Unlike the householder Citta, Gokulika is a monk, and a meditation specialist no less. Yet he has not attained even the first of these states.

This is not to say, however, that monks never enter the *dhyānas* in Mūlasarvāstivādin literature. There are three instances in the *Kṣudrakavastu* in which a monk or nun enters the

⁴⁹ Here I am using Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation of the Pāli text. See Donald Lopez (ed.), *Buddhist Scriptures* (London: Penguin 2004): 441-444.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 443.

dhyānic states. But in each of these instances the monks or nuns who enter these states have—unlike the householder Citta or Gokulika—already attained the highest state of enlightenment available to the Buddha’s followers (*S. arhat*).

There are two instances in which an enlightened being ascends and descends all of the *dhyānic* stages at the moment before his or her death. The first of these is found in a narrative that recounts the death of the eminent nun Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī. The details surrounding her decision to enter into final *nirvāṇa* are strange and even, one might say, a bit inauspicious. At one time, the Buddha, after delivering one of his teachings, is caught by a fit of sneezing. Mahāprajāpatī responds by announcing, “May the Blessed One live a long time.” The Buddha chides her for honoring him in the wrong way. Then, seemingly in respond to this chiding, Mahāprajāpatī announces that she wishes to enter into final *nirvāṇa*—in other words, she wishes to die. And the episode of her death reads as follows:

Then Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and her five hundred nuns honored with their heads the feet of the elders and went into the nunnery (*S. varṣaka*).⁵¹ There, when the three part space was established, *dharma* was taught in such a way that many living beings reached great attainments by hearing it. Then, in the midst of the community of nuns, in an open space that was proper, Mahāprajāpatī sat in the cross-legged position. Her nuns sat in this way as well. Then Mahāprajāpatī entered into a state of concentration and, her mind remaining steady, she left her seat, flew into the eastern sky, and exhibited the four postures—walking, standing, sitting, and lying. Then, with a balanced mind, she entered into the element of fire. And magnificent rays of light came from her body—blue,

⁵¹ See Gregory Schopen, “On Emptying Chamber Pots without Looking and the Urban Location of Buddhist Nunneries in Early India Again,” *Journal Asiatique* 296 (2008) 229-256.

yellow, red, white, gold, and clear. She also displayed the double miracle: flames burst from the lower part of her body, and from the upper half came cold water. Then from the upper half of her body flames burst, and from the lower half came cold water. And as this was done in the eastern part of the sky, so it was done in the southern, the western, and the northern parts of the sky. Having exhibited in the four directions the four kinds of supernatural alteration, she entered into the first state of meditative absorption (*S. dhyāna*, *T. bsam gtan*). Her five hundred nuns also entered into the first state of meditative absorption. Having left the first state of meditative absorption, she entered into the second state of meditative absorption, and from the second to the third, and from the third to the fourth, and from the fourth to the Sphere of Infinite Space, and from the Sphere of Infinite Space to the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness, and from the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness to the Sphere of Nothingness, and from the Sphere of Nothingness to the Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception. Then, having passed from the Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception she entered once more into the Sphere of Nothingness, from the Sphere of Nothingness to the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness, from the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness to the Sphere of Infinite Space, from the Sphere of Infinite Space to the fourth state of meditative absorption, from the fourth to the third, from the third to the second, from the second to the first state of meditative absorption. Then, remaining in the first state of meditative absorption, she passed into final extinction (*S. parinirvāṇa*). Her five hundred nuns also, having entered into the states of meditative absorption in ascending and descending order, remaining in the first state of meditative absorption, also passed into final extinction.

When Mahāprajāpatī had entered into final extinction, the wide earth trembled, stars fell, the sky turned red and was filled with celestial music.⁵²

⁵² The story of Mahāprajāpatī's death is found at *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 110a.6-113b.3. The section translated above appears at *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 112a.3-112b.7; *de nas skye dgu'i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mī dang / 'khor dge slong ma lnga brgyad dge slong gnas brtan gnas brtan dag gi rkang pa gnyis la mgo bos phyag 'tshal te dbyar khang du song ngo // der 'khor gsum po dag gi rnam pa la brtags nas nyin zhag bdun du gang thos nas sems can mang pos khyad par chen po thob pa de lta bu'i chos bstan to // de nas sa phyogs bar skabs yangs pa zhig tu dge slong ma'i dge 'dun gyi gung la skyil mo krung phyed bcas nas 'dug go // dge slong ma de dag kyang de bzhin du 'dug go // de nas skye dgu'i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mī ting nge 'dzin 'di lta bu la snyoms par zhugs te / gang la sems mnyam par bzhag na rang gi stan las mi snang bar gyur cing / shar phyogs kyi steng gi nam mkha' la mngon par 'phags nas sbyod lam rnam pa bzhi po 'chag pa dang / 'greng ba dang / 'dug pa dang / nyal ba dag ston par byed cing me'i kham la yang snyoms par zhugs so // me'i kham la snyoms par zhugs nas / skye dgu'i bdag mo chen po gau ta mī'i lus las 'od zer rnam pa sna tshogs 'di lta ste / sngon po dang / ser po dang / dmar po dang / dkar po dang / btsod kha dang / shel gyi kh dog lta bu dag ston par byed cing cho 'phrul zung dag kyang ston par byed de / lus kyi smad nas me 'bar la / lus kyi stod nas chu grang mo'i rgyun 'byung ba dang / lus kya stod nas me 'bar la / lys kyi smad nas chu grang mo'i rgyun 'byung bar byed do // shar phyogs su ji lta bde bzhin du lto dang / nub dang / byang gi phyogs su yang de bzhin byed de / 'di ltar phyogs bzhir rdzu 'phrul gyi cho 'phrul rnam pa bzhi po dag ston par byed cing bsam gtan dang po la snyoms par zhugs so // dge slong ma lnga brgya po de dag kyang bsam gtan dang po la snyoms par zhugs so // bsam gtan dang po las langs nas bsam gtan gnyis pa la / gnyis las bsam gtan gsum ba la / gsum pa las*

This narrative presents a number of insights. For the purposes of this section of our study, we might start by noting that in this episode Mahāprajāpatī exhibits the same miracles that we find in the second instance in which an enlightened being ascends and descends all of the *dhyānic* stages at the moment before his death. This second instance recounts the death of the Buddha himself, and is found in the *Kṣudrakavastu*'s recension of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*. The Tibetan translation of the Mahāprajāpatī's ascension and descension of the *dhyānas* is nearly identical to that of the Buddha's.⁵³ Also, in Mahāprajāpatī's death narrative the *dhyānic* trances

bsam gtan bzhi la / bzhi las nam mkha' mtha' yas skye mched la / nam mkha' mtha' yas skye mched las rnam shes mtha' yas skye mched la / rnam shes mtha' yas skye mched las ci yang med ba'i skye mched la / ci yang med pa'i skye mched las 'du shes med 'du shes med min skye mched la snyoms par 'jug cing / 'du shes med 'du shes med min skye mched las langs nas / yang ci yang med pa'i skye mched la snyoms par zhugs so // ci yang med pa'i skye mched las rnam shes mtha' yas skye mched la / rnam shes mtha' yas skye mched las nam mkha' mtha' yas skye mched la / nam mkha' mtha' yas skye mched las bsam gtan bzhi pa la bzhi pa las gsum pa la / gsum pa las gnyis pa la / gnyis pa las bsam gtan dang po la snyoms par zhugs so // de nas bsam gtan dang po nyid la brten nas yongs su mya ngan las 'das so // dge slong ma lnga brgya po de dag kyang de bzhin du lugs dang mthun pa dang / lugs las ldog par snyoms par zhugs nas bsam gtan dang po nyid la brten te yongs su mya ngan las 'das so // skye dgu'i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mī mya ngan las 'das mthag tus chen po g.yos par gyur cing / skar mda' lhung ba dang / phyogs dmar po dang / bar snang la lha'i rol mo'i sgra dag byung ngo //

⁵³ For the version of the Buddha's ascension and descension of the *dhyānas* in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, see *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Da 289a.2-290a.6. See also Ernst Walschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra. Text in Sanskrit und*

are presented as a kind of miracle that is publically exhibited. The attainment of these states is placed in the same context as emanating rays of light from the body, flying into the air, and performing “the twin miracle.” Note also that the states are not just exhibited by Mahāprajāpatī but also by the 500 nuns who are accompanying her in death. These nuns had decided to enter “final extinction” (S. *parinirvāṇa*) along Mahāprajāpatī and thus had all attained the state of an *arhat* as well. Judging by our next narrative, the attainment of the *dhyānic* states was an effortless affair for those who were enlightened, and they had access to these states in the same way that the Buddha did.

Mahāprajāpatī and her nuns are not the only followers who ascend and descend the *dhyānic* states with ease. We see this same occurrence in another narrative from the *Kṣudrakavastu*.⁵⁴ This is the story of a group of monks that lived on the bank of a particular river.⁵⁵ The Buddha hears of these monks and the many faithful lay followers they have brought to the community. He orders Ānanda to invite them for a visit. When they arrive, they demonstrate their status as liberated beings by attaining the various *dhyānas*. The relevant passage reads:

Tibetisch, verglichen mit dem Pāli nebst einer Übersetzung der chinesischen Entsprechung im Vinaya der Mūlasarvāstivādins (Abhandlungen der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Philologisch-Historische Klasse für Sprachen, Literatur und Kunst. Jahrgang 1950, Nr. 2-3) (Berlin: 1950-1951) Teil I-III, 200-02.

⁵⁴ This entire story can be found at *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 163a.2-169a.1.

⁵⁵ This story presents a number of insights for our study. I will treat it in much greater detail in Chapter III.

Then, the Blessed One said to the Venerable Ānanda, “Ānanda, go at once to the monastery and prepare seats for the Tathāgata and for the monks from the bank of the beautiful river.”⁵⁶

“As you wish, My Lord.” Having heard and understood the words of the Blessed One, the Venerable Ānanda went immediately to the monastery and prepared seats for the Tathāgata and for the monks from the bank of the beautiful river. Then he returned to where The Blessed One was and, prostrating with his head at the feet of The Blessed One, he sat to one side. Having sat to one side, the Venerable Ānanda said to The Blessed One, “My Lord, seats for the Tathāgata and for the monks from the bank of the beautiful river have been prepared. Please consider now the time.”

Then, the Blessed One went to the monastery where the monks from the bank of the beautiful river were. When he arrived, he washed his feet outside the monastery, and then went inside and sat cross-legged on the seat that was prepared for him. Making his body upright, and having focused his thoughts, he sat. The monks from the bank of the beautiful river each came to the monastery and, washing their feet outside, they entered. Likewise, they settled on the seats that had been spread for them.

Then, the Blessed One entered into the first state of meditative absorption and the monks from the bank of the beautiful river also entered into the first state of meditative absorption. The Blessed One rose from the first state and entered into the second, the

⁵⁶ Here the Tibetan translation is ambiguous. *Chu bo snyan ldan* could be the proper name of an river in India, which I think it probably is. The Sanskrit for *snyan ldan* is probably *valgu*. However, it could also be an unspecified geographical area, and could be read as “the bank of a river which possessed beauty”—i.e. a beautiful river.

third, the fourth, the Sphere of Infinite Space, the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness, the Sphere of Nothingness, and the Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception.

Similarly, the monks from the bank of the beautiful river rose from the first state and entered into the second, the third, the fourth, the Sphere of Infinite Space, the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness, the Sphere of Nothingness, and the Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception. Then the Blessed One moved from the Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception to the Sphere of Nothingness. Similarly, the monks from the bank of the beautiful river moved from the Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception to the Sphere of Nothingness. The Blessed One moved from the Sphere of Nothingness to the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness, and to the Sphere of Infinite Space, and the fourth state, and the third, and the second and the first. Similarly, the monks from the bank of the beautiful river moved from the Sphere of Nothingness to the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness, and to the Sphere of Infinite Space, and the fourth state, and the third, and the second and the first...

The Blessed One thought, “Excellent!”⁵⁷

⁵⁷ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 164a.5-165a.3; *de nas bcom ldan ‘das kyis tshe dang ldan ba kun dga’ bo la bka’ stsal ba / kun dga’ bo song la gtsug lag khang gcig tu de bzhin gshegs pa dang / chu bo snyan ldan gyi ‘gram gyi dge slong dag gi khri shoms shig / btsun pa de ltar ‘tshal lo zhes tshe dang ldan pa kun dga’ bos bcom ldan ‘das kyi ltar mnyan nas gtsug lag khang gcig tu de bzhin gshegs pa dang / chu bo snyan ldan gyi ‘gram gyi dge slong dag gi khri bshams nas bcom ldan ‘das gang na ba der song ste phyin nas bcom ldan ‘das kyi zhabs la ma go bos phyag ‘tshal te phyogs gcig tu ‘dug go // phyogs gcig tu ‘dug nas tshe dang ldan kuun dga’ bos bcom ldan ‘das la ‘di skad ces gsol to // btsun pa bcom ldan ‘das dang / chu bo snyan ldan gyi ‘gram*

gyi dge slong rnams kyi khri gtsug lag khang gcig tu bshams lags na / bcom ldan 'das da de'i
dus la bab par dgongs su gsol / de nas bcom ldan 'das chu bo snyan ldan gyi 'gram gyi dge
slong rnams kyi gtsug lag khang gang na ba der gshegs so // gshegs nas gtsug lag khang gi phyi
rol tu zhabs bkrus te gtsug lag khang du gshegs nas khri bshams pa nyid la skyil mo krung bcas
nas skra drang por bsrang ste dgongs pa mngon du bzhas nas bzhugs so // chu bo snyan ldan gyi
'gram gyi dge slong rnams kyang rang rang gi gtsug lag khang gang na ba der dong ste phyin
pa dang / gtsug lag khang gi phyi rol du rkang pa bkrus nas gtsug lag khang du dong ste ji ltar
sten bting ba la 'khod do // de nas bcom ldan 'das bsam gtan dang po la snyoms par zhugs pa
dang / chu bo snyan ldan gyi 'gram gyi dge slong rnams kyang bsam gtan dang po la snyoms par
zhugs so // bcom ldan 'das bsam gtan dang po las bzhengs nas gnyis pa dang / gsum pa dang /
bzhi pa dang / nam mkha' mtha' yas skye mched dang / rnam shes mtha' yas skye mched dang /
ci yang med pa'i skye mched dang / 'du shes med 'du shes med min skye mched la snyoms par
zhugs pa dang / chu bo snyan ldan gyi 'gram gyi dge slong rnams kyang bsam gtan dang po las
langs nas gnyis pa dang / gsum pa dang / bzhi pa dang / nam mkha' mtha' yas skye mched dang
/ rnam shes mtha' yas skye mched dang / ci yang med pa'i skye mched dang / 'du shes med 'du
shes med min skye mched la snyoms par zhugs so // de nas bcom ldan 'das 'du shes med 'du shes
med min skye mched las bzhengs nas ci yang med pa'i skye mched la snyoms par zhugs pa dang /
chu bo snyan ldan gyi 'gram gyi dge slong rnams kyang 'du shes med 'du shes med min skye
mched las langs nas ci yang med pa'i skye mched la snyoms par zhugs so // bcom ldan 'das ci
yang med pa'i skye mched las bzhengs nas rnam zhes mtha' yas skye mched dang / nam mkha'
mtha' yas skye mched dang / bsam gtan bzhi pa dang / gsum pa dang / gnyis dang / dang po la
snyoms par zhugs pa dang / chu bo snyan ldan gyi 'gram gyi dge slong rnams kyang cu yang
med pa'i skye mched las langs nas rnam zhes mtha' yas skye mched dang / nam mkha' mtha' yas

Here it seems the authors of this text wanted to demonstrate the status of this particular group of monks as *arhats*. And they did so by demonstrating that the monks could ascend and descend all the *dhyānic* states effortlessly, as prompted by the Buddha.

As we saw in the previous section—with the story of Dharmadinnā and other passages—in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* enlightenment is engendered primarily through adherence to rules and hearing the *dharma*. This story about the monks who lived on the bank of this river would seem to indicate that the composers of this *vinaya* understood the case to be that anyone who had attained the state of a liberated being (S. *arhat*) had access to all eight of the *dhyānic* states. Therefore at least some of the composers of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* had an understanding of the stratified *dhyānic* states that is very different than what is presented in both meditation manuals such as the *Visuddhimagga* and the studies in meditation that are based on such manuals. That is, rather than seeing enlightenment as an attainment or experience that was engendered by the attainment of the successive *dhyānas*, it seems that the *dhyānas* are made available by the attainment of enlightenment, which is the result of training the mind in moral discipline, recitation, and listening to those who have already realized the truth. As a consequence of this, meditative attainment was presented as a kind of supernatural power that was attained by monks the moment they were enlightened.

While this, of course, does not trump or negate the model in which *dhyānic* states are understood to precede rather than follow enlightenment, it certainly nuances it. These stories demonstrate the breadth and variety of understandings that surrounded the term *dhyāna* in the Indian community of monks. As we move forward, the insights we have gained regarding

*skye mched la snyoms par zhugs nas bsam gtan bzhi pa dang / gsum pa dang / gnyis pa dang /
bsam gtan dang po la snyoms par zhugs so //.*

Mūlasarvāstivādin soteriology will be nuanced. For now, let us turn to the one form of meditation that is treated in detail in Mūlasarvāstivādin sources: “contemplation of the repulsive” (*S. aśubhabhāvana*).

1.2 *Aśubhabhāvana*—Its Prominence in the Mūlasarvāstivādin Tradition

The Sanskrit term *aśubhabhāvana* (P. *aśubhabhāvana*, T. *mi sdug pa bsgom pa*) literally means “cultivation regarding what is not beautiful.” In the Buddhist context, the term could be translated as “contemplation of the repulsive” and refers to a meditative technique in which the practitioner focuses the mind on various unsavory aspects of physical, material existence. The object of this contemplation could be a skull, a corpse at various stages of decomposition,⁵⁸ the body of another person, or the body of the meditator him or herself. The objective is to cultivate an appreciation—if that word is *appropo*—for the disgusting nature of the physical body (S. *kāya, rūpa*) and its various components. This in turn will lead to an attitude of detachment from one’s own physical body and from the bodies of other beings.

There is much evidence from the ancient tradition to suggest that variations of this practice are very old and were widespread in Indian monastic Buddhism. In the first verse of the ninth chapter of the *Aṭṭhakavagga*—one of our oldest surviving texts⁵⁹—we find what could be

⁵⁸ For more on the doctrinal relationship between death and Buddhism, see Paul Williams and Patrice Ladwig, *Buddhist Funeral Culture of Southeast Asia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁵⁹ On the age of the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, see Gomez, Luis O. “Proto-Mādhyamika in the Pāli canon,” in *Philosophy East and West* 26:2, 1976, 137-165, see particularly 139 and the sources cited there. See also Grace G. Burford, “*Cūlaniddesa*,” in *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy, Vol. VII: Abhidharma Buddhism to 150 A.D.*, eds. Karl H. Potter et al. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 316.

the first version of a list that appears widely in classical Buddhist literature. It is the first instance we have in which revolting elements of the human body are enumerated for the purpose of evoking an attitude of disgust. The verse reads:

Having seen craving, dissatisfaction, and desire,
There is not even an inclination towards pleasure.
What is this thing full of urine and dung?
With my foot I would not even touch it.⁶⁰

The question posed in the third line of this verse—“What is this thing full of urine and dung?”—was apparently taken quite seriously by Buddhist monastics. Over time, the enumeration that began with two bodily elements—dung (P. *karīsa*) and urine (P. *mutta*)—expanded into a long, fairly comprehensive catalogue of the components of the human body. So, by the time of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*’s compilation we find that the list of disgusting bodily constituents has grown into the following:⁶¹

⁶⁰ *Aṭṭhakavagga IX.1-3.disvāna taṇhaṃ aratiṃ ragañca / nāhosi chando api methunasmin / kimevidaṃ muttakarīsapuññaṃ / pādāpi naṃ samphusitaṃ na icche.*

⁶¹ This is the list as it is found in the *Poṣadhavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. See H. Hu-von Hinüber, *Das Poṣadhavastu: Vorschriften für die buddhistische Beichtfeier im Vinaya der Mūlasarvāstivādins: Auf Grund des Sanskrit-Textes der Gilgit-Handschrift und der tibetischen Version sowie unter Berücksichtigung der Sanskrit-Fragmente des Poṣadhavastu aus zentralasiatischen Handschriftenfunden herausgegeben, mit den Parallelversionen verglichen, übersetzt und kommentiert* (Reinbek: Verl. für Orientalist Fachpublikationen, 1994), see section 5.2. The Pāli version, found in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* reads: *kesā lomā nakhā dantā taco maṃsaṃ nhāru aṭṭhi aṭṭhimiñjaṃ vakkhaṃ hadayaṃ yakanāṃ kilomakaṃ pihakaṃ papphāsaṃ*

Hair (S. *keśā*), body hair (*romāṇi*), nails (*nakkhā*), teeth (*dantā*), excretions (*rajo*), filth (*malaṃ*), skin (*tvaṇ*), meat (*māṃsam*), bones (*asthi*), tendons (*snāyu*), veins (*sirā*), kidneys (*vṛkkā*), heart (*hṛdayaṃ*), spleen (*plīhā*), lung (*klomaka*), bowels (*āntrāṇy*), intestines (*antraguṇāny*), stomach (*āmāśaya*), small intestine (*pakvāśaya*), bladder (*audaryakaṃ*), liver (*yakṛt*), dung (*purīṣam*), tears (*aśru*), sweat (*svedaḥ*), phlegm (*kheṭas*), mucus (*śiṃghāṇako*), grease (*vasa*), tendons (*lasikā*), marrow (*majjā*), fat (*medaḥ*), bile (*pittaṃ*), mucus (*śleṣmā*), puss (*pūyaḥ*), blood (*śoṇitaṃ*), skull (*mastakaṃ*), the membrane of the brain (*mastakaluṅgaṃ*), and urine (*mūtraṃ ca*).

If nothing else, the ancient Buddhists were, after all, avid list-makers. And much work has been done on the history and evolution of certain lists in *abhidharma* Buddhism.⁶² Here it seems—from the *Aṭṭhakavagga* to the compilation of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*—we may have found another instance in which a list grew over the centuries. And the fact that it was expanded so thoroughly and comprehensively indicates that this list and what it signified must have received their share of attention in the Indian tradition. The list, or at least passages that suggest an awareness of it, are found in a broad array of sources—from Pāli and other mainstream sources,⁶³ to Mahāyāna literature.⁶⁴

antaṃ antaguṇaṃ udariyaṃ karīsaṃ pittaṃ semhaṃ pubbo lohitaṃ sedo medo assu vasā kheḷo siṅghāṇikā lasikā muttaṃ.

⁶² See, for example, Johannes Bronkhorst, “Dharma and Abhidharma” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. Vol. XLVIII Part 2 1985: 305-320; and Frauwallner, *Studies in Abhidharma Literature*.

⁶³ Pāli versions of this list can be found in the *Satipatṭhāna-sutta* and the *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna-sutta*. *Aśubhabhāvana* is also a centerpiece for a rather chilling narrative at *Vinayaṭṭhaka* III.68,

An examination of our source demonstrates that the practice was relatively popular. To begin with, as I have noted, there are only two known instances in which a meditation technique is specifically described in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. Both of these are instructions for “contemplation of the repulsive” (S. *aśubhabhāvana*). This may not be surprising, given what we saw in the previous section. Consider that one of the key moments in the spiritual advancement of Dharmadinnā was when she took on the precept of celibacy. As we will see, the *aśubhabhāvana* technique was used specifically to combat the lustful impulses that must have accompanied the monastic commitment to celibacy.

The first narrative we might consider comes from the section of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* that we are most concerned with here: the *Kṣudrakavastu*. From this narrative we can begin to see the popularity of the practice, and the position it occupied relative to other contemplative techniques.

The Buddha, the Blessed One, was dwelling in Śrāvastī, in Jetavana, the park of Anāthapiṇḍada. In Śrāvastī, there was a meditating monk (S. *prahāṇika*, T. *spong ba pa*). At one time, this meditating monk sat in the cross-legged position (S. *paryāṅka*, T. *skyil*

though the list is not employed. For Buddhaghoṣa’s detailed treatment of *aśubhabhāvana*, see *Visuddhimagga* i.110.29-31.

⁶⁴ Edgerton lists, for instance, the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* and the *Śatasāhasikā-prajñāpāramitā* as each containing several instances of the term *aśubhabhāvana*; see Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, 80. For a more detailed discussion on *aśubhabhāvana* in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, see Susanne Mroziak, *Virtuous Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 89-90.

mo krung) and his penis came to be active.⁶⁵ At another time, when he had gone to beg for food, and had done what he needed to in regard to food, he put away his robe and begging bowl, and washed his feet. When he sat down in the cross-legged posture at the root of a tree and entered the work of the mind (S. *manasikāraḥ*, T. *yid la byed pa*) again his penis became active, he did as much as he could to make it be still. Because the mind is a flickering thing, whenever his thoughts became distracted, his penis became active, again and again. Being completely ensnared in desire, with his mind greatly agitated, he placed his penis on top of a rock and smashed it with another rock. Because he was afflicted with pain and torment, he thought, “I am afflicted with pain! Surely the Blessed One did not intend this!”

Then the Blessed One through his great compassion went to where that monk was and said, “Monk, what is the matter?”

The monk reported what had happened.

The Blessed One said, “Oh monk, have I not said that contemplation of the repulsive (S. *aśubhabhāvana*, T. *mi sdug pa bsgom pa*) is the enemy of desire? That which a deluded person ought to smash is one thing, but you have smashed something different.”

The monk sat, saying nothing.

The Blessed One said to the monks, “Monks, if you cultivate one thing I assure you that you will not be reborn again—that is contemplation of the repulsive in regard to the body. You monks should cultivate contemplation of the repulsive in regard to the body. I assure you that you will not be reborn again. Therefore, although a monk ought to smash

⁶⁵ The Tibetan here is *yan lag gi rnam pa las su rung bar gyur to*. I assume this means that his penis became erect, though, one way or another, the implication of sexual arousal is clear.

one thing, he must not smash the other! If a monk smashes it, he comes to be guilty of an offense.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 39a.6-39b.5; Tog Ta 57b.4-58b.1; *sangs rgyas bcom ldan ‘das mnyan yod na rgyal byed kyi tshal mgon med zas spyin gyi kun dga’ ran a bzhugs so // mnyan na yod dge slong spong ba pa zhig gnas pa de gang gi tshe skyil mo krung bcas te ‘dug go cog na de’i tshe yan lag gi rnam pa lass u rung bar gyur to // de dus gzhan zhig na bsod snyoms brgyus nas zas kyi bya ba byas te / phyi ma’i zas kyi bsod snyoms las phyir log pas lhung bzed dang chos gos mkhos su phab ste rkang pa gnyis bkus nas shing ljon pa zhig gi drud du skyil mo krung bcas te yid la byed pa la zhugs shing ‘dug pa na / yang de’i yan lag gi rnam pa las su rung bar gyur nas des de zi ltar zhi bar ‘gyur ba de ltar byas so // sems ni myur du ‘gyur ba yin pas de sems yengs pa na yang dang yang du las su rung bar gyur nas de ‘dod chags kyi kun nas dkris pa na / zhe sngad chen po yang skyes nas des de rdo ba’i steng du bzhag nas rdo ba gzhan gyis brdungs so // de sdug bsngal gyi tshor bas gduds nas bsams pa / bdag sdug bsngal gyi tshar bas gduds na / bcom ldan ‘das kyi mi dgongs pa lta zhig snyam pa dang / de nas bcom ldan ‘das thugs rje chen po’i dbang gis der gshigs nas bka’ stsal pa / dge slong ‘di ci nyes / des ji ltar gyur pa gsol pa dang / bcom ldan ‘das kyi bka’i stsal / dge slong ngas ‘dod chags kyi gzhen po ni mi sdug pa bsgom pa’o zhes ma gsungs sam / mi gtu mug can brdung par bya ba ni gzhan yin na khyod kyi ni gzhan brdungs so // de cang mi smra bar ‘dug pa dang / bcom ldan ‘das kyi dge slong rnams la bka’ stsal pa / dge slong dag khyed kyi chos gcig bsgoms na phyir mi ‘ong bar ‘gyur bar nga khas ‘che ste / de ni ‘di lta ste / lus la dmigs pa’i dran pa’o // dge slong dag khyed kyi lus la dmigs pa’i dran pa sgoms shig dang / phyir mi ‘ong bar ‘gyur bar nga khas ‘che’o // de lta bas na dge slong gis brdung bar bya ba gzhan yin la gzhan brdung bar mi bya’o // rdung na ‘gal tshabs can ngu ‘gyur ro //.*

First of all, here, as with the story of Gokulika that we visited in the previous section, a meditating monk (S. *prahāṇika*, T. *spong ba pa*) is made to look foolish. This depiction of meditating monks as foolish is in keeping with the prevalent attitude towards them in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, a theme we will explore in detail in Chapter III. However, for the purposes of our present discussion, what is more telling is the relative value this narrative places on *aśubhabhāvana* versus the unspecified contemplative technique this meditating monk attempts to begin with. The monk’s troubles with passion begin while he is meditating. Our text tells us that he goes to the root of a tree (T. *shing ljon pa zhig gi drung du*), assumes the cross-legged position (T. *skyil mo krung bcas te*), and “sits engaged in the work of the mind” (T. *yid la byed pa la zhugs shing ‘dug pa*) when his penis becomes active. Here the Tibetan *yid la byed pa* is translating some form of the Sanskrit *manas + √kṛ*. Our 9th century Sanskrit-Tibetan lexicon, the *Mahāvvyutpatti*, confirms this and can help us find the form of *manas + √kṛ* we are dealing with. It cites *yid la byed pa* as the Sanskrit *manasikāraḥ*.⁶⁷ As I said earlier,⁶⁸ forms of the Sanskrit compound *manas + √kṛ* are at times used in association with meditation (S. *dhyāna*).

The picture becomes clearer when we turn to our commentary on the *Kṣudrakavastu*—the *Āgamaḥkṣudrakavyākhyāna* (T. *lung phran tshegs kyi rnam par bshad pa*) by Śīlapāliṭa. Fortunately for us, Śīlapāliṭa glosses the use of *yid la byed pa* in the story of this monk who smashed his penis. The commentary reads:

⁶⁷ *Mahāvvyutpatti*, #1926. References to the *Mahāvvyutpatti* can be found at the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center’s online version of the text: http://tbrc.org/#library_work_Object-W1KG4598.

⁶⁸ See section 0.5—The Word “Meditation” and What It Indicates from the Introduction and sections 1.2 & 1.3—both on the Sanskrit term *dhyāna*—above.

Regarding “the work of the mind,” it is a kind of concentration (S. *samādhi*, T. *ting nge 'dzin*).⁶⁹

We still, however, do not know exactly what specific meditative technique this monk was engaged in, only that it was associated with concentration (S. *samādhi*). We do know, however, as the narrative makes clear, that he is not practicing contemplation of the repulsive. The meditating monk’s intention for engaging in *manasikāraḥ* is not specified. However, as the Buddha states, “contemplation of the repulsive” was intended to combat desire. Attempting to engage in the *manasikāraḥ* that Śīlapālita associates with *samādhi* leads this monk into an unfortunate situation. The situation is remedied, according to the Buddha himself, by a different technique. One might be tempted to argue that our meditating monk simply had not undergone the monastic training necessary to engage in deeper states of concentration, indicated by the technical term *samādhi*. But this is not what the narrative itself says. Here, *aśubhabhāvana* is not represented as merely preparatory. Note again the beginning of the Buddha’s final admonition to the monks:

Monks, if you cultivate one thing I assure you that you will not be reborn again. It is this: contemplation of the repulsive in regard to the body.

*dge slong dag khyed kyis chos gcig bsgoms na phyir mi 'ong bar 'gyur bar nga khas
'che ste / de ni 'di lta ste / lus la dmigs pa'i dran pa'o //*

After this, the Buddha goes on to assert again that contemplation of the repulsive leads to the end of rebirth. Here the language is very clear, even emphatic. It seems that the composers of this

⁶⁹ *Āgamakṣudrakavyākhyāna*, Derge ‘dul ba Dzu, 23a.1; *yid la byed pa ni ting nge 'dzin gyi rnam pa'o//*.

story at least saw a certain primacy and efficacy in contemplation of the repulsive. And this is further demonstrated in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*.

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If we look outside the *Kṣudrakavastu*, into another section of the *Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya* we see that some monks may even have understood “contemplation of the repulsive” (S. *aśubhabhāvana*) to be the only meditation technique practiced in North Indian Buddhist monasteries. The *Poṣadhavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* contains a telling narrative regarding this meditative technique and meditation in general. It relates to our conversation in many ways and will shed light on what we find in the *Kṣudrakavastu*.

Fortunately for us, unlike the *Kṣudrakavastu*, the *Poṣadhavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* survives in both Sanskrit and Tibetan.⁷⁰ It contains rather surprising details regarding, to begin with, the origin and nature of “seated *yoga*” in the *Mūlasarvāstivādin* tradition. It opens by recounting the events that led to the Buddha’s authorization of the construction of a *prahāṇasālā*. The term *prahāṇasālā*—(a *tatpuruṣa* compound in Sanskrit)—has been rendered as “meditation hall,”⁷¹ “meditationsraum,”⁷² “hall for religious exertion,”⁷³ and “hall for practicing religious

⁷⁰ For this study, I am using two versions: First, Hu-von Hinüber’s critical edition found in Hu-von Hinüber, *Das Poṣadhavastu*, and second, for the Tibetan version, Tog ‘dul ba Ka, 389.4-396.7. I am also indebted to Dutt for his edition, N. Dutt, ed., *Gilgit Manuscripts*, Vol. III, Part 1 (Srinagar: 1947); Vol. III, Part 2 (Srinagar: 1942); Vol. III, Part 3 (Srinagar: 1943); Vol. III, Part 4 (Calcutta: 1950). References to this work will be cited as follows: volume, part, page, line.

⁷¹ M. Prasad, *A Comparative Study of Abhisamācārikā: Abhisamācārikā-Dharma-Vinaya of the Ārya Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins and the Pali Vinaya of the Theravādins* (Patna: K.P.

exercise and discourses.”⁷⁴ The *prahāṇasālā* is one of the structures within the monastery wherein the *poṣadha* ritual—the fortnightly recitation of monastic rules, and the confession of any infractions—might have taken place.⁷⁵ For insights into the practice of contemplation of the repulsive in the Mūlasarvāstivādin school, I would like to focus on roughly the first quarter of this section of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*.

The *Poṣadhavastu* opens while the Buddha is dwelling at *Rajagrha*. Early one morning, a large group of lay disciples arrives at the monastery, eager to see (S. $\sqrt{drś}$)⁷⁶ and attend to the

Jayaswal Research Institute, 1984): 33, 39, etc. See also Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, 390.

⁷² Hu-von Hinüber, *Das Poṣadhavastu*, see 267, 269, etc.

⁷³ This is how the term is consistently translated by Gregory Schopen. See for instance Schopen, “Doing Business for the Lord: Lending on Interest and Written Loan Contracts in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*,” *Journal of American Oriental Society* 114.4 (1994): 527-553; repr. in *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004): 45-90, see page 49.

⁷⁴ A.M. Shastri, *Early Buddhism: A Historical Survey of Buddhology, Buddhist Schools & Sanghas mainly Based on the Study of Pre-Gupta Inscriptions* (Varanasi, India: Indological Book House, 1965), 125.

⁷⁵ However, it may be of importance to note that such a structure has not yet been readily or certainly identified in our archeological records.

⁷⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the importance of this term in the history of Indian religious tradition, see Diana L. Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

Blessed One. But these lay disciples have come too early and the Blessed One and his monks have not emerged from their cells. Having realized that the Buddha and his monks are not available, the lay followers decide to go instead to the park of a group of non-Buddhist ascetics (S. *tīrthika*). There, they are treated to much pleasant conversation.

During their stay at the park, a rather telling exchange occurs between these non-Buddhist ascetics. One of the ascetics asks his fellow renunciants whether or not the Buddha and his monks engage in three practices. The question reads:

Sirs, are the practice of sitting (S. *niṣadyā*), the practice of effort (S. *kriyā*), and the fortnightly recitation of the rules (S. *poṣadha*) known only among us or also among ascetics who are sons of *Śākya*?

The answer is more than a little surprising: No, the others answer, these things are not practiced by the Buddha's followers.⁷⁷ Leaving the non-Buddhist ascetics, the lay-followers return to the Buddha and present him with the following request: They ask that the Blessed One establish these three practices—the practice of sitting, the practice of effort, and the fortnightly

⁷⁷ The entire exchange reads: *athānyatamas tīrthyas tīrthyān idam avocat kin nu bhavanto 'smākam eva niṣadyā kriyā poṣadhaś ca prajñāyate āho svic chramaṇānām api śākyapurīyāṇām / athānyatamas tīrthyas tīrthyān idam avocat askākam eva bhavanto niṣadhyā kriyā poṣadhaś ca prajñāyate na tv eva śramaṇānām śākyaputrīyāṇām /*. See Hu-von Hinüber, *Das Poṣadhavastu*, 258. Tog 'dul ba Ka, 390a.4-390a.6 reads as follows: *de nas mu stegs can zhig gis / mu stegs can dag la 'di skad ces smras so // shes ldan dag bdag cag 'ba' zhig la 'dug pa dang / bya ba dang / gso sbyong yod dam / 'on te shākhyā 'i bu 'i dge sbyong dag la yang yod / de nas me stegs can zhig gis / mu stegs can la 'di skad ces smras so // shes ldan dag bdag cag 'ba' zhig la 'dug pa dang / bya ba dang / gso sbyong yod kyi / shākhyā 'i bu 'i dge sbyong dag la ni med do //*.

recitation of the rules—for his monks. At the instigation of his lay-followers, the Buddha agrees to do so and the lay-followers depart.

The Buddha commands his monks to engage in these three practices—“sitting,” “effort,” and “the recitation of rules”—but a problem arises immediately: The monks do not know what any of these things are, or how to do them. So the Buddha explains, first by explaining the practice of “sitting” (S. *niṣadyā*). He says: “The practice of sitting is called *yoga*.”⁷⁸ The Buddha then proceeds to explain the contemplative technique we have been treating here:

aśubhabhāvana, or “contemplation of the repulsive.” The Buddha says, “the body is to be observed from the soles of the feet upwards, from the hair of the head downwards.” As in similar passages from *sūtra* and *vinaya* literature, he provides the monks with the long list of revolting and unsavory bodily constituents that we looked at earlier—mucus, hair, bone, blood, bile, etc. As we saw in the previous story regarding the monk who smashed his penis with a rock, the Mūlasarvāstivādins did employ the specific term *aśubhabhāvana*. However, it may be important to emphasize that the term *aśubhabhāvana* is not used in this exchange from the *Poṣadhavastu*. Here, instead, the practice is called *yoga*. The two—*aśubhabhāvana* and *yoga*—are clearly one and the same. The full significance of this fact will become clearer as we proceed through the narrative.

The monks then endeavor to engage in the contemplative practice described by the Buddha. The fruits of their efforts are nothing less than laughable.⁷⁹ First, they try to practice this

⁷⁸ *Niṣidyā ucyate yogaḥ*. Hu-von Hinüber, *Das Poṣadhavastu*, 260.

⁷⁹ It would be hard to argue that the authors of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* did not have a good sense of humor. See G. Schopen, “The Learned Monk as Comic Figure. On Reading a Buddhist Vinaya as Indian Literature,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 35 (2007) 201-226, and the many

yoga while they have “gone to the field.”⁸⁰ But they are trampled by elephants, horses, foot soldiers, and tigers. Non-believers who see this make fun of them. When the monks report this to the Buddha, he admonishes them thus: “*Yoga* must not be undertaken by one who has gone to the field.”⁸¹ So the monks try to practice this *yoga* in the vestibule, where they fall asleep. Again, non-believers abuse them, asking if Buddhist monks are in the habit of “sleeping together.” In response, the Buddha admonishes the monks that they are not to practice *yoga* in the vestibule either. Next, they try to practice on the terrace, but it is problematic. They try to practice in their cells, but it is too noisy. They try to practice this *yoga*—again, what we commonly refer to as “contemplation of the repulsive”—in the forest, but they are attacked by thieves and wild animals. They try to practice near the village, but non-believers abuse them there. The monks try in a few other spaces, but they are unsuccessful. And in almost every instance, the monks’ attempt to engage in this *yoga* is met with abuse from non-believers. Finally, the Buddha declares that a “meditation hall” (S. *prahāṇasālā*) must be constructed in order to conceal the practice altogether. In the section immediately following this, the Buddha gives the specifications for how a meditation hall is to be built, and in the section after that, the Buddha gives the appropriate actions for a monk who is charged with the upkeep of the meditation hall. The events that prompt the Buddha to order the construction of a meditation hall, and his

sources cited there. See also S. Clarke, “Locating Humour in Indian Buddhist Monastic Law Codes: A Comparative Approach,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 37/4, 311–330.

⁸⁰ This is also a Sanskrit idiom for “going to the bathroom,” though whether or not this meaning was intended by the author(s) is not clear. If so, it would obviously be for the sake of evoking a humorous tone.

⁸¹ *Na gocarāya prasṛtena yogo vāhayitavyaḥ*. Hu-von Hinüber, 262.

instructions for its layout and upkeep occupy, as I noted, roughly the first quarter of the *Poṣadhavastu*.⁸²

This account of the origin of the *prahāṇasālā* in an Indian monastery contains a world of insight. We will be revisiting this narrative throughout our study in the context of different discussions as it is both vexing and enlightening on a number of points. And what is most vexing about it may not be immediately obvious for the simple reason that it is so radically dissonant from what we expect to find in the Indian tradition. For a moment let us leave aside, as best we can, all preconceptions and suppose that this were the only text that survived from India and was thus our only window into the lives of Indian Buddhist monks. According to this text, the seated⁸³ *yoga* for which a *prahāṇasālā*—again, “meditation hall”—was constructed⁸⁴ was not the central practice of Buddhist religious life. It was not even an original aspect of the Buddha’s teaching. In her entry “Body, Perspective on the” in the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Elizabeth Wilson wrote:

⁸² For Paul Williams’ brief comments on this passage, see Williams, *The Origins and Nature of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (London: Routledge, 2005); see pages 63-64, n. 83.

⁸³ We know that this practice occurred while seated because it is referred to as *niṣadyā*. I will talk more about this below.

⁸⁴ If we look further in the *Poṣadhavastu*, we see that “religious exertion” was only one of the many activities for which this hall was intended. The *Abhisamācārikā* of the Mahāsāṃghikas also lists several activities that may be undertaken in the “meditation hall,” including the *poṣadha* ritual and menial tasks such as sewing robes. See Prasad, *A Comparative Study of Abhisamācārikā*, 99.

Although members of other religious communities in ancient India also practiced such meditations on the physical elements of earth, water, fire, and air in the body, Indian Buddhists developed a *uniquely Buddhist form of meditation* on the body, which is praised in Buddhist scripture as the sine qua non of salvation. Called “mindfulness of the body,” this contemplative technique entails breaking the body down into its thirty-two constituent parts, including internal organs such as the heart, the liver, the spleen, and the kidneys.⁸⁵

The monks who composed our text, however, did not understand this practice to be originally Buddhist. Rather, it was a practice borrowed from ascetics in other religious groups and incorporated into Buddhist monastic practice on the initiative of the laity. In this text, we see an account of the very beginning of the practice of seated *yoga* among monastic Buddhists. Prior to this episode, the monks do not know what *yoga* is or how to do it. Clearly, one of the reasons for the Buddha’s authorization of a “meditation hall” is that the monastery itself, as it stood, could not facilitate silent, seated contemplation. Yet the Buddha does not credit this practice as encapsulating “the heart of his teaching.” In fact, the Buddha does not even explain to the monks *why* this *yoga* is to be practiced; in this story the Buddha advocates it in order to impress or appease his lay-followers. It is a rather telling point that such an account was transmitted again and again over the centuries from one language to another without being explained, or edited out altogether. However you approach this passage, it is clear that at least those Indian monks who composed this text thought of meditation in a very different way than what has been widely assumed.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Wilson, “Body, Perspective on the,” in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Robert E.

Buswell (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2004): 63-43. The italics are mine.

But the surprising features of this portion of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* do not end with this understanding of the origins of “seated *yoga*” in the “meditation hall.” Another telling point surfaces when we consider what meditation technique is prescribed. In this narrative “contemplation of the repulsive” is the *only* technique mentioned. It clearly conforms to the features of meditation set out in our introduction in that 1) it is carried out intentionally, 2) it is carried out in silence, and 3) it is carried out while seated.⁸⁶ The narrative tells us again and again that the monks set out to engage in this practice only. Their repeated failures at doing so lead to the construction of the “meditation hall.” We know the practice required silence because the story says that when they tried to practice in their cells it was too noisy; we will look closer at this specific passage below. Finally, we know the practice is seated because one of the lexical terms provided for it in the beginning is *niṣadyā*, which means “sitting” in Sanskrit. The Buddha himself equates *yoga* with *niṣadyā*: “The practice of sitting (*niṣadyā*) is called *yoga*.”⁸⁷ So here *aśubhabhāvana* fits our definition of meditation, and it is the only kind of meditation that is understood to occur in the “meditation hall.”

But the interesting features of this passage do not end here either, particularly when we look closer at the Sanskrit used throughout the narrative. Here, the practice we know as *aśubhabhāvana* is first equated to three Sanskrit terms: *niṣadyā*, *yoga*, and *prahāna*. But other telling lexical items are included. The account wherein the monks try to practice this *yoga* in their cells reads as follows:

⁸⁶ See Introduction, section 0.5—The Word “Meditation” and What It Indicates.

⁸⁷ *Niṣidyā ucyate yogaḥ*; see Hu-von Hinüber, *Das Poṣadhavastu*, 260.

[The monks] practiced in their cells. Because noise was an obstacle to their concentrations, they could not attain one-pointedness of mind. They reported this matter to the Blessed One.

*layane vāhayanti / dhyāyinām kaṇṭakaśabdena cittaikāgryaṃ na labhante / etat prakaraṇaṃ bhikṣavo bhagavata arocayanti*⁸⁸

What is most interesting here is the phrase *dhyāyinām kaṇṭakaśabdena cittaikāgryaṃ na labhante*, which I have translated as “Because noise was an obstacle to their concentration, they could not attain one-pointedness of mind.” There are a number of lexical terms here which feature prominently in classical Buddhist meditative nomenclature. As I said in our introduction, “one-pointedness of mind” (S. *cittaikāgrya*, T. *sems rtse gcig pa*) is frequently used in association with, and sometimes even synonymously with instances of meditation that employ the term *dhyāna*. This is not surprising given that “one-pointedness of mind” (S. *cittaikāgrya*) is one of the mental factors that are present in all of the first four states of deep meditative absorption (S. *dhyāna*). We also find the Sanskrit adjective *dhyāyin*, meaning “absorbed in meditation,” here in the ablative plural: *dhyāyinām*.

Given that we know that these monks are engaged in *aśubhabhāvana*, the inclusion of this kind of contemplative nomenclature might seem a little strange. Here, a good variety of words associated with meditation are bundled together: *yoga*, *niṣadyā*, *cittaikāgrya*, *dhyāyin*, *prahāṇa*. This passage completely lacks the technical nuance and specificity that accompany *sūtras*, commentaries, and *abhidharma* works. The composers of our *vinaya* understand all these terms to be associated with the same practice, which, according to them, is the only contemplative technique that occurs in the “meditation hall.” There is no ambiguity about what

⁸⁸ Hu-von von Hinüber, *Das Poṣadhavastu*, 6.4

meditative technique these terms are all understood to center on: “contemplation of the repulsive.” They are all subsumed under this practice. We might safely assume that *aśubhabhāvana* was the only form of meditation that was practiced within the walls of whatever Indian monastery the author of this text inhabited. This may help explain why, as Gregory Schopen has noted, in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* the practice of *dhyāna* is associated with cemeteries and corpses.⁸⁹ The monk or monks who composed this text understood *yoga*, *niṣadyā*, *cittaikāgrya*, *dhyāyin*, and *prahāṇa* all to be bound up in one practice—“contemplation of the repulsive,” which probably also occurred in cemeteries and cremation grounds.⁹⁰

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There is one final section from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* that we should consider. This comes from our primary source, the *Kṣudrakavastu*, and contains what may be the most detailed treatment of “contemplation of the repulsive” (S. *aśubhabhāvana*) meditation in the entire corpus of mainstream Buddhist literature. This treatment is found in one relatively long section of the *Kṣudrakavastu* that the Buddha calls the teaching on “entering the womb” (S.

⁸⁹ Gregory Schopen, “On Monks and Menial Labors: Some Monastic Accounts of Building Buddhist Monasteries,” in *Architetti, Capomastri, Artigiani: L'Organizzazione dei Cantieri e della Produzione Artistica nell'Asia Ellenistica. Studi Offerti a Domenico Faccenna nel suo Ottantesimo Compleanno* (Serie Orientale Roma 100), ed. P. Callieri (Rome: 2006): 225-45; see n. 52 and the primary sources cited there: *Vibhaṅga*, Derge Ca 123a.6; *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts*, Pt.1 223.7.

⁹⁰ In Chapter VI of the *Visuddhimagga*, we find detailed instructions for how a monk should approach an actual cadaver he hears of in a cemetery. See Buddhaghosa and Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *Visuddhimagga*, 173-190.

garbhāvākrānti; T. *mngal du 'jug pa*). Not surprisingly, this section contains the list bodily constituents found above, along with detailed instructions for the practice of *aśubhabhāvana* meditation. But the authors of this section of our *vinaya* went far beyond that in their efforts to evoke a sense of disgust towards the living, material world. In fact, this entire section on “entering the womb”—again, *garbhāvākrānti* in Sanskrit—could be understood as a prolonged experiment in *aśubhabhāvana* contemplation. A more detailed look at both the context and the content of this section of our *vinaya* will help make this clear.

The teaching on “entering the womb” appears in the conversion narrative of the Buddha’s half-brother, Nanda (T. *dga' po*), and an understanding of Nanda’s story is essential to understanding this section’s full significance. The general outline of Nanda’s conversion story is as follows:

Given that Nanda’s elder half-brother (the Buddha himself) has renounced his station as a prince, Nanda is the heir apparent to his father Śuddhodana’s kingdom. He lives in Kāpilavastu with his lovely wife Sundarī, with whom he is particularly smitten. One day the Buddha realizes that the time for Nanda’s training has arrived. And so the Buddha comes to Nanda’s house for alms, but leaves before Nanda can give him anything to eat. Nanda follows his brother after promising his wife that he will return before her makeup dries. Sundarī’s use of make-up and Nanda’s promise to return before it dries have clear sexual implications, and this is an important feature of the story. The Buddha leads Nanda to the monastery, ordains him, and keeps him there with a series of magical tricks. For instance, the Buddha tells Nanda he must stay until he has swept all the floors. But, using his extraordinary powers, the Buddha causes more dust to appear so that Nanda can never finish his work.

While living in the monastery, Nanda continues to pine for his wife Sundarī, and wishes to return to his palace. Seeing this, the Buddha takes Nanda to heaven and shows him celestial nymphs—whose beauty greatly exceeds that of Nanda’s wife Sundarī. This causes Nanda to forget about his human wife. He begins to take the religious life seriously, but only in the hope that he will be reborn in heaven among such beautiful nymphs. Because his volition is not pure, other monks shun him and refuse to practice in his company. When the Buddha hears this, he takes Nanda to hell and shows him the tortures that result from practicing the religious life just for the sake of celestial pleasures. He assures Nanda that extinction of the self (*S. nirvāṇa*) is the highest reward. The day after they return from hell, the Buddha preaches the teaching on “entering the womb” to Nanda. Nanda then makes proper effort and attains the state of a liberated being (*S. arhat*).⁹¹

The context of this section is essential to understanding its content. It is delivered to Nanda, who is clearly stricken with an overabundance of desire—first for his wife, then for the celestial nymphs he sees in heaven. Recall the narrative we discussed at the beginning of this section, in which a meditating monk smashed his penis with a rock in order to curb his sexual desire. At the end of that narrative, the Buddha prescribed “contemplation of the repulsive,” and asserted that the monk should have been practicing this technique from the beginning. Nanda’s plight is identical to that of the meditating monk. And the contents of the Buddha’s teaching on “entering the womb” are tailored to this context. It is preached by the Buddha to a follower who

⁹¹ The entire episode, from the beginning to Nanda’s enlightenment including the teaching on “entering the womb” can be found at Derge ’dul ba Tha 119a.3-153a. Nanda’s story is found at Derge ’dul ba Tha 119a.3-124b.6. The teaching on “entering the womb”, and Nanda’s consequential enlightenment can be found at Derge ’dul ba Tha 124b.6-153a.

is overcome by feelings of lust. It is therefore centered on the disgusting aspects of physical existence.

Here the Buddha explains the development of a fetus from conception to birth—hence the label *garbhāvākṛānti*, or “entering the womb” in Sanskrit. The Buddha uses this discussion on the development of a fetus to explore the foulness of physical life in a variety of ways.

This section begins as we might expect a *sūtra* to begin:

Then, when The Blessed One saw that the community of monks had sat to one side, he said to the Venerable Nanda: “Nanda, I will teach you the *dharma*. It is this: the explanation of the teaching (S. *dharma*) entitled ‘Entering the Womb’ (S. *garbhāvākṛānti*) which is lovely in the beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely in the end, excellent in meaning, excellent in word, not muddled, completely perfect, pure, untainted, and chaste. Because it is so, listen and pay heed!”⁹²

Though the opening may be what we expect from a Buddhist *sūtra*, it is important to note that here we find two features that mark this section as *vinaya*, rather than *sūtra* literature. First, we do not find the standard evocation used in *sūtra* literature: “Thus have I heard” (S. *evaṃ mayā śrutam*). Second, when the Buddha names the sermon, he does not call it a *sūtra* (T. *mdo*), but rather the “teaching” (S. *dharma*; T. *chos*) on “entering the womb”.

⁹² Derge ‘dul ba Tha 125a.1-125a.2; *de nas bcom ldan ‘das kyis dge slong gi dge ‘dun phyogs gcig tu ‘dug par mkhyen nas / tshe dang ldan pa dga’ po la bka’ tstal pa / dga’ po khyod la chos bstan par bya ste / ‘di lta ste / mngal du ‘jug pa zhes bya ba’i chos kyi mgrangs thog mar dge pa / bar du dge ba / tha mar dge ba / don bzang po / tshig ‘bru bzang po / ma ‘dres pa yongs su rdzogs pa / yongs su dag pa / yongs su byang ba / tshang par sbyod par rab tu bstan gyis de legs par rab tu nyon la yid la zung shig dang bshad do /*

As we proceed into the content of this sermon on “entering the womb,” we see that it is tailored for the monk who, like Nanda, has problems overcoming sexual desire. There are other Indian texts, like this section of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, that describe the various stages of fetal development that precede a being’s rebirth. Robert Kritzer, a specialist in these *sūtras*, identifies three non-Buddhist texts from India that also treat conception and gestation.⁹³ But, as Kritzer notes, the version in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* does this with its own unique style and for its own purpose. In the story of Nanda, the Buddha preaches the teaching on “entering the womb” for the sake of demonstrating two truths: all life is suffering (the First Noble Truth,) and all human life is disgusting.

The Buddha begins by explaining to Nanda the conditions that must be present for a “being in the intermediate state” (S. *gandharva*, T. *dri za*) to enter a womb, as well as the nature of the fetus and how the fetus grows. But shortly after his first few explanations, he places the discourse in the context of Buddhist soteriological doctrine. The Buddha clarifies his position in this way:

Nanda, I do not praise the gaining of existence even a little. I do not praise the gaining of existence even for a moment. If asked why, it is because the gaining of

⁹³ Kritzer cites the *Agnipurāṇa* (Hindu), the *Garbhopaniṣad* (Hindu), and the *Tandulaveyāliya* (Jain). See Robert Kritzer, “Life in the Womb: Conception and Gestation in Buddhist Scripture and Classical Medical Literature,” *Imagining the fetus the unborn in myth, religion, and culture*. Sasson, Vanessa R., and Jane Marie Law (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2009), 73-89.

existence is suffering. For example, even a little vomit smells foul. Nanda, in the same way, the gaining of existence—even a little, even for a moment—is suffering.⁹⁴

As I noted, the rest of the discourse uses the growth and progression of the fetus—what we might call “the miracle of life”—to develop two major themes: all life is suffering, and all life is disgusting. In the Buddha’s explanation of the thirty-eight weeks of fetal development, the fetus is described in such terms as “residing within a putrid, blazing heap of soup, its entire bodily sense organ suffering, greatly pained, terrified, having a consciousness that knows only suffering.”⁹⁵ It is asserted that “Regarding the suffering of that fetus, it is not possible to make a comparison.”⁹⁶ In the final week—week thirty-eight—the suffering of the mother is described in gory detail.⁹⁷ Immediately after this, the sufferings of the newborn baby are described in the

⁹⁴ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 129a.6-7; *dga’ po ni srid pa mngon par grub pa chung ngu la yang bsngugs par mi byed / srid pa mngon par grub pa skad cig la yang la yang bsngags par mi byed do // de ci’i phyir zhe na / srid pa mngon par grub pa ni sgud bsngal ba’o//dper na ngan skyugs ni chung ngu yang dri mnam mo // dga’ po bzhin du srid pa mngon par grub pa yang chung ngu yang skad cig kyang sdug bsngal ba’o //*.

⁹⁵ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 129b.1-2; *rab tu ‘bar ba’i ‘dam gyi nang na ‘dug pa lus kyi dbang po thams cad sdug bsngal ba / shin tu dka’ ba / dog pa dang / nyam nga bar gyur pa / sdug bsngal bar ro gcig pa’i rnam par shes ba can de ma’i ltor nur nur po ri gyur ro //*. Slight variations of this refrain are repeated at *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 129b.5-6, 130a.1-2, and 130a.5-6. See *Āgamakṣudrakavyākhyāna*, Derge ‘dul ba Dzu 50b.4 for lexical clarification on this passage. Here again we see the benefit of including Śīlapālita’s commentary.

⁹⁶ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 165b.6; *de’i sdug bsngal ni dpe bya bar yang mi nus so //*.

⁹⁷ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 166b.3-167a.4.

same way.⁹⁸ Here, the two themes of life as suffering and life as putrid are skillfully woven together. For example, the child’s suffering is likened to that of a cow who is flayed alive and then devoured by a swarm of flies. It is also likened to that of a leper whose rotting skin is cut by a whip.

After explaining the full development of the fetus, the Buddha goes on to explain some of the more disgusting aspects of the life the child will live. He discusses the types of worms that infest the human body, and the parts of the body they reside upon.⁹⁹ He explains the different kinds of illnesses and diseases one can expect to suffer in the course of one’s life, and the parts of the body they affect.¹⁰⁰ Throughout these sections, we find variations of the refrain, “For this reason, Nanda, what gain is there in clinging to rebirth in *samsara* [or in the mother’s womb] when one is afflicted by so many sufferings?” Nanda is also occasionally encouraged to pursue the religious life in an effort to escape this miserable condition.

It is perhaps now a bit clearer why I suggested earlier that this section of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* is itself a prolonged exercise in the cultivation of a sense the repulsiveness of material existence. Periods of gestation and the conditions of life are described in morbid anatomical detail. At every turn the author(s) of this section of our *vinaya*—be it the Blessed One or some other(s)—conveys a sense of disgust and disdain for the process of gestation and the state of existence to which it leads.

However, the contents of this section come to bear more directly on our conversation on meditation when the Buddha begins to enumerate four different types of beings who enter the

⁹⁸*Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 167a.4-168a.2.

⁹⁹*Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 168a.2-169a.5.

¹⁰⁰*Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 190b.2-190b.7.

womb.¹⁰¹ Therein we find a stenciled passage that provides meditation instructions. These four different types of beings are divided based on the length of time the new fetus can sustain its awareness (*S. samprajñā*, T. *shes bzhin*)¹⁰² during 1) the time of entering the womb, 2) the time of gestation, and 3) the time immediately after birth. The first¹⁰³ and second¹⁰⁴ type of fetus are both said to sustain awareness from the time they enter the womb, through gestation, but only the first can sustain its awareness after birth. Both of these first two types are said to be exceedingly wise and virtuous. And while they sit, aware in their mother’s womb, they are said to reflect on the foulness of their surroundings. In both descriptions—for the first and second types of beings—their reflections include the standard list of bodily constituents we discussed above: mucus, hair, bone, blood, bile, etc. However, this list is expanded considerably. It includes, for instance, items such as “dwelling place for thousands of kinds of worms,”¹⁰⁵ “two foul-smelling openings,”¹⁰⁶ “bone holes,”¹⁰⁷ and “pore holes.”¹⁰⁸ Both descriptions also include a detailed

¹⁰¹ This section begins at *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 192a.2.

¹⁰² *Mahāvīyutpatti*, #1978.

¹⁰³ The first type is said to be a “stream-enterer,” a “once-returner,” or a “non-returner”; for more on the history and import of these terms, see section 1.2 and 1.3 above—on the two related meanings of the Sanskrit term *dhyāna* in classical Buddhist literature.

¹⁰⁴ The second type, our text says, could possibly be a “stream-enterer.” See previous note.

¹⁰⁵ T. *srin bu’i rigs stong phrag mang po’i gnas*.

¹⁰⁶ T. *shin tu dri da ba’i sgo gnyis dang ldan pa*.

¹⁰⁷ T. *rus pa’i bug*.

¹⁰⁸ T. *khung bu phug*.

treatment of the vagina, in which the fetus rests. The vagina is described as “dark”¹⁰⁹ “a swamp of filth,”¹¹⁰ and “smelling like a toilet.”¹¹¹ These grotesque descriptions stretch on and on, taking up over twelve pages of the manuscript. Into the descriptions are here and there woven statements to the effect that, as it sits in this filth, the suffering of the fetus is unspeakably dire.

In the context of this discussion on four different kinds of fetuses we come to a stenciled passage that is found in a variety of sources from classical Buddhist literature. It is a set of meditation instructions that reads:

Nanda, here that monk possesses diligence, he is mindful and aware, he has completely abandoned unhappiness and greed towards the world, he sits observing body (S. *kāya*, T. *lus*) as body internally, he sits observing body as body externally, he sits observing body as body both internally and externally, he observes the truth regarding the origination of the body, he observes the truth regarding the origination and cessation of the body, he is mindful saying "This is the body." Seeing that, he is well-established in wisdom only, seeing only, in recollection only and he dwells without support. He does not cling to the world even for a moment. Likewise, Nanda, that monk possesses diligence, he is mindful and aware, he has completely abandoned unhappiness and greed towards the world, he sits observing body as body internally, he sits observing body as body externally, he sits observing body as body both internally and externally, and sensations (S. *vedanā*, T. *tshor pa dag*) internally, and sensations externally, he sits observing sensations as sensations both internally and externally, and mind (S. *citta*, T.

¹⁰⁹ T. *mun gnag*.

¹¹⁰ T. *ljan ljin gyi 'dam*.

¹¹¹ T. *chab khungs lta bur dring ba / mnam pa*.

sems) internally, and mind externally, he sits observing mind as mind both internally and externally, and mental constituents (S. *dharmā*, T. *chos rnam*s) internally, and mental constituents externally, he sits observing mental constituents as mental constituents both internally and externally, he observes the truth regarding the origination of the mental constituents, he observes the truth regarding the origination and cessation of the mental constituents, he is mindful saying "These are mental constituents." Seeing that, he is well-established in wisdom only, seeing only, in recollection only and he dwells without support. He does not cling to the world even for a moment.¹¹²

¹¹² *Kṣudrakavastu* Derge 'dul ba Tha 150a.3-150b.3; *dga' po 'di na dge slong rtun pa dang ldan pa / dran pa dang shes bzhin can / 'jig rten la brnab sems dang / yid mi bde ba rnam par spangs nas nang gi lus la lus kyi rjes su lta zhing gnas / phyi'i lus la lus kyi rjes su lta zhing gnas / phyi dang nang gi lus la lus kyi rjes su lta zhing gnas / lus la kun 'byung ba'i chos su rjes su lta zhing gnas / lus la kun 'byung ba la zad pa'i chos su lta zhing gnas / lus yod do zhes de'i dran pa 'di lta ste / shes pa tsam dang / mthong ba tsam dang / so sor dran pa tsam du legs par gnas shing mi rten par gnas la / 'jig rten na chung zad kyang len par mi byed do // dga' bo de bzhin du dge slong rtun pa dang ldan ba / dran pa dang shes bzhin can / 'jig rten la brnab sems dang / yid mi bde ba rnam par spangs nas / nang gi lus la yang lus kyi rjes su lta zhing gnas / phyi dang nang gi lus la yang lus kyi rjes su lta zhing gnas / nang gi tshor ba dag dang / phyi'i tshor dag dang / phyi dang nang gi tshor dag la tshor ba'i rjes su lta zhing gnas / nang gi sems dang / phyi'i sems dang / phyi dang nang gi sems la sems kyi rjes su lta zhing gnas / nang gi chos rnam dang / phyi'i chos rnam dang / phyi dang nang gi chos rnam la chos kyi rjes su lta zhing gnas / chos rnam la kun 'byung ba'i chos su rjes su lta zhing gnas / chos rnam la kun 'byung ba la zad par rjes su lta zhing gnas / chos rnam yod do zhes de'i dran pa 'di lta ste / shes patsam dang /*

The placement of this passage is clearly not accidental. Those monks listening to this sermon on “entering the womb” are told to observe the body, sensations, mind, and mental constituents while sitting in the midst of a long and grotesque description of material life. Earlier, we saw that Mūlasarvāstivādin authors subsumed a host of meditative nomenclature under the practice of “contemplation of the repulsive” (S. *aśubhabhāvana*). And in the teaching on “entering the womb” we see these standardized meditation instructions are also set in the context of “contemplation of the repulsive.”

Variations of the passage cited above are found in the *sūtras* of other Buddhist schools, and a look at how it was treated by another school will help further demonstrate the importance of *aśubhabhāvana* in the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition. A variation of this passage is found in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* of the Pāli canon, and while the teaching on “entering the womb” ends with this passage, the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* opens with it. The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* goes on to provide detailed analysis of the four objects of attention—the body (S. *kāya*, P. *kāya*, T. *lus*), sensations (S. *vedanā*, P. *vedanā*, T. *tshor pa dag*), mind (S. *citta*, P. *citta*, T. *sems*), and mental constituents (S. *dharma*, P. *dhamma*, T. *chos rnams*). The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*’s analysis of the observation of

mthong ba tsam dang / so sor dran pa tsam du legs par gnas shing mi rten par gnas la / 'jig rten na cung zad kyang nye bar len par mi byed de / dga' bo de ltar na dge slong bdag nyid gling dang / bdag nyid skyabs can dang / chos gling dang / chos skyabs can dang / gzhan ma yin pa gling dang / gzhan ma yin bskyabs can du gnas pa yin no // This passage is repeated later in the *Kṣudrakavastu*’s recension of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*. The version in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* is, however, somewhat abbreviated. *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Da 247a.6-247b.2. For a German translation and a comparison of the Tibetan, Pāli, and Sanskrit versions, see E. Walschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, 200-02.

body is broken into six sections—respiration, postures, impermanence, contemplation of the repulsive, material elements, and the nine charnel-ground observations. The section on the contemplation of the repulsive is, not surprisingly, a reiteration of the standardized list of bodily elements cited above. It is the standard enumeration of thirty or so features of the body. This and the nine charnel-ground observations are all the space that contemplation of the repulsive receives. The *sutta* goes on to analyze sensations, mind, and mental constituents, the last of which receives the most extensive analysis.

A comparison of this same passage and its use by the two different schools suggests two things. First, it suggests that the section on “entering the womb” of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* is slightly older than the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* of the Pāli *Tipiṭaka*. The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* is exceptionally neat and well-ordered. Its contents are laid out with no unnecessary repetition or awkward insertions. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*’s section on “entering the womb,” on the other hand, seems to have been in the editing and evening process for less time, almost cobbled together. Notice, for instance, that the instructions for the observation of the body are repeated in the list of four observations that follows, after it has already been explained. In other words, the order in *Mūlasarvāstivādin* version is body, body, sensations, mind, mental constituents. The second enumeration of “body as body internally,” etc. is entirely redundant. Also the refrains, addressed to Nanda, that encourage dedication to the religious life, are spliced in randomly. The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* does not make these kinds of editorial oversights.¹¹³ This indicates, to me at least, that the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* had a longer period of time to undergo editing before it was canonized and is therefore probably somewhat later than the *Mūlasarvāstivādin* section on “entering the womb”.

¹¹³ Incidentally, neither does the version of the passage found in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*.

Second, and more importantly for our discussion, this comparison tells us something about the value placed on “contemplation of the repulsive” by the Mūlasarvāstivādin school. None of the other objects of observance—sensations, mind, or mental constituents—are given any analysis in the teaching on “entering the womb,” or in any other part of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* to my knowledge. But “body” (S. *kāya*) is given a prolonged and detailed treatment. As I said early, in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, contemplation of the repulsive is treated with relative brevity—it includes the standardized list cited above and an enumeration of the the nine charnel-ground observations. On the other hand, the treatment of body in the teaching on “entering the womb” stretches for two dozen leaves—or four dozen pages—in the Derge translation of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. Here, we see a tendency that is similar to what we saw in the passage from the *Poṣadhavastu* discussed above. Again, the nomenclature and procedures that we normally associate with meditation—in this instance the observation of body, sensations, mind, and mental constituents—are all presented in the context of “contemplation of the repulsive.”

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Thus far we have seen three narratives from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* that all point to *aśubhabhāvana* as the premier contemplative technique among Mūlasarvāstivādin monks. First, we saw a narrative from the *Kṣudrakavastu* in which a monk is chided by the Buddha himself for practicing an unspecified form of meditation—represented by the Sanskrit *manasikāraḥ* (T. *yiḍ la byed pa*)—when he should have been practicing contemplation of the repulsive.

In the second, we saw the origin of the contemplative practice for which the construction of “meditation hall” (S. *prahāṇasālā*) was authorized by the Buddha. And there, again, the only practice cited was seated *yoga*—the instructions for which are simply contemplation of the

repulsive. In this narrative we also saw that a wide array of Buddhist contemplative vocabulary—*cittaikāgrya*, *yoga*, *dhyāyin*, *prahāṇa*, etc.—was subsumed under this one practice.

Third, we saw the conversion story of the Buddha’s half-brother Nanda whose problems with sexual desire led the Buddha to preach a sermon on “entering the womb”. This section culminates in meditation instructions that—given the appearance of our standardized list of bodily constituents and its dramatic expansion—can only be understood as a form of contemplation of the repulsive. Furthermore, where the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* treats contemplation of the repulsive in a cursory way, the teaching on “entering the womb” treats it exclusively and extensively.

There is still a lot to be unpacked here. In Chapter II, I will look more closely at the sociological implications and consequences of the popularity of this particular type of contemplative technique. Brahmanical culture, with which the Indian tradition was inextricably tied, bears a host of strictures and superstitions against death pollution. These strictures played a part in shaping how this practice would play out in Buddhist monasteries. Also in Chapter II, I will look at the relationship between the recitation of a text such as the teaching on “entering the womb” and the cultivation of a sense of detachment towards the material world. Here, I have argued that Mūlasarvāstivādin monks favored “contemplation of the repulsive” over other techniques of silent, seated meditation. The narratives discussed above clearly suggest this is the case. However, it appears that in the Mūlasarvāstivādin school recitation of the section on “entering the womb” itself was probably favored over silent, seated meditation on the body. Recitation of such a scripture would no doubt have a similar effect on the mind as the contemplative technique itself. But these discussions will have to wait until Chapter II.

Given what we have seen, it seems that contemplation of the repulsive deserves a good deal of consideration in treatments of meditation in the ancient tradition. However, as Bryan J. Cuevas and Jacqueline I. Stone have noted,

Despite its centrality to Buddhist traditions, until recently death has received surprisingly little attention in the field of Buddhist Studies as a theme in its own right. While a full investigation of the reason for this neglect would require a separate essay, we suspect that it may stem, at least in part, from a legacy of modernist assumptions about what Buddhism is “supposed” to be. Since the late nineteenth century, proponents of Buddhist modernism, in Asia and the West, have sought to reconfigure Buddhism as rational, empirical, and fully compatible with science—in short, a religion preeminently suited to the modern age.¹¹⁴

In the context of Cuevas and Stone’s work, “death” is meant primarily in the sense of Buddhist funeral rituals, and visions of the afterlife. They only briefly mention contemplation of the repulsive. But the pattern definitely holds. If, for instance, we look for contemplation of the repulsive in a variety of introductory textbooks on Buddhism we find nothing. These works tend to exclude this practice in favor of the eightfold *dhyāna* model of meditation discussed in the previous section, or they prefer to speak of meditation in terms of “calm” (S. *śamatha*) and “insight” (S. *vipaśyanā*). This is perhaps the result of our tendency to romanticize the ancient Buddhist tradition. And the idea that these monks were contemplating corpses, or reciting lists of elements like urine, guts, and blood, just does not fit with what we want the tradition to be.

¹¹⁴ Bryan J. Cuevas and Jacqueline Ilyse Stone, *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 3.

1.4 *Pratisaṃlī*—The Value of Rest and Privacy

Forms of the Sanskrit construction *prati + saṃ + √lī* (henceforth *pratisaṃlī*) commonly appear in nominal and verbal forms in Indian Buddhist literature. The term literally means “to rest, or enter into solitude.” From the beginning of Western Buddhology, translators have tended to associate this term with contemplative practice and rendered it as something like “entering seclusion for the purpose of meditation.” In his 19th century translation of the *Lalitavistara*, Edouard Foucaux rendered the phrase *ayaṃ kālaḥ prisaṃlayanasya* as “c’est le temps de s’absorber dans la contemplation.”¹¹⁵ But studies of the term’s use in Mūlasarvāstivādin literature indicate that it would be problematic to project a meditative connotation onto the use of the word in the entire Indian tradition.

In all fairness to Foucaux, his source comes from the Mahāyāna tradition, where the term is often linked to seated mental exercises.¹¹⁶ We find, for instance, a passage in Chapter Three of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* wherein Śāriputra recounts a tale to the Buddha explaining why he,

¹¹⁵ See Edouard Foucaux, *Le Lalita Vistara, Développement des jeux contenant l’histoire de BouddhaÇakya-mouni depuis sa naissance jusqu’à sa prédication*, (Paris: E. Leroux, 1884), 146.

¹¹⁶ There are over fifty instances in a variety of Mahāyāna texts. These include the *Bodhisattvaprātimokṣa-sūtra*, the *Mahāvastu*, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*, the *Mahakarunapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, the *Lalitavistaraḥ*, and *Mahāyāna Sūtra Saṃgrahaḥ*. See Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, s.v. *pratisaṃlayati*, *pratisaṃlayana*, etc.

like the Buddha's other disciples, is reluctant to visit Vimalakīrti. It seems that Śāriputra was schooled in the finer points of "sitting in solitude" (*S. pratisaṃlīna*) by Vimalakīrti. Śāriputra tells the Buddha:

At one time, I was sitting in solitude (*S. pratisaṃlīna*) at the root of a tree.

Vimalakīrti approached and said 'Venerable Śāriputra, as you are sitting in solitude, this is not how one should sit in solitude (*S. pratisaṃlayitavya*). You should sit in solitude so that neither body nor mind is distinguished in the three-fold world. You should sit in solitude so that you can demonstrate all appropriate behavior without abandoning cessation. You should sit in solitude so that you can exhibit the marks of an ordinary person without dismissing the marks you have attained. You should sit in solitude so that the mind neither remains within the self nor moves in outward forms. You should sit in solitude so that you go with the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment appearing, but without being confused by any opinions. You should sit in solitude so that you meet with liberation even though you go among those who have not abandoned the defilements that are the mark of the round of rebirths. Oh Reverend Śāriputra, those who sit in solitude in this way are said by the Blessed One to be truly sitting in solitude.'¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ For the Sanskrit, see *Vimilakīrtinirdeśa: A Sanskrit Edition Based upon the Manuscript Newly Found at the Potala Palace* (Tokyo: 2006), Chapter 3, verses 2-3— *ekasmin samaye 'nyatamasmin vṛkṣamūle pratisaṃlīno 'bhūvam /vimalakīrtiś ca licchavir yena tad vṛkṣamūlam tenopasamkramya mām etad avocat / na bhadantaśāriputra evaṃ pratisaṃlayanam saṃlātavyam yathā tvam pratisaṃlīnaḥ / api tu tathā pratisaṃlīyaś ca yathā traidhātuke na kāyaś cittam vā samdrśyate / tathā pratisaṃlīyaś ca yathā nirodhāc ca na vyutiṣṭhasi sarveryāpatheṣu ca samdrśyase / tathā pratisaṃlīyaś ca yathā prāptilakṣaṇam ca na vijahāsi*

Vimilakīrti's instructions to Śāriputra, though perhaps vague, convey a clear understanding of *pratisaṃlī* as an exercise of the mind. The practice undertaken by Śāriputra certainly conforms to our definition of meditation—it is done intentionally, while seated, and, presumably, in silence. And the relationship between Mūlasarvāstivādin and Vimilakīrti's attitudes and representations of “sitting in solitude” may tell us something about the relationship between mainstream and Mahāyāna monks in India. We will discuss this further in Chapter III.

For now, let us visit our Mūlasarvāstivādin sources for instances of *pratisaṃlī*. When we look closely at how the term was used therein it becomes clear that when Mūlasarvāstivādin monks were “retreating into solitude” they were not necessarily doing so for the sake of engaging the mind, quite the opposite. In some instances the term can only mean that a monk wished to go to bed or have a nap.

We can begin to see this by looking at a tale found in the *Divyāvadāna*, and borrowed from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. In the seventh chapter, the *Nagarāvalambikā-vadāna*, we find the following situation involving the gift of a beggar woman:

That beggar woman thought, “Even Prasenajit, the King of Kośala isn't content with his merit, so he gives gifts and makes merit. I too, by some means, should make a

*prthagjanalakṣaṇeṣu ca samdrśyase / tathā pratisaṃlīyaś ca yathā te na cādhyātmaṃ cittam
avasthitam bhaven na bahirdhopavicaret / tathā pratisaṃlīyaś ca yathā sarvadṛṣṭigatebhyaś ca
na calasi saptatrimśatsu ca bodhipakṣyeṣu dharmeṣu samdrśyase / tathā pratisaṃlīyaś ca yathā
saṃsārāvacarāmś ca kleśān na prajahāsi nirvāṇasamavasaraṇaś ca bhavasi / ye
bhadantaśāriputra evaṃ pratisaṃlayanam pratisaṃlīyante teṣāṃ bhagavān pratisaṃlayanam
anujānāti /.*

collection and give a lamp to the Blessed One.” She procured a small amount of oil in a broken vessel, lit a lamp, and placed it on the Buddha’s walking path (S. *caṅkrama*).

Then, all the other lamps went out; but the one that she lit continued burn.

It is the nature of things that so long as Buddhas, Blessed Ones do not enter into seclusion (S. *pratisaṃlīnā*, T. *nang du yang dag ‘jog pa*), so their attendant monks do not enter into seclusion (S. *pratisaṃlīnā*). The Venerable Ānanda thought, “It is unthinkable that Buddhas, Blessed Ones would go to bed (S. *pratisaṃlīyante*) in such light. I should put out the lamp.”¹¹⁸

Here, our discussion hinges on the phrase “It is a rule that the personal attendants of lord buddhas do not go to bed until lord buddhas go to bed” (S. *dharmatā khalu buddhānāṃ bhagavatām na tāvad upasthāyakāḥ pratisaṃlīyante na yāvad buddhā bhagavantaḥ pratisaṃlīnā iti*). Here we see two forms of *pratisaṃlī*: the third person plural, present indicative middle verb *pratisaṃlīyante*, and the masculine plural, past passive participle *pratisaṃlīnā*. Rottman’s rendering of these terms as “go to bed” is clearly appropriate given the narrative context.

¹¹⁸ For the Sanskrit, see *Divyāvadāna*, ed. P.L. Vaidya, (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute: 1959), 7; *nagarāvalambikāvadānam / tatastasyā nagarāvalambikāyā etadabhavatayaṃ tāvadrājā prasenajit kauśalaḥ puṇyairatṛpto'dyāpi dānāni dadāti, puṇyāni karoti / yannvhamapi kutaścīt samudānīya bhagavataḥ pradīpaṃ dadyāmiti / tayā khaṇḍamallake tailasya stokam yācayitvā pradīpaṃ prajvālyā bhagavataścaṅkrame dattaḥ / ... yāvat sarve te dīpā nairvāṇāḥ / sa tayā prajvalitaḥ pradīpaḥ prajvalatyeva / dharmatā khalu buddhānāṃ bhagavatām na tāvadupasthāyakāḥ pratisaṃlīyante na yāvadbuddhā bhagavantaḥ pratisaṃlīnā iti / athāyusmānānandaḥ saṃlakṣayati asthānamanavakāśo yadbuddhā bhagavanta āloke śayyāṃ kalpayanti / yannvham dīpaṃ nirvāpayeyamiti /*

Ānanda, and therefore the author(s) of the text, associated these forms with “sleeping” (S. *śayyā*). The Sanskrit formation *saṃ* + *√lī* simply means “to lie down,” and it is clear—in this passage at least—that *pratisaṃlī* retains much of this same sense.¹¹⁹

This exact phrase regarding the attendant of a Buddha is also found in the *Kṣudrakavastu*. And there too it is clear from the context that the various forms of *pratisaṃlī* are understood to mean “retirement into private for the sake of sleeping.” In the *Kṣudrakavastu* we find this charming tale of a monk who pretends to be a ghost in a desperate attempt to get the Buddha out of the rain:

The Buddha, the Blessed One, and his attending servant the Venerable Nāgapāla went wandering in the realm of Gandhāra, and came to a town with biting cold.¹²⁰ In this town, they stayed in the territory of a spirit (S. *yakṣa*) who resided in a Bakula tree. Then it became night—very dark. Rain and lightning suddenly appeared. The Blessed One walked on a walking path (S. *caṅkrama*) that was open and exposed.

It is the nature of things that so long as Buddhas, Blessed Ones do not enter into seclusion (S. *pratisaṃlīnā*, T. *nang du yang dag 'jog pa*), so their attendant monks do not enter into seclusion...

¹¹⁹ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *saṃ* + *√lī*.

¹²⁰ Here, I have translated the Tibetan *sad kar can* as “with biting cold.” *Sad kar can* could, however, be the Tibetan translation the Sanskrit proper name of the town. Unfortunately, this is unknowable without the original Sanskrit. None of our lexical sources for Tibetan offer a Sanskrit equivalent for *sad kar can*. However, given the details of the narrative that follows, it seems most likely that the original Sanskrit was simply describing the area, rather than naming it.

Then the Venerable Nāgapāla thought, “Alas! The Blessed One has been walking on this walking path which is open and exposed for a very long time. Therefore I will now scare him by way of this Bakula spirit.” Forming a plan, he put his cloak over his head, stepped onto the walking path, and said this to the Blessed One:

“Bakula! Bakula! Oh renouncer, I am the spirit of the Bakula!”

The Blessed One said to the Venerable Nāgapāla: “Oh foolish man, did you think you could threaten the Tathāgata with this Bakula spirit? Tathāgatas, *arhats*, perfectly enlightened Buddhas have nothing to do with fear or anxiety.”¹²¹

¹²¹ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 72b.4-72b.6... 73b.1-73b.4; *sangs rgyas bcom ldan ‘das zhabs ‘bring ba tshe dang ldan pa klu skyong dang yul ma ga dhā ra ljongs rgyu zhing gshegs te grong khyer sad kar can tu gshegs nas sad kar can na gnod sbyin ba ku la’i gnas na bzhugs so // de nas bcom ldan ‘das mtshan mo nam sros te / mun gnag cing khad kyis cung zad cung zad char ‘bab cing glog ‘byung ba na blag ba med pa’i ‘chags na ‘chag pa mdzad do // chos nyid kyis sangs rgyas bcom ldan ‘das rnams kyis zhabs ‘bring ba dge slong rnams ni ji srid sangs rgyas bcom ldan ‘das rnams nang du yang dag ‘jog la mi bzhugs pa de srid du nang do yang dag ‘jog la mi ‘jug go //... de nas tshe dang ldan pa klu skyong gis ‘di snyam du bsams / kye ma bcom ldan ‘das ha cang yun ring du blag ba med pa’i ‘chag sa na ‘chag mdzad pas ma la bdag gis de la gnod sbyin ba ku las bsdigs so snyam du rig nas la ba bzlog ste bgos nas ‘chag sa’i slad du ‘dug ste / bcom ldan ‘das ‘di skad ces gsol to // ba ku la ba ku la dge sbyong nga ni gnod sbyin ba ku la yin no // de nas bcom ldan ‘das kyis tshe dang ldan pa klu skyong la ‘di skad ces bka’stsal to // mi blun po khyod kyang de bzhin gshegs pa la gnod sbyin ba ku las bsdigs par sems sam / de bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa’i sag rgyas rnams ni bsnyengs ba dang bag tsha ba dang bral ba ste /.*

Here, the Venerable Nāgapāla’s desire is not to meditate, but simply to escape nasty weather and go to bed. Given what we have seen thus far regarding this term, there is a certain irony here. If, like Rottman, we take the Buddha’s exercise on the walking path as a kind of contemplation, then the Venerable Nāgapāla’s desire is not to “withdraw into privacy” for the purpose of meditation. It is the opposite. He is trying to get the Buddha to cease his contemplations so that they can get some rest out of the rain. Again, it would seem here that *pratisaṃlī* retains much of the same sense of *saṃ* + *√lī*, simply meaning “to lie down and sleep.”¹²²

At this point we might consider one instance from the *Kṣudrakavastu* in which the term *pratisaṃlī* is used in a way that is ambiguous. In the conversion story of Nanda, which we discussed above, we find this term used. The day after the Buddha took Nanda to hell, on the morning he preached the teaching on “entering the womb” to him, Nanda and the monks are said to have “emerged from seclusion.”¹²³ What they were doing in private is not made clear. But given what we have seen so far, it seems unlikely that our Mūlasarvāstivādin authors understood them to be engaged in silent, seated meditation. As we will see in Chapter II, the monks of the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition greatly valued their privacy for a few reasons, all of which centered on their relationship to the laity. To begin with, there were a number of necessary, everyday activities that these monks were forbidden to do in the public eye. In our *vinaya*, we find rules that monks must conceal from the public practices such as leatherworking,¹²⁴ smithing,¹²⁵

¹²² Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *saṃ* + *√lī*.

¹²³ This occurs immediately before the teaching on “entering the womb”, discussed and cited at length in the previous section 1.2: *Aśubhabhāvana—Its Prominence in the Mūlasarvāstivādin Tradition*.

¹²⁴ *Carmavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Ka 227a.6-227b.5.

barbering,¹²⁶ washing their feet,¹²⁷ administering medical procedures,¹²⁸ and in one instance engaging in any “practice of their former trades.”¹²⁹ And in each of these instances the rule is given after the monks’ engagement in such practices results in criticism from lay-followers.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, sustaining a Mūlasarvāstivādin monastery required a close interaction with the laity. This interaction in turn required the monks to display strict poise and deportment both inside and outside the monastery. In the next section of this chapter, we will look at stories that feature the term *smṛtyupasthāna*, or “establishing mindfulness.” And the narratives in this next section make it clear that maintaining this kind of poise was not always easy, especially for novice monks. Moments in which the monks could “enter into seclusion” in the monastery would, no doubt, have been highly prized. At this time, the monks may have attended to personal matters, or enjoyed a bit of respite from their duties and from the watchful eye of the laity. Some

¹²⁵ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 31a.5-31b.4.

¹²⁶ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 204b.1-205a.3.

¹²⁷ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 60a.4-60b.6.

¹²⁸ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Da 36a.2-36b.3.

¹²⁹ *Bhaṣajyavastu*, Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts*, iii 1, 280.8-281.18.

¹³⁰ These actions are to be “guarded; protected.” For a more general discussion on the relationship between monks and various types of labor, see Gregory Schopen, “On Monks and Menial Labors: Some Monastic Accounts of Building Buddhist Monasteries,” *Architetti, Capomastri, Artigiani: L'Organizzazione dei Cantieri e della Produzione Artistica nell'Asia Ellenistica. Studi Offerti a Domenico Faccenna nel suo Ottantesimo Compleanno* (Serie Orientale Roma 100), ed. P. Callieri (Rome: 2006): 225-45.

of them might even have taken this time to meditate, but that is not what the term *pratisaṃlī* necessarily denotes in our sources.

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There is one final passage containing the term *pratisaṃlī* that we should examine. It seems that the Mūlasarvāstivādin commentarial tradition did in fact associate this term with meditation when it appeared in one particular context. *Pratisaṃlī* appears in a stenciled passage regarding the intentions of a Buddha. This passage is deployed in narrative situations where the Buddha is absent from the larger community of monks. It reads,

There are five reasons why Buddhas, Blessed Ones, remain in the monastery and alms are brought [to them]. What are these five reasons? They wish to remain in seclusion (S. *pratisaṃlātukāmā bhavanti*, T. *nang du yang dag 'jog par bzhed pa yin*);¹³¹ they wish to give a teaching to the gods; they wish to inspect the bedding and seats; they wish to tend to the sickly; or they wish to bring about a rule of training (S. *vinaya*) for their followers.¹³²

¹³¹ See *Mahāvvyutpatti*, #1488, #1642.

¹³² *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 68a.6-7; *sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das rnams ni rgyu lngas gtsug lag khang na bzhugs shing gdugs tshod 'dren te / lnga gang zhe na / nang du yang dag 'jog par bzhed pa yin / lha rnams la chos ston par bzhed pa yin / gnas mal la gzigs par zhed pa yin / nad pa la gzigs par bzhed pa yin / nyan thos rnams 'dul ba la bslab pa'i gzhi bca' bar bzhed yin no //*. See also *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 68a.6-69b.1.

This list of five reasons why Buddhas might not participate in alms-giving is fairly standard and occurs—with slight variations in the first line—throughout the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*.¹³³ The original Sanskrit has been preserved in the Gilgit manuscripts of the *Cīvaravastu*.¹³⁴

Unfortunately, however, this passage tells us little about the composer’s understanding of the first reason cited—that the Buddha “wishes to remain in seclusion” (*S. pratisaṃlātukāmā*). What the Buddha is doing while he is secluded is not made clear.

However, our commentator Śīlapāliṭa addresses this use of the term. In the *Āgamakṣudrakavyākhyāna*, he glosses “They [Buddhas] wish to enter into seclusion” in the following way:

Regarding the phrase “they desire to enter into seclusion,” it means they desire to dwell in the bliss of entering deep meditative states in solitude.¹³⁵

Here the term is clearly associated with meditation, and our 8th-9th century Sanskrit-Tibetan lexicon, the *Mahāvīyutpatti*, makes this clear. The language turns on the Tibetan phrase *snyoms par 'jug pa*. In every entry where *snyoms par 'jug pa* appears, it is translating the Sanskrit term

¹³³ For example, it can also be found at *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 257 a.1-2. For a slight variation, see *Cīvaravastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Ga 106a.2-3.

¹³⁴ The full Sanskrit of this passage has been preserved at Dutt, *Cīvaravastu, Gilgit Manuscripts* iii.2.128; it reads: *pañcabhiḥ kāranairbuddhā bhagavantaḥ aupadhike tiṣṭhanty abhinirhṛtapīṇḍapātāḥ / katamaiḥ pañcabhiḥ / pratisaṃlātukāmā bhavanti / devatānāṃ dharmam deśayitukāmā bhavanti / śayanāsanam pratyavekṣitukāmā bhavanti / glānamavalokayitukāmā bhavanti / śrāvakānāṃ vinayaśikṣāpadam prajñāpayitukāmā bhavanti /*

¹³⁵ See *Āgamakṣudrakavyākhyāna*, Derge ‘dul ba Dzu 30b.6-7; *nang du yang dag par 'jog par bzhed pa zhes bya ba ni dben par snyoms par 'jug pa'i bde bas bzhugs par bzhed pa'o //*.

samāpatti, and this means entering into the *dhyānic* states.¹³⁶ *Samāpatti* is the same term used in the narratives we have saw earlier wherein the Buddha and the nun Mahāprajāpatī ascend and descend the *dhyānas* before their deaths.¹³⁷ So when the Buddha “entered into seclusion,” he was understood, by our commentator at least, to be absorbed in meditation.

However, when we look back at those instances of the term that do not involve the Buddha it seems clear that Śīlapālita’s gloss speaks not to “entering into seclusion” as a contemplative practice but rather to the nature of a Buddha. In other words, it tells us about his understanding of how Buddhas rest, versus how ordinary people rest. Naturally, when the Buddha takes rest (*S. pratisamlī*) he does so in the bliss of profound trance, but not everyone who takes rest does so, as the preceding stories involving Ānanda and Nāgapāla demonstrate. Nāgapāla was not interested in pursuing *dhyānic* trance. He just wanted to get out of the rain and get some sleep.

Śīlapālita’s gloss of the term points us back again to our previous discussion of the two meanings of *dhyāna* in our sources. There we say that these deep meditative states are painted as the supernatural domain of the enlightened. Here, as before, *dhyānic* mind-states are not painted as something to be striven for and attained one at a time, but as a transcendent domain that those who are enlightened can enter at will. According to Śīlapālita, the Buddha dwelt in the *dhyānas* when ordinary beings might sleep.

¹³⁶ See *Mahāvīyutpatti*, #126, #868, #1491, #1496, #1498, #1499, #1500, #1502, #1987, #1988.

See also Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, s.v. *samāpatti*.

¹³⁷ See sections 1.2&1.3 above, on the term *dhyāna* in Mūlasarvāstivādin sources.

1.5 *Smṛtyupasthāna*—Minding Your Manners in an Indian Monastery

The Sanskrit term *smṛtyupasthāna* (T. *dran pa nye bar gzhag pa*) is generally rendered in English as “the establishment, (or foundations) of mindfulness.” In Buddhist *sūtras* and abhidharmic literature it is most often associated with practices and attainments related to meditation. This compound and its Pāli cognate *satipaṭṭhāna* have received their fair share of attention from both monastic and lay scholars of Buddhism, particularly among those scholars interested in ancient meditation and the models of liberation surrounding it. Many studies have been done on this term, its history in texts, and its exact meaning and application in Indian Buddhism. So the technical—or soteriological—dimensions of the term have been studied extensively.

But we find no such technical treatments of the term in the *Kṣudrakavastu*. If we move from *sūtras*, *abhidharma*, and commentarial literature into our *vinaya*, we find that the term was used by different kinds of monks for different reasons. The composers of our monastic code, whose principle interests were the maintenance and governance of the community of monks, used the term in a way that suited their own ends. We find several instances of *smṛtyupasthāna* in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, many of which occur in the *Kṣudrakavastu*. In most instances, this term can only be related to contemplation in an indirect way, and certainly not to the definition of meditation that we have established for this study. In other instances the term excludes the possibility that “applying mindfulness” included any element of contemplation, as monks are told to “establish mindfulness” while performing other tasks. In the *Kṣudrakavastu* of

the *Mulasarvāstivāda-vinaya* the term is most often associated with manners and deportment—observances and regulations to be kept both inside and outside a Buddhist monastery.

In this section, we will look at four narratives from the *Kṣudrakavastu* in which our authors used this term to encourage behavior that would be essential for the upkeep of a clean, respectable monastery. Such behavior was, no doubt, closely related to the monastery’s role as a “field of merit” (S. *punyakṣetra*), i.e. as a place where the laity can acquire merit by way of donations. In these instances where monks use the term to encourage proper behavior the term “mindfulness” is strikingly appropriate. It is, however, much more in keeping with our English sense of “being mindful of your actions,” or “minding your manners,” rather than an indication of mindful meditation. In other words, most often when the term is used in the *Mulasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, it has a more social orientation, rather than a soteriological one.

Here our aim is not to discredit or undermine prior studies, nor bring into question the importance of the technical sense of the term. Rather, we hope to nuance them and demonstrate the variety of monastic voices that can be found within Indian Buddhist literature. In fact, the overlap between how the compilers of the *vinaya* used this term and how meditation specialists used it can tell us a lot about the Indian monastic tradition and the various interests of those operating within it.

Let us begin by looking at this term, its technical meaning, and modern studies that have explored it. The Sanskrit compound *smṛtyupasthāna* is made up of two members: *smṛti* + *upasthāna*. *Smṛti* is a noun meaning literally “memory,” or “remembrance.” *Upasthāna* is a noun indicating the act of putting something in place or establishing something, but it might also be rendered in English as “foundation or abode,” i.e. where something is placed.¹³⁸ So in its most

¹³⁸ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *upasthāna*.

general sense, the term indicates the action of keeping something in mind, without forgetting or allowing the mind to wander away from it.

In Buddhist sermons (S. *sūtras*) and abhidharmic literature, the term was analyzed into four “foundations (S. *upasthāna*) for applying attention (S. *smṛti*).” The most widely studied version of this four-fold model is found in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (S. *Smṛtyupasthāna Sūtra*) of the Pāli Canon, which we have met before in our discussion. In this *sutta*, the Buddha calls the practice of the four-fold *satipaṭṭhāna* the only way (P. *ekāyanomagga*) for the purification of beings and the realization of *nibbāna* (S. *nirvāṇa*). Therein, the four “foundations of mindfulness” are presented as the body (P. *kāya*), sensations (P. *vedāna*), thoughts (P. *citta*), and mental constituents (P. *dhamma*).

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* stands at the forefront of the modern Theravāda meditation movement and this fact has, no doubt, had a considerable impact on the modern handling of the term *smṛtyupasthāna*. In fact, in the formation of these meditation movements, no other Buddhist text has been more influential than the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. Many modern teachers use this *sutta* as a textual foundation for their own interpretations of the tradition and its liberating practices. Nyanaponika Thera’s popular work *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* is basically a translation and exegesis of this *Sutta*. The Venerable Analayo, Bhikkhu Thanissaro, and Bhikkhu Sujato are all influential Theravada monks who have written commentaries on the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, and whose practice and teaching center on meditation. S.N. Goenka, the lay meditation teacher from the lineage of Burmese monk Ledi Sayadaw, teaches an entire 10-day meditation course based on this one text.

The conception and analysis of *smṛtyupasthāna* presented in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* has also had a considerable influence on the modern scholarly conversation regarding the meaning

and import of “establishing mindfulness.” In their dictionaries, both Edgerton and Rhys-Davids center their definition of *smṛtyupasthāna*, (or *satipaṭṭhāna*, as the case may be,) on the fourfold model put forward in the *Smṛtyupasthāna Sūtra* tradition.¹³⁹

In one study entitled “Dharma and Abhidharma,” Johannes Bronkhorst attempts to unravel the historical evolution of a list (S. *māṭṛkā*) of wholesome qualities (S. *kuśala dharma*) found in a variety of early literature. Version I of this list—found in the Pāli *Majjhima Nikāya* and the Chinese *Madhyamāgama*—begins with the four *smṛtyupasthāna* (P. *satipaṭṭhāna*) listed above: body (P. *kāya*), sensations (P. *vedāna*), thoughts (P. *citta*), and mental constituents (P. *dhamma*). Variations of this list are used in a variety of texts throughout the Indian tradition. Citing instances in which this list was expanded and subjected to analysis, Bronkhorst argues that Version I is early, “perhaps the earliest, list of the type that came to be called *māṭṛkā*.”¹⁴⁰ If Bronkhorst’s assumptions are correct, then the term *smṛtyupasthāna*, at least in this technical sense, was in play in the Indian tradition from very early on. Bronkhorst’s understanding of the term is, however, restricted to its technical sense, wherein it is related to formal meditation, as per the threefold definition that we have used in our study. He writes:

In order to recognize the two kinds of mindfulness we turn to the stereotype description of the road to liberation which often recurs in the Sūtras. It distinguishes between preparatory exercises on the one hand, and “meditation” proper on the other, the two being divided by the moment when *the monk went to a lonely place and sat down in*

¹³⁹ Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, 614; T.W.Rhys-Davids, and William Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary* (London: 1921-1925; repr. London: Pali Text Society, 1972), 672.

¹⁴⁰ Bronkhorst, “Dharma and Abhidharma,” 305.

the prescribed manner. Mindfulness plays a role both before and after this moment, but in different ways. Before this moment the monk “When going out and returning acts with clear comprehension; when looking forward and to the side... when going, standing, sitting, sleeping, waking, speaking, and keeping silent acts with clear comprehension”; in short, the monk practices the “observation of the positions of the body.” After this moment the situation changes. *The monk no longer makes any movement. Yet his first act in the motionless position is “calling upon [establishing] mindfulness” (parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā).* As the expression indicates, it is here that the *smṛtyupasthāna* would seem to come in.¹⁴¹

Here—as per Bronkhorst’s understanding of the term—*smṛtyupasthāna* fits seamlessly into the definition of meditation that we established in the Introduction of this study. It is carried out intentionally, in a “motionless position,” and, we can safely assume, in silence. Note how Bronkhorst asserts that *smṛtyupasthāna* does not come into play until the monk has ceased all other activity and assumed a “motionless position.”

This same understanding of *smṛtyupasthāna* as a feature of seated meditation is found in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. The story of the enlightenment of the monk Vairāṭṭasiṃha from the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* is, to my knowledge, the only instance in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* wherein the practice of meditation is cited as the direct and immediate cause of a monk’s liberation. And here *smṛtyupasthāna* is clearly associated with meditation as we outlined the practice in the Introduction to this study. The monk Vairāṭṭasiṃha was having trouble realizing one-pointedness of mind due to a foul smell that had developed in the monastery. So the Buddha authorized his monks to use perfumes and unguents to drive away the stench. Once the air of the

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 311. The italics are mine.

monastery was cleared, Vairāṭṭasiṃha sat down to meditate and immediately realized the state of a liberated being (S. *arhat*). In the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, his experience is described as follows:

Having sat and assumed the cross-legged posture, having made his body erect and established his mindfulness (S. *smṛtim upasthāpya*) before him, having smelled the perfume, he attained one-pointedness of mind. Then, because of that he experienced the state of an *arhat* through the abandonment of all defilements.¹⁴²

Here this Mūlasarvāstivādin author’s understanding of “establishing mindfulness” conforms perfectly to Bronkhorst’s understanding of the term. Note that Vairāṭṭasiṃha’s mindfulness is not established until he is fixed in a seated posture. Then, he is said to establish mindfulness in front of him (S. *pratimukhaṃ smṛtimupasthāpya*). And once it is established, it immediately results in his mind being purged of defilements. Consequently, Vairāṭṭasiṃha directly experiences liberation. This is the type of *smṛtyupasthāna* we would expect to find in Buddhist literature if our consideration was limited to the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. It occurs alongside the intention to meditate, and results in the movement of the mind—a rather dramatic movement in this instance—towards liberation.

However, if we accept that the term is relatively old, then we must consider that it had longer to evolve and find its way into different contexts within the tradition. As we saw in the previous section on “contemplation of the repulsive” (S. *aśubhabhāvana*), in the teaching on

¹⁴² Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts*, iii.1.223.7-224.12; *praviśya nisannaḥ paryaṅkamābhujya rjuṃ*

kāyaṃ praṇidhāya pratimukhaṃ smṛtimupasthāpya tasya sugandhaṃ ghrātvā

cittasamādhānamutpannam / tatastena sarvakleśaprahāṇādarhattvaṃ sākṣātkṛtam /

pūrvavadyāvat abhivādyaśca samvṛttaḥ /. See also Tog ‘dul ba Ga 8b.7-9b.6; Derge Ga 16b.6-

17b.2.

“entering the womb” the Mūlasarvāstivādins did not group these four objects of attention—body, sensations, thoughts, and mental constituents—under the term “foundations of mindfulness” (S. *smṛtyupasthāna*). In the teaching on “entering the womb” the four are all subsumed into the practice of “contemplation of the repulsive” (S. *aśubhabhāvana*), and the term *smṛtyupasthāna* does not appear. Here we can begin to see the Mūlasarvāstivādins using these terms and categories in different ways—ways that may not conform to our popular understanding of the term. And though the term *smṛtyupasthāna* is not used in the teaching on “entering the womb”, it is used in four other narratives of the *Kṣudrakavastu*. In these instances, it is in no way associated with seated meditation.

In the *Kṣudrakavastu*, we find the voice of another kind of monk—one whose immediate interest is not meditation or even liberation. Monks who used this term in the *Kṣudrakavastu* were more concerned with getting other monks to behave in appropriate ways. Below I will summarize four stories in which the term *smṛtyupasthāna*—“the application of mindfulness”—is deployed as an essential element of monastic practice. And the primary concern in these texts is not, as I have said, meditation. The four stories we will examine address two important characteristics of Indian monasticism—two characteristics that are more centered on social, rather than soteriological, concerns. These two concerns are the deportment of monks and the cleanliness of the monastery.

Our first story involves the infamous Group of Six monks, who consistently serve as a model for inappropriate behavior. According to our *vinaya*, this episode took place in the Jetavana monastery, where the Group of Six monks all laid down together in one bed. In that bed, they behaved like children—wrestling and giggling, or, as we might say colloquially,

“horsing around.” Seeing this, the Blessed One made a rule forbidding two or more monks to sleep together in one bed.

However, a large group of monks “went wandering” (T. *ljongs rgyu pa*)—a topic we will take up in Chapter II—and came to a small secluded monastery, which did not have enough beds to accommodate them all. Remembering the rule that monks were not allowed to sleep in a bed together, they were at a complete loss regarding what to do. Then,

The monks reported what had occurred to the Blessed One. The Blessed One said, “Those monks who possess heedfulness and shame, they, applying mindfulness (S. *smṛtyupasthāna*), desirous of the teaching, must lie with an alms bowl or the wrap of their robe spread in between them. This should not be regretted.”¹⁴³

So the monks in this story are admonished to “establish their mindfulness” as they are lying down and going to sleep. In this story, we see what could be a link to one of the “foundations of mindfulness” (S. *smṛtyupasthāna*) found in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. Therein, the second division of mindfulness on the body, after attention to in and out breathing, is attention to the four postures of the body—one of which is lying down.

But here, it would seem, something different is in play—a different kind of voice within the tradition. The monks are told to use their mindfulness in order to avoid the kind of scene caused by the Group of Six monks at the beginning of the story. They are, in other words, told to

¹⁴³ The entire story can be found at *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 66b.6-67a.5. This passage is at 67a.4-5; *dge slong dag gis bcom ldan 'das la gsol pa dang / bcom ldan 'das kyis bka' stsal pa / dge slong gang dag ngo tsha shes shing 'gyod ba dad ldan la / bslab ba 'dod pa de dag gis dran pa nye bar bzhag ste / gang ba bting ba la bar du chos gos kyi gtur bu 'am / lhung bzed kyi snod dag bcug la nyal bar bya ste / 'di la 'gyod bar mi bya'o //*.

be mindful not for the sake of meditating, but for the sake of not engaging in embarrassing behavior. In the section of the Mūlasarvāstivādin *Poṣadhavastu* that was summarized in a previous section of our study, monks were criticized by lay followers who saw them sleeping in close proximity to one another. So monks sleeping together was, apparently, a source of some concern for the composers of our text. And this story involving the Group of Six served as a reminder to monks that in circumstances where sleeping together is unavoidable, caution must be exercised.

Our commentary, the *Āgamakṣudrakavyākhyāna*, confirms this more socially oriented interpretation. It addresses this story, and glosses the Tibetan *dran pa nye bar gzhag pa* (S. *smṛtyupasthāna*) as:

Regarding the phrase “establishing mindfulness,” it is for the sake of completely avoiding contact with the body of another.¹⁴⁴

So if the admonition to “establish mindfulness” was here meant to indicate engagement in some kind of contemplative exercise, such was not the understanding of our commentator.

There are other stories in the *Kṣudrakavastu* that deploy the term for similar purposes. In other narratives monks are told to “establish mindfulness” during activities that necessarily exclude seated meditation. Our second story also deals with deportment. And it contains, not surprisingly, a degree of humor. The householder Anāthapiṇḍada invited the monks to eat at his house. When they arrived and sat down to eat, it began to rain. Then, one novice monk made an embarrassing scene in the following way:

¹⁴⁴ *Āgamakṣudrakavyākhyāna*, Derge ‘dul ba Dzu 30b.1; *dran pa nye bar gzhag pa ni phan tsun lus la reg pa yongs su spang ba'i phyir ro//*.

The householder served soup, rice, bread, and turnips to the community of monks. Some who drank the soup made the sound *thub thub*. Some who ate the rice made the sound *khrum khrum*. Some who ate the turnips made the sound *sol sol*. And the raindrops that fell on the dining hall made the sound *thigs thigs*. When monks drank from the water vessel, it made the sound *blug blug*.

Among those monks was one who had been a musician before renouncing. He was not applying mindfulness (T. *dran pa nye bar ma bzhag ste*) and these noises increased the power of his imagination. Because of the rising power of these thoughts, the sound became agreeable and he began to dance, saying “Nobles, *sol sol!* Nobles, *khrum khrum!* Nobles, *chom chom!* Nobles, *blcag blcag!* Nobles, *blug blug!*”

Because of this, other monks who were also not applying mindfulness (T. *dran pa nye bar ma bzhag ste*) became light-hearted and began to laugh. For those who were applying mindfulness (T. *dran pa nye bar bzhag ste*), their deportment was not shaken, and they sat as they were. But the attendants began to laugh.

Then came censure, and the householders came to lose faith¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ The entire story can be found at *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Da 189a.7-190a.1. This last section can be found at 189b.3-190a.1; *khyim bdag des dge slong gi dge 'dun la thug pa dang / khur ba dang / 'brag khur dang / la phug dag brimspa dang / de la dge slong kha cig ni thug pa 'thung ba na thub thub ces sgra byed do // kha cig ni 'bras khur za ba na khrum khrum zhes sgra byed do // kha cig la phug za ba na sol sol zhes sgra byed do // thigs pa bkad sar zags te sgra thigs thigs zhes zer ro // dge slong bum par chu 'thung na sgra blug blug ces zer dang / de la rol mo mkhan las rab tu byang ba zhiḡ dran pa nye bar mi 'jog ste sngon byas bs rjes su dran nas rnam par rtog pa'i dbang rgyas te / kun tu rtog ba'i shags kyis langs te sgra grag pa de dang*

Imagine for a moment the degree of anxiety this situation would have presented to those monks whose primary interest was the maintenance of the monastic community. Though the situation may be entirely fictional—and the humor it evokes suggests that it is—it is not hard to imagine that such a scenario was a very real concern for established senior monks in the Indian tradition. Here, a novice monk creates an embarrassing scene in the midst of lay donors and consequently the donors lose faith in the monks. This is the equivalent of extinction for a community whose sustenance depends on the laity. Later in this same story, the Buddha expresses the concern that if monks do not eat properly, with deportment, then potential donors may go to other religious groups (*S. tirthikas*) as a source of merit (*S. punyakṣetra*).¹⁴⁶ We will say more about this below, but for now let us continue looking at two instances in which the term *smṛtyupasthāna* bears a similar meaning.

Our next two narratives deal with cleanliness. Here monks are admonished to establish their mindfulness while they read, recite, walk, and even when they spit. This first of these two stories occurred in the Jetavana monastery. There, a monk became sick. Because he was bedridden, he spat to the side of his bed, making the floor filthy. A monk who came to tend on him prostrated before him and accidentally touched some of the spittle with his head. When he heard about this, the Blessed One ordered that spittoons be set up for the sake of bedridden

mthun par sbyar nas gar byas te / btsun pa sol sol / btsun pa khrum khrum / btsun pa chom chom / btsun pa blcag blcag / btsun pa blug blug / de la dge slong gang dran pa nyebar ma bzhang pa de la yid dga' bar gyur te dgong ngo // dran pa nye bar bzhang pa de dag ni spyod lam las ma 'khrugs te de nyid na 'dug go // zhal ta kha cig ni gad mo dgong par rtsom mo // kha cig ni 'phya bar gyur to // khyim bdag kyang ma dad par gyur to //

¹⁴⁶ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Da 190b.2-3.

monks. But all the monks, sick or not, took to using the spittoons and so the Buddha ordered that spittoons be placed in various parts of the monastery. Then,

Monks were reading, reciting, and walking in their abodes. And they spat from time to time when their minds had wandered. The Blessed One said, “When they have come to be forgetful, monks must not spit around the seating and bedding. Furthermore, there must be set up four spittoons at the four pillars of the monastery. While they are reading, reciting, or walking, monks must be mindful (T. *dran pa nye bar bzhag ste*) when they spit.”¹⁴⁷

The point of this story and its admonition to “apply mindfulness” is clear. Given the taboos placed around bodily fluids in brahmanical culture, it is easy to see how spit could cause such a fuss among these monks, especially if one or more of them had made bodily contact with it. But for our purposes the most telling feature of this story is that, in the end, the monks are told to “apply mindfulness” while they are in the midst of a host of activities, none of which involve meditation. The admonishment to remain mindful if they spit while reading, reciting or walking points to a different understanding of the term than what is presented in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, and other *sūtra* literature. Here, the main religious activity centers on texts, with the “application

¹⁴⁷ The entire story can be found at *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 184a.2-184b.7. This last is found at 184b.5-7; *dge slong khang bzangs dag tu klog pa dang / kha ton byed pa dang / chags pa de dag mchil ma bro ba dang / de dag sems yengs shing bab bab du mchil ma 'dor bar byed nas / bcom ldan 'das kyis bka' tshal ba / brjed phyal par gnas mal bcas par mchil ma dor bar mi bya'i 'on kyang gtsug lag khang gi grwa bzhir ka ba'i drung du dge 'dun gyi mchil ma'i snod bzhi gzhag par bya zhing de dag tu klog pa dang / kha ton byed pa 'am / 'chags pas dran pa nye bar gzhag ste mchil ma dor bar bya'o //*.

of mindfulness” being an ancillary idea, employed with the intention of ensuring that the monastery does not become filthy.

There is a certain irony in the situation presented in this narrative. Consider, again, that in *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* the Buddha calls the practice of the four-fold *satipaṭṭhāna* the only way (*ekāyanomagga*) for the purification of beings and the realization of *nirvāṇa*. But *smṛtyupasthāna* is not the chief religious activity of the community represented in this story, reading and recitation are. In fact, they are apparently so absorbed in reading and recitation that they must be told to be more mindful of their surroundings so that the monastery is not made disgusting by the careless actions they commit while, again, engaged in reading and recitation texts.

Our fourth story points to a similar understanding of the term as a way of admonishing monks, or in this case nuns, to keep the monastery free of polluted bodily fluids. This narrative begins with the Blessed One inviting monks and nuns to hear his teaching. One of the nuns who attended the talk—and who happened to be menstrating—did not “apply mindfulness” (T. *dran pa nye bar ma bzhaḡ ste*) and bled on one of the covered seats. Once the discourse was over, a monk came to collect the seats and saw this nun’s seat covered with flies that were attracted by the blood. Consequently the Buddha made a rule that nuns who came to hear the teachings must not be given covered seats. But a problem arose when the eminent Mahāprajāpatī arrived.

Then the nun Mahāprajāpatī came to hear the teaching and she was not given a covered seat. She said, “Sirs, when I was a householder I never once sat on a seat that was not covered!

They replied, “Gautamī, the Blessed One will not allow it. He said nuns who assemble to hear the teaching must not be given covered seats.”

She said, “Sirs, am I guilty of the same offense as those who do not apply mindfulness (T. *dran pa nye bar ma bzhaḡ ste*)?”

They reported this to the Blessed One. The Blessed One said, ”Monks, henceforth, those nuns who apply mindfulness (T. *dran pa nye bar ’jog pa*) may be given covered seats when they have come for the sake of hearing the teaching.”¹⁴⁸

Here, again, monks, or in this case nuns, are told to apply their mindfulness for the sake of not defiling the monastery with fluids that in brahmanical culture would be seen as highly polluted. The situation that the nuns find themselves in is a complex one, where the reality of menstruation creates a potentially messy complication.

In these stories, we see that the term *smṛtyupasthāna* had a different usage among those monks who specialized in the composition, compilation and preservation of Buddhist monastic codes in North India. Here we see a variation in *how* and *why* monks are asked to ”apply mindfulness.” We see a different set of voices, whose concerns did not necessarily center on

¹⁴⁸ The entire story can be found at *Kṣudrakavastu* Derge ’dul ba Da 155b.1-156a.2. This last section is found at 155b.6-156a.2; *ji tsam na sḡye dḡu’i bdag mo chen mo chos nyan ba’i phyir ’ongs ba dang / de la yang khri’u ma g.yogs pa zhiḡ byin pa dang / des ’phags pa bdag ston khyim na gnas pa na yang khri’u ma g.yogs pa la cung zad kyang ma mchis so zhes smras pa dang / dḡe slong dag gis smras pa / gau ta mī bcom ldan ’das kyis ma gnang ste / dḡe slong ma chos nyan ba’i phyir lhags pa la khri’u g.yogs pa ma sbyin cig ces bka’ stsal to // des ’phags pa dḡe slong ma gang dag dran pa nye par mi ’jog pa de bzhin du bdag kyang nyes ba’i dmigs pa ci bḡyid dam zhes smras pa dang / de ltar gyur pa dḡe slong dag gis bcom ldan ’das la ḡsol nas / bcom ldan ’das kyis dḡe slong dag de lta bas na gnang pa ni dran pa nye bar ’jog pa’i dḡe slong ma de dag chos nyan pa’i phyir ’ongs na de dag la ni khri’u g.yogs pa sbyin par byos shiḡ //.*

liberation. The chief concern in these stories is, rather, the smooth operation of the monastery—ensuring its cleanliness and its continued support from donors. Here the term is being used more broadly to indicate an awareness of what is appropriate in social situations. And those who are using the term are concerned with more immediate issues, such as keeping floors and seats free from spit and blood.

As I have noted, the rendering of “mindfulness” for the Sanskrit term *smṛti* is rather appropriate in these instances. However, this is a different kind of mindfulness than what we find in the *Satipaṭṭhana Sutta*, one that is not linked to formal meditation. As we have seen, in our *vinaya* the term used most often to indicate meditation in the *Kṣudrakavastu* is *dhyāna* (T. *bsamgtan*), which is never found together with *smṛtyupasthāna*. Nor is it suggested in these stories that monks need to be mindful for the sake of liberation. In two narratives, monks are asked to be mindful for the sake of keeping the monastery clean, and in two the monks are asked to be mindful for the sake of not embarrassing the larger community.

There are a few important points to be made here. Before looking at these four stories, I began with a story from another section of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*: the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*. There we find the story of Vairāṭṭasiṃha. This story indicates that some Mūlasarvāstivādin monks were aware of the association between *smṛtyupasthāna* and seated meditation. However, in the majority of instances where the term is used, this association is not in play. Between Vairāṭṭasiṃha’s story and the four stories cited above we can begin to see the variety of voices present within the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition alone. Clearly, the term *smṛtyupasthāna* had currency in Mūlasarvāstivādin monasteries. There was, at least, enough talk of “applying mindfulness” that monks could relate to one another using this term. The author(s) of our stories knew at least that the term had something to do with keeping your mind focused. And they used

the term for their own ends, which were not what we could call soteriological. Clearly some Indian monks would reject the notion that *smṛtyupasthāna* was a single act involving intense concentration on one object of awareness. This speaks of a broad Indian tradition, one locked in the social milieu around it. It speaks of a tradition in which certain monks were not burdened with the pursuit of ultimate liberation, but rather with the task—perhaps equally daunting—of making sure that everyone in the monastery behaved and got along.

Chapter II: The Vocation of a Monk

2.0—Introduction

2.1—Recitation and Meditation: A Closer Look at “the Two Activities of a Monk”

2.2—“Go and Wash Your Bowl”: Another Look at “Nandika the Meditator”

2.3—The Importance of Morality in *Śamatha* and *Vipaśyāna*

2.4—Meditation and Supernatural Powers

2.0 Introduction

In Chapter I, I made the point that the stock phrase “the two activities of a monk are recitation and meditation”—though it was used repeatedly in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*—is somewhat misleading. The *Mūlasarvāstivādin* monastic program involved a host of responsibilities and religious activities that do not fall into either of these two categories. The maintenance of reliquary mounds (S. *stūpa*), visiting and preaching to the laity, tending the sick, and seeing to the governance of the monastery are only some of the other activities these monks were expected to participate in.

In this Chapter we are going to look more closely at the role meditation played in the context of monastic life. Here we will look at meditation from a number of angles: Where was it practiced? To what degree was it valued against other practices? How did the practice relate to other important aspects of *Mūlasarvāstivādin* life such as the recitation of scripture and the observance of monastic rules? How was it perceived by the laity?

One of the main themes we are going to encounter in this Chapter is somewhat ironic. While meditation is presented as a method for bringing about tranquility, it seems the practice

did not necessarily bring peace between members of the monastic community. One of the most persistent themes surrounding meditation in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* is conflict. In what follows we will see that conflict and anxiety—both within the monastic community and between monks and the laity—followed this practice like the cart follows the ox, as it were. For example, in our *vinaya* monks who specialize in meditation repeatedly come into conflict with monks who specialize in recitation. They also come into conflict with royalty on multiple occasions.

Also in this section, we are going to look at the importance of adherence to the rules set out in the *Mūlasarvāstivādin* monastic code. Modern meditation movements—especially those lead by lay meditation teachers—tend to deemphasize the importance of monastic discipline in their depiction of the tradition. However, our sources make two facts clear. First, meditation was an activity that occurred in the context of monastic training. In other words, meditation was understood to be efficacious only when it was *preceded* by training in moral precepts. Second, if it happened that the pursuit of meditative attainment lead a monk to compromise his vows, the practice had to be abandoned for the sake of assuring that the monk did not break such vows in the future. The story of a meditation specialist named Nandika makes this point clear.

It seems also that there was a kind of ambivalence about practicing meditation in public view. On the one hand, in some instances meditation is presented as a kind of display—sometimes for the sake of displaying magical power and other times for demonstrating the mental discipline of the monks to the laity. On the other hand, we also find an impulse to keep meditation away from the eyes of the public. There were a number of actions that *Mūlasarvāstivādin* monks were expected to perform in private. Often these actions relate to the monk or nun's former trade. Meditation was also seen, to some degree at least, as an activity that should be kept away from the eyes of the public. This latter concern is no doubt tied to the fact

that “contemplation of the repulsive” was a relatively popular technique, a point that I demonstrated in the previous Chapter.

Statements to the effect that meditation was the essence of the Indian tradition give the practice a kind of absolute, untouchable value. But in this section, we will see that the value placed on meditation was very much dependent upon the context in which it was practiced. For example, in one story, the Buddha asks his monks to meditate for the sake of displaying magical power. However, in another story, it seems the Buddha wished to keep the practice private, out of the eyes of the public. As another example, Mūlasarvāstivādin monks clearly had the option of choosing meditation as an area of specialization. However, if this choice lead a monk to compromise his monastic vows, a schedule that excluded the possibility of meditation was imposed upon the monk. All-in-all, here we will see that the decontextualization of meditation is very misleading. The practice had a relative value. It was at times encouraged. But at other times, as in the story of Nandika, it was discouraged and even excluded from a monk’s options.

2.1 Recitation and Meditation: A Closer Look at “the Two Activities of a Monk”

In this section, we will explore the dynamic that existed between recitation and meditation in the Mūlasarvāstivādin community. The first thing we will see is that, between these two, the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition had a clear preference for the practice of recitation. In this section we will also begin to see the theme of meditation as a source of anxiety and tension within the monastic community. As I noted earlier, meditation was a practice that was surrounded by a variety of conflicts and tensions. In the context of this discussion we will see a tension that existed between monks who specialized in meditation and those who specialized in recitation.

Edward Conze once remarked that in the Sthaviravāda schools of the Indian tradition “the scholars ousted the saints, and erudition took the place of attainment.”¹ According to Conze, as Buddhism in India became more institutionalized and supported by the lay community, monks increasingly deemphasized contemplative practice in favor of recitation and ritual. In his book *Buddhist Saints in India*, Reginald Ray also wrote on the ongoing dynamic between meditation and recitation in the Indian tradition, drawing the same general conclusion as Conze.²

When considered alongside our sources, Conze’s statement is insightful, but a little misleading. It is certainly clear that in our Sthaviravāda school—represented by the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*—the “scholars,” i.e. reciters of sacred scripture, were held in higher

¹ Edward Conze, “Mahāyāna Buddhism,” in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths*, ed. R.C. Zaehner (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959): 296-320.

² Reginald Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, 18-19, 33-34.

regard than were the “saints,” i.e. the monks who specialized in meditation. The literature we will survey below leaves no doubt in regard to this. However, to say that monks who focused on meditation were “ousted” implies that they once held sway in the larger monastic community, and this is not evident in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. Also, as we will see, reciters did not understand themselves to be mere “scholars.” They understood themselves to be “saints.” In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, recitation as a practice is, on the whole, painted as more virtuous than meditation. This should come as no surprise, given that the preservation of the Buddha’s religious tradition was a great—perhaps the greatest—source of merit (S. *punya*) in the tradition. And in the eyes of the composers of our *vinaya*, mastery of “erudition” was no different than “attainment.” Evidence in our sources suggests that attainments such as “one-pointedness of mind” (S. *cittaikāgrya*, T. *sems rtseg gcig pa*) were brought to fruition through the spiritual discipline of scriptural recitation.

*

We begin by looking at a wide array of evidence to the effect that these monks favored the practice of recitation over meditation. In Chapter I, we saw that in Mūlasarvāstivādin sources meditation (S. *dhyāna*) is presented in rather vague terms. When the term is used, there is no clear articulation of how the mind is engaged. The only specific meditation instructions that are ever provided are those for the technique we know as “contemplation of the repulsive” (S. *aśubhabhāvana*). These instructions occur twice in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, and we saw both of these instances in the section on *aśubhabhāvana* from Chapter I.

But the treatment of *dhyāna* is not just vague in terms of instruction. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* never provides a clear picture of where and when meditation would have been practiced within the monastery. In most of the instances that meditation practice is

mentioned, the monk or monks who are meditating have left the monastery to some exterior location—usually the forest—in order to do so. As we will see in Chapter III, when monks leave the monastery to meditate it is safe to assume that some form of trouble will soon follow. If there were meditation sessions built into the daily schedule of Mūlasarvāstivādin monks then our authors were silent on these.

Recitation of verse and scripture is, however, another matter. In our sources, the practice of recitation is treated in much greater detail. Our monastic code includes a wealth of passages specifying how, when, where, and why recitation was performed. Gregory Schopen has pointed to a host of narratives in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* where ritual recitation is prescribed:

Of such recitations the closest to those referred to in the daily schedule are probably the ones referred to in the *Śayanāsanavastu*, where it is said that the Elder-of-the-Community recites a verse for the benefit of dead donors... or the one referred to in the *Kṣudrakavastu* in a set of rules meant to govern the behavior of a Mūlasarvāstivādin monk who is on the road... The latter looks much like an extension of the final recitative obligations found in the daily schedule to the road: whether in the *vihāra* or traveling, the monk must recite verses for those who provide for his needs. Apart from these instances, in the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* the Buddha himself says: “After having eaten, you must recite a verse of the Sage”... in the *Kṣudrakavastu* a monk is instructed to recite a verse of the Sage... over water used to wash the bowls of the monks before it is given as a curative agent to laypersons; again in the *Kṣudraka* the monks are instructed to recite such a verse before stepping on the shadow cast by an image or by the pole of the *stūpa*...³

³ Gregory Schopen, “Marking Time in Buddhist Monasteries: On Calendars, Clocks, and Some Liturgical Practices,” in *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters*, 265-266. This article was

And Schopen's list of passages is by no means exhaustive. In the *Kṣudrakavastu*—just one of several sections of the ponderous *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*—we find a host of specific information on the practice of recitation. We find, for instance, a narrative in which regional variation in the recitation of a *sūtra* causes confusion for one young monk.⁴ The Buddha makes a rule allowing for regional differences in the pronunciation of *sūtras*. Also we find the Buddha's detailed instructions on the metrical configuration of certain passages.⁵ Therein he explains which verses should be placed in meter and which should not. Again in the *Kṣudrakavastu* we find the Buddha's detailed instructions on the recitation of the core list of rules (*S. prātimokṣa*). These instructions include when and by whom the recitation should be done.⁶ All of this information, again, comes from just one of section of our *vinaya*.

Other passages that shed light on the arrangement of a typical day in a Mūlasarvāstivādin monastery further demonstrate that recitation was an activity that these monks would have encountered—and probably participated in—on a daily basis. Unfortunately, nowhere in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* do we find the daily schedule of an ordinary monk. We do, however, find a detailed daily itinerary that was to be followed by monks who were on probation (*S. pārivāsika*) and monks who were given penance (*S. śikṣādattaka*). This schedule appears twice

originally published in *Sūryacandrāya. Essays in Honor of Akira Yuyama on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (Indica et Tibetica 35), ed. P. Harrison and G. Schopen (Swistal-Odendorf: 1998) 157-179.

⁴ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 70b.5-71b.2; Tog Ta 70b.5-71b.2.

⁵ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 45b.6-46b.5; Tog Ta 67b.3-69a.3. 25b.1.

⁶ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 201b.2-202b.5; Tog Ta 302a.5-303b.7.

in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*—once in the *Pārivāsikavastu* and again in the *Kṣudrakavastu*.⁷ It applied to monks who had engaged in sexual activity—the first of four offenses (*S. pārājika*) that supposedly resulted in expulsion from the community. And though the schedule was made for penitent monks it does offer insight on the daily schedule of a North Indian monastery. For the purposes of this discussion what is most telling is the emphasis placed on liturgical recitations in the schedule of these penitent monks. The day begins and ends with recitations of the qualities of the Buddha:

If able to recite verses on the meritorious qualities of the teacher [the Buddha], he [the penitent monk] must do so. If not, a recitation specialist (*S. bhāṣaṇakaḥ*) must be asked.⁸ Also included in the penitent monk’s schedule was the recitation of verses for the owner and for powerful spirits living in the monastery. Thus we find this monk involved in a variety of obligatory recitation rituals that occurred on a daily basis. The passage above also makes it clear that recitation was understood to require some amount of training. Note that the passage states that he must recite these verses “if he is able” (*S. sa cet pratibalo bhavati*), and if not he must ask someone who knows the text (*S. bhāṣaṇaka*). So the monastic training—or spiritual program, we

⁷ The Sanskrit of the *Pārivāsikavastu* can be found at *Pārivāsikavastu*, Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts* iii 3, 97.12-98.10. The version in the *Kṣudrakavastu* is found at Derge ’dul ba Tha 102a.5-104b.2. For Gregory Schopen’s comments on the these passages, see “Marking Time in Buddhist Monasteries”, 260-266.

⁸ See Dutt’s edition of the *Pārivāsikavastu*, cited above. There, the Sanskrit reads: *sa cet pratibalo bhavati śāstur guṇa saṅkīrtanaṃ kartuṃ svayam eva kartavyam noced bhāṣaṇakaḥ praṣṭavyaḥ /*.

might say—of a penitent monk would have necessarily proceeded in the direction of recitation as a discipline.

These passages demonstrate that Mūlasarvāstivādin monks recited passages in the morning, in the evening, after meals, for the teacher (i.e. the Buddha), for donors, for spirits, in the place where they ate, and while they were walking from place to place both inside and outside the monastery. Thus, in *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* narratives, the practice of recitation bears four important features that meditation practice lacks entirely. First, it is a part of the daily schedule of the monks, undertaken at several set intervals of the day. Second, it is generally practiced inside the monastery—while in most instances where meditation is mentioned it occurs outside the monastery. Third, the literature repeatedly offers detailed instructions on how the practice is to be undertaken, with such technical nuances as how to treat regional variation and how and when to incorporate metrical configuration into the verses. And finally, while meditation is never presented as an obligatory activity, recitation clearly is. Consider again the text cited above. If the penitent monk does not know the text to be recited, he must find someone who does.

But these details on ritual recitation are not the only evidence we have to the effect that the Mūlasarvāstivādin religious program was more centered on recitation than meditation. We also find a difference in attitude toward monks who specialized in meditation versus monks who specialized in the recitation of scripture, the latter being held in greater favor. We can see this, for example, in the relationship between monks and Indian royalty. In the *Kṣudrakavastu*, we find two stories in which a monk who specializes in meditation upsets a king. We looked at the first of these two narratives in a previous section.⁹ This is the story of the monk named Gokulika.

⁹ See above, section 1.2—*Dhyāna* as Advanced Meditative Mind State.

Because he had meditated in the wilderness for so long, Gokulika was exceedingly unkempt. The king's retinue of queens saw him and thought he was a demon. They screamed for the king who ran to their aid. Gokulika told the king he was a monk and a "son of Śākya." The king asked if he had attained any degree of enlightenment. Gokulika answered that he had not and the king chased him out of the garden. Consequently, the Buddha made a rule that monks must remain well-groomed.¹⁰

In another story that we will visit in detail in our next chapter, a meditating monk who was practicing in the forest angered a local goddess by refusing to sleep with her.¹¹ For this reason, she hurled him through the air and he lands on top of King Bimbasara, who was sleeping on the roof of his palace. The king berated the monk and, consequently, the Buddha made a rule that monks must not meditate in such dangerous places, i.e. the forest.¹² Meditating monks frequently caused trouble with those outside the monastic community. And the fact that these meditating monks are infuriating royalty only exaggerates the trouble they cause. As I have noted, this characterization of meditating monks as somehow burdensome is typical of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. We will look more closely at this dynamic in Chapter III.

Compare these two stories to a third narrative found in the *Kṣudrakavastu*, one involving the monk Lavaṇabhadrika, whose recitations of the scriptures were particularly pleasing.¹³ In a

¹⁰ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 34a.3-35b.7. See above, section 1.2—*Dhyāna* as Advanced Meditative Mind State.

¹¹ See below, section 3.1—Ambivalence towards the Forest; the story is found at *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Da 35b.2-36a.2, Tog Tha 50b.5-51b.2.

¹² *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Da 35b.2-36a.2.

¹³ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 41b.4-44b.6; Tog 'dul ba Ta 61a.6-66a.3.

past life, he used all of his earnings to have a bell erected atop the burial mound of the Buddha Krakucchanda. Because of this action, he was born with a particularly beautiful voice. In one episode, his chanting was so melodious that it captured the attention of the King's most powerful elephant, Puṇḍarīka. When the king learned of this, he was so impressed with Lavaṇabhadrika that he decided to visit the monastery with gifts. So while the actions of meditating monks repeatedly infuriate royalty, we find the opposite is true in the case of this recitation monk.

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All the passages cited above are meant to demonstrate the preference this mainstream school held for the practice of recitation. They also demonstrate that meditation and recitation were understood to be two different activities, a point we have visited before. But there is one natural consequence of this differentiation between meditation and recitation—and of the Mūlasarvāstivādin preference for the latter—that may not be immediately obvious. This is the natural tension that would have developed between the mutually incompatible practices of oral recitation and silent meditation. This exact conflict is evident in two narratives of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. The first comes from the *Vibhaṅga* section and involves two groups of nuns who, despite their efforts, simply cannot cohabit.

The Buddha, the Blessed One was dwelling in Śrāvastī, in the grove of Anāthapiṇḍada. The nuns Mahāprajāpatī Gaumtāmī and Dharmadinnā were also both dwelling in Śrāvastī. Mahāprajāpatī Gaumtāmī was a nun who specialized in meditation (S. *prahāṇikā*, T. *spong ba ma*) and she had a following of nuns who specialized in meditation. Dharmadinnā specialized in recitation of the *sūtras* (S. *sūtrānta*, T. *mdo sde'i mtha' pa*) and she had a following of nuns who specialized in recitation of the *sūtras*. At one time those two groups lived in a single nunnery (S. *varṣika*). When Mahāprajāpatī

Gaumtamī and her assembly came into conflict with the other nuns, Dharmadinnā said to her assembly:

“Sisters, the Blessed One authorized nuns to enter the religious life, ordain, and be granted the requisites. All of which is because of Mahāprajāpatī Gaumtamī . Also, by the Blessed One it was said that the person who is careful in regard to the mind of another generates much merit. Because it was said thus, you also must practice focusing the mind on impermanence from time to time.” She admonished them thus. The nuns endeavored to focus the mind on impermanence.

When Dharmadinnā and her assembly came into conflict with the other nuns, then Mahāprajāpatī Gaumtamī said to her assembly:

“Sisters, through three innumerable aeons, through many hundreds of thousands of hardships, the Blessed One completely fulfilled the six perfections and realized unsurpassed wisdom, all of which was for the benefit of beings. Also, by the Blessed One it was said that the person who is careful in regard to the mind of another generates much merit. Because it was said thus, from time to time you too must recite *sūtras* connected with impermanence.” She admonished them thus. The nuns endeavored to make oral readings of *sūtras* connected with impermanence.

Although the nuns guarded their minds in this way, wholesome qualities did not develop, like a lotus without water.

On account of his faith, a layman named Saga invited Dharmadinnā to a feast with all the requisites. At some other time, the lay follower Saga came to pay homage at the feet of Dharmadinnā. Dharmadinnā said to him:

“Good Sir, very many nuns have undertaken to dwell in a single nunnery, and have guarded their minds. However, because wholesome qualities are not developing, like a lotus without water, could you commit to the building of a nunnery for the community of nuns?”¹⁴

¹⁴ *Vinayavibhaṅga*, Derge ‘dul ba Cha 188a.5-196a.6; *sangs rgyas bcom ldan ‘das mnyan yod na rgyal byed kyi tshal mgon med zas sbyin gyi kun dga’ rab na bzhugs so // mnyan yod na dge slong ma skyed gu’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mī dang / chos byin gnyis las skye dgu’i bdag mo chen po gau ta mī ni spong ba ma ‘khor yang spong ba ma dang ldan pa yin la / chos byin ni mdo sde’i mtha’ pa ‘khor yang mdo sde’i mtha’ pa dang ldan pa yin te / de gnyis dbyur khang cig tu gnas par khas blangs nas gang gi tshe / skye dgu’i dbag mo chen mo gau ta mī ‘khor rnam par langs par gyur pa de’i tshe na chos byin gyis rang gi ‘khor la nu mo dag bcom ldan ‘das kyis dge slong ma rnams la rab tu ‘byung ba dang rdzogs par bsnyen pa dge slong ma’i dngos po rjes su gnang ba gang yin pa de thams cad skye dgu’i bdag mo chen po gau ta mī las brten pa yin la / bcom ldan ‘das kyis kyang gzhan gyi sems srung ba’i gang zag ni bsod nams mang du skyed par byed do // zhes gsungs kyis / khyed cag kyang re zhid mi rtag pa nyid yid la bya ba sgoms shig ces ‘doms par byed cing // de dag kyang mi rtag pa nyid yid la bya ba sgom par rtsom mo // gang gi tshe chos byin gyi ‘khor rnam par langs par gyur pa de’i tshe na skye dgu’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mī yang rab gi ‘khor la nu mo dag bcom ldan ‘das kyis bskal pa grangs med pa gsum gyis dka’ pa spyod pa brgya stong phrag du ma dag gis pha rol tu phyin pa drug yongs su rtsogs par mdzad de bla na med oa’i mkhyen pa thugs su chud pa gang yin pa de thams cad sems can la phan pa’i rgyu yin la / bcom ldan ‘das kyis kyang gzhan gyi sems srung ba’i gang zag ni bsod nams mang po skyed par byed do zhes gsungs kyis / khyed cag kyang re zhid mi rtag pa nyid dang ldan pa’i mdo sde’i mtha’ dag kha ton gyis shig ces ‘doms par byed cing / de dag kyang mi*

We visited this narrative briefly in the previous section on *dhyāna*. Here Dharmadinnā admonishes her followers to “focus the mind on impermanence,” like the followers of Mahāprajāpatī, who are meditation specialists (*S. prahāṇikā*). For the purposes of this section, our narrative speaks to a predictable, logistical conflict that occurred within the Mūlasarvāstivādin monastic community. Attainment in meditation requires long hours of sustained, uninterrupted concentration. This, in turn, requires long hours of seated, silent practice in a space designated for meditation. The memorization of texts also requires long hours of application, and the oral recitation of scripture. This explains why neither group could make any progress in their religious programs, i.e. why, “like a lotus without water, wholesome qualities did not develop.” Meditators cannot practice *without* silence and reciters cannot practice *in* silence. It is a natural, predictable tension.

One interesting feature of this story is that it places the two practices of meditation and recitation on an even footing. Here the two practices would seem to occupy a very similar space in the monastic program. Note that they both center on the doctrine of impermanence (*S. anitya*). And in this narrative, the conflict between Mahāprajāpatī and Dharmadinnā is painted as a fairly

rtag pa nyid dang 'dan pa'i mdo sde'i mtha' dag kha ton du byed par rtso ma mo // dge slong ma dag de ltar phan tshun sems rjes su srud bas dge ba'i chos rnams kyis mi 'phel te / chu med pa nas utpa la bzhin no // chos byin la dge bsnyen sa ga zhes bya ba mngon par dad pas des yo byad thams cad kyis de mgron du bos so // dus gzhan zhig na dge bsnyen sa ga chos byin gyi rkang pa la phyag 'tshal du 'ongs pa dang / chos byin gyis de la smras pa / bzhin bzangs dge slong ma rab tu mang po dag dbyar khang gcig tu gnas par khas blangs pas de dag phan tshun sems rjes su srung bas dge ba'i chos rnams kyis mi 'phel te chu med pa nas utpa la bzhin du gyur na khyod kyis dge slong ma'i dge 'dun gyi phyir dbyar khang byed du 'jud nus sam /.

amicable one. In a mutual effort to coexist, both sides try to make concessions to the other. Although in the end their differences are irreconcilable, the author(s) of this narrative did not place blame on either side of the conflict.

However, our second narrative involving conflict between reciters and meditators is not so amicable. It leads to name calling, bad *karma*, and an unfortunate rebirth. A narrative from the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* tells the story of a meditation monk (S. *prahāṇika*) who was ordained in the time of the Buddha Kāśyapa.¹⁵ At one time, he arrived at a monastery and immediately began practicing meditation. However, he was unable to attain “one-pointedness of mind” (S. *cittaikāgrya*, T. *sems rtseg gcig pa*) because of the noise created by other monks who were reciting texts. Again and again the meditation monk found himself unable to meditate because of the noise created by the recitation of other monks, and he became exceedingly angry. In a fit of frustration, he likened the reciters to croaking frogs. As a consequence of this outburst, the meditating monk was reborn as a frog. The Mūlasarvāstivādin authors of this second story are coming down on the side of the reciters. First of all, the meditating monk is presented as one against many. And his response to the situation is not blameless.

*

All of these stories serve to demonstrate that Mūlasarvāstivādin monks held recitation as the more preferable of “the two activities of a monk.” The practice is treated in greater detail throughout their literature and those who specialize in it are generally portrayed in a more favorable light. It is not difficult to imagine a number of reasons why recitation would come to

¹⁵ *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts*, iii 1, 56.20-57.18; Derge ‘dul ba Kha 151a.2-151b.2; Tog ‘dul ba Kha 199a.3-199b.7.

be favored over seated, silent meditation. To begin with, more and more emphasis would have to be placed on recitation as the Indian tradition developed over the centuries. As the canons of the various schools grew, a greater number of monks would have to be given time and training to preserve them. Furthermore, we know that the texts, which had been preserved orally, began to be written down sometime in the first few centuries of the Common Era, perhaps sooner. Unfortunately, the enterprise of trying to preserve the texts in writing was not as successful as we might hope, at least not for the Sanskrit versions. Nevertheless, the introduction of writing into the milieu of an oral tradition must have brought with it a host of new roles and responsibilities. So as this literary tradition of Indian Buddhism grew, more and more monks would have to take on recitation as a field of specialization.

Another likely reason for this preference was that the preservation, proliferation, and generation of these texts was understood to be a tremendous source of merit.¹⁶ In the Indian Buddhist worldview we find a long line of successive Buddha's who appear after the message of the previous Buddha has dissipated. It is the responsibility of monks to preserve the Buddha's teaching for as long as possible, though it seems there was, from early on in this tradition, an understanding that attempts to preserve the teaching were ultimately doomed to fail. This, again, is where Conze's statement—to the effect that “the scholar's ousted the saints”—is misleading. As the preceding discussion makes clear, these scholars never saw themselves as anything but saints who were performing the essential task of maintaining the founder's message. The designation of reciters as “scholars” and meditators as “saints” does not appear in our literature.

¹⁶ See Chapter I, “The Earliest Abhidharma,” in Frauwallner, *Studies in Abhidharma Literature*.

Here Frauwallner discusses the generation of *abhidharma* literature as a source of merit.

In the Indian context, scriptural recitation as a source of great merit also allowed for a certain reciprocal relationship between monks and the laity. Study and recitation (*S. adhyayana*) of the Vedas is one of the “six duties of a brahmin” prescribed in *The Laws of Manu* (*S. Manusmṛti*). Recitation would have been widely and easily recognized as an effective dimension of religious practice. It provided a means by which merit could be accumulated for donors who sponsored the efforts of the monks. The passages cited above make it clear that such donors were both living and dead. It also allowed for the propitiation of local spirits.

But this emphasis on recitation is also not surprising when we consider how the two activities of meditation and recitation overlap in terms of their effect on the mind. Recounting his training in recitation in a Tibetan monastery, George B.J. Dreyfus writes:

During this process, I discovered that after a few minutes of memorization, my usually overactive mind would calm down and become more focused. I felt happy and soothed with enhanced concentration.¹⁷

Dreyfus’ comments encourage us to consider “the two activities of a monk” in a different way. Why would the ends we associate with meditation—calm and concentration—not also be associated with recitation? Our sources make it clear that they were. It seems the two activities were understood to serve a similar function in the Mūlasarvāstivādin monastic program: they were both used as a means to train and calm the mind.

On the one hand, these were understood as two separate practices in the Mūlasarvāstivādin monastic community. In fact, they were so different that they were, in some instances, mutually exclusive. Earlier in this section, we looked at narratives in which the

¹⁷ George B.J. Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003), 96.

coupling of recitation and meditation lead to conflict among monks and nuns. There are however, three instances in the *Kṣudrakavastu* in which meditation and recitation are placed side-by-side, but without a resulting quarrel. We find, for instance, a story in which monks go into the forest for the sake of practicing meditation and recitation.

The Buddha, the Blessed One was staying in Śrāvastī, in Jetavana, the park of Anāthapiṇḍada...

Monks who were elders (S. *sthavira*) went to a place in the forest and commenced the practices of recitation (S. *vācana*, T. *bklag pa*)¹⁸ and meditation (S. *dhyāna*, T. *bsam gtan*).¹⁹

Clearly these monks had gone into the forest to engage in mental training away from the bustle of the monastery. And both of these activities are cited as their means. So both recitation and meditation occurred, at least at times, in the forest.

Also in the *Kṣudrakavastu*, we find a passage that links both of these practices with the Sanskrit term *manasikāra*, and this is no small detail. In a previous chapter, I discussed how the term *dhyāna* is often found in proximity to the Sanskrit term *manasikāra*, which Edgerton defines as “fixing in mind, mental concentration, (esp. intense) attention, thought.”²⁰ In one

¹⁸ Here the Tibetan *bklag pa* is probably translating some form of the Sanskrit $\sqrt{vāc}$, most likely *vācana*, meaning “the act of reciting.” The Tibetan *‘don pa*, which translates the *adhyayana* form of the Sanskrit root $\sqrt{adhī}$, is found more often in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*.

¹⁹ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 71b.2-71b.7; *sangs rgyas bcom ldan ‘das mnyan yod na rgyal byed kyī tshal mgon med zas sbyin gyi kun dga’ ra ba na bzhugs so //... dge slong gnas brtan gnas brtan dgon pa’i gnas su dong ste bsam gtan dang bklag par bya ba dag brtsams so //*.

²⁰ Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, s.v. *manasikāra*.

passage we find these activities— meditation (S. *dhyāna*), recitation (S. *adhyayana*), and mental focus (S. *manasikāra*)—all grouped together:

There was a householder living in Śrāvastī who from time to time went to the Jetavana. When he saw monks exerting themselves in the practices of meditation (S. *dhyāna*, T. *bsam gtan*), recitation (S. *adhyayana*, T. ‘*don pa*), and mental focus (S. *manasikāra*, T. *yid la byed pa*) he was greatly impressed by their demeanor, practice and accomplishments.²¹

Notice first in this second narrative that the religious practices of the monks are spoken of as a display. We will talk more about this in a later section of this chapter. Note also in this passage that the two activities were kept in close proximity, and they were understood to have the same impressive effect on the laity. Here recitation is placed alongside meditation and mental focus, and is presented as part of the monks’ mental training.

Finally, in the *Kṣudrakavastu*, we find a passage that links recitation with the attainment of “one-pointedness of mind” (S. *cittaikāgrya*).²²

²¹ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 256b.7-257a.1; *mnyan yod na khyim bdag cig gnas pa de dus dus su rgyal byed kyi tshal du nye bar ‘ongs te / des de na dge slong dag bsams gtan dang / ‘don pa dang / yid la byed pa’i rnal ‘byor la brtson pa mthong nas / de de dag gi spyod lam dang / spyod pa dang / sgrub pa des mngon par dad de /*

²² *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 116a.1-116a.3; *sangs rgyas bcom ldan ‘das mnyan yod na rgyal byed kyi tshal mgon med zas sbyin gyi kun dga’ ra ba na bzhugs so //... dge slong rnams kyi sgo btod cing sgo ‘phar ‘jug par mi byed pas bsam gtan dang ‘don pa la zhugs pa dag snang ste / de dag bram ze dang khyim bdag dag gis mthong nas nye bar ‘ongs te de dag gnam brjod*

The Buddha, the Blessed One was staying in Śrāvastī, in Jetavana, the park of Anāthapiṇḍada...

Because monks did not shut their doors and instead left them ajar, their practice of meditation (S. *dhyāna*, T. *bsam gtan*) and recitation (S. *adhyayana*, T. *'don pa*) became visible. Brahmans and householders saw them, and when the laymen who had come there began to chat, the monks could not attain one-pointedness of mind (S. *cittaikāgrya*, T. *sems rtseg gcig pa*).

The Blessed One said: “Monks, you must shut your doors.”

Here again meditation and recitation are presented as occurring side-by-side. But here we find one interesting addition: the aim of “one-pointedness of mind” (S. *cittaikāgrya*). Given what we have seen before, regarding conflict between reciters and meditators, this may seem strange. But clearly some Mūlasarvāstivādin authors saw an overlap between the effect of these two practices. This and the other passages speak of recitation not only as a means for garnering merit, nor just as a means of preserving the tradition. They understood recitation as a means of cultivating and disciplining the mind, with results similar to those that we associate with meditation.

This point may become clearer if we consider again the teaching on “entering the womb”, which we discussed at length in the previous chapter. This sermon was preached to the monk Nanda, whose greatest obstacle to spiritual development was passion. It is basically a long catalogue of the disgusting features of human life—particularly the body of a pregnant woman and the state of the fetus it contains. Memorization and recitation of this *sūtra* would surely have had a similar effect as silent meditation focused on the body, i.e. “contemplation of the

pas sems rtseg gcig pa nyid du ma gyur nas / bcom ldan 'das kyis bka' stsal pa / dge slong dag sgo 'phar gzhus bar bya'o //

repulsive” (S. *aśubhabhāvana*), which was intended to counteract lustful impulses. Robert Kritzer makes a similar point in the following way:

The account of gestation [in the teaching on “entering the womb”] occurs in the context of a sermon on the suffering inherent in rebirth, and the emotion elicited by the physiological details is neither scientific detachment nor wonder at the miracle of life. We are reminded of the filth in which the fetus grows and the pain that it experiences, at both the embryonic stage and in the seventh month, when it is fully capable of appreciating its predicament. In the Buddhist meditation on the body, the practitioner is explicitly told that the enumeration of the hairs, sinews, guts, bones, etc., is for the “direction of the attention to repulsiveness.” In this *sūtra*, Nanda is not meditating, but the message that he is hearing is that the body, beginning from the porridge-like liquid in the hot, filthy pot-like womb, is an unsatisfactory, suffering mess, consisting of vast numbers of components, formed and arranged by often grotesquely named winds.²³

In the previous chapter, I discussed the teaching on “entering the womb” and the instructions for “contemplation of the repulsive” (S. *aśubhabhāvana*) contained within it. Given what we have seen in this section it seems likely that a *sūtra* such as the *Garbhāvākṛānti* would have been recited either in preparation for, or in lieu of the actual practice of “contemplation of the repulsive.” Clearly recitation was understood to have the same pacifying qualities that meditation did. It was understood as another means of cultivating the mind—a separate practice that bore the same result.

²³ Kritzer, “Life in the Womb,” 88.

It has been said of meditation that it was the “the universal method of mental culture of all Indian religious schools.”²⁴ What we have seen here indicates that recitation was included among the practices of mental culture. It was certainly understood as such among the Mūlasarvāstivādins. It naturally bore the same results as meditation. Not only that, but it was the preferred means of mental exercise among Mūlasarvāstivādin monks.

²⁴ Masaharu Anesaki and Junijirō Takakusu. “Dhyana,” *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James A. Hastings, vol. 4 (New York: Scribner, 1912), 702.

2.2 “Go and Wash Your Bowl”: Another Look at “Nandika the Meditator”

In the *Kṣudrakavastu*, we find a stenciled passage that was commonly used throughout the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* to describe the moment of enlightenment for one or more followers. Here, it is quoted from the story of Jyotiṣka, one of the Buddha’s most eminent monks:

Then the Blessed One said to him, “Come here. Come here, monk, and practice the life of purity.” And the moment he said this, Jyotiṣka found himself shaved, dressed in monk’s robes, with an alms bowl and a pitcher in his hand. With his head and face shaved, the hair came to only seven days growth, and he appeared as a monk who had received full vows 100 years ago. Because the Tathāgata said “Come here,” his head appeared shaved, he came to wear monk’s robes, and his senses immediately became calm. With the permission of the Buddha, he covered his body. When the Blessed One had given him the teaching, he exerted himself, made effort, and applied himself. Because he did so, he came to understand this wheel of rebirth with its five destinations, both moving and stopped. He struck down all conditioned states with their inherent disintegration, collapse, dispersal, and ruin. Then, having abandoned all impurity, he directly realized the state of a liberated being (*S. arhat*).²⁵

²⁵ The whole story of Jyotiṣka is found at *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 12a.3-31a.5. This passage is found at Derge ‘dul ba Tha 25b.1-25b.6; *de la bcom ldan ‘das kyis dge slong tshur shog tshang par spyang spyod ci gces bka’stsal ma thag kho nor skra byi zhing sna ma sbyar bgos nas / lag ba lhung bzed dang byam bum dang lngan pa dang / skra dang kha sbu bregs bas*

This passage is found—with very little variation—in a number of Mūlasarvāstivādin narratives wherein a monk or nun becomes enlightened. And while not all moments of enlightenment are described in this exact way, many of them are. In the *Kṣudrakavastu* alone we find this same passage, identical in wording, in the enlightenment of Gavampati,²⁶ Kātyāyanīputra,²⁷ Lavaṇābhadrīka,²⁸ Daśapūtra, and Pāla.²⁹

Notice in this passage that the transition from lay person to monk is presented as a kind of magical transformation. The act of ordaining causes the head to be shaved, causes robes to appear, and causes one’s senses to be calmed immediately. And it is this transformation that makes the highest state of liberation possible for the individual. In the previous chapter’s section on *dhyāna* we dealt briefly with the importance of observing moral precepts in Mūlasarvāstivādin soteriology. In the example I discussed, Dharmadinnā’s progress along the

*zhag pa ngun lon pa tsam du gyur cing / dge slong bsnyen par rdzogs nas lo brgya lon pa'i
 spyod lam lta bur gnas bar gyur to // de bzhin gshegs pas tshur shog bka' stsal pas // skra byi
 snam sbyar gyon pa'i lus ldan zhing / mong la dbang po rab zhir gnas 'gyur te / sangs rgyas
 dgongs pas lus gzugs bkab par gyur // bcom ldan 'das kyi dre la lung phog nas des brtsal ba
 dang / 'bad pa dang / bsgrim pa byas bas 'khor ba'i 'khor lo cha lnga pa g.yo ba dang / mi g.yo
 ba 'di nyid rig ste / 'du byed kyi rnam pa thams cad nyams pa dang / lhung badang / rnam par
 'thor ba dang / rnam par 'jig pa'i chos nyid kyi bcom nas nyon mongs ba thams cad spangs pas
 dgra bcom pa nyid mngon sum du du byas te /.*

²⁶ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 56a.5-59a.6; Tog 'dul ba Ta 83a.7-85b.7.

²⁷ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 283b.4-284a.1.

²⁸ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 42a.6-42b.2.

²⁹ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 178b.1-b.7.

stages of enlightenment was stratified according to the degree to which she had committed herself to monastic discipline. And when she was fully ordained, she achieved the highest degree of enlightenment—the state of an *arhat*. In fact, passages in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* that depict moments in which a person attained the highest state of liberation inevitably include a mention of the fact that he or she first took the vows of a monk or nun. On this point, Mūlasarvāstivādin literature does not waiver.

In this section and the next, we are going to look at the emphasis placed on adherence to monastic rules in Mūlasarvāstivādin sources and how this emphasis related to the practice of silent, seated meditation. Modern meditation movements have greatly deemphasized the role of monastic discipline in Buddhism, and this can certainly be traced to philosophical and religious developments in the West. Robert Thurman once remarked that America will never and could never have a Buddhist monastic community of the size and significance that we find in Asian countries.³⁰ According to him, Americans are too averse to the idea of “the free lunch.” This attitude is surely a facet of our Puritan heritage, specifically Puritan suspicions towards European clergy. And this discomfort with “the free lunch” has caused institutional monasticism to be deemphasized in representations of the tradition that are packaged for the West.

Our Mūlasarvāstivādin sources convey their own notions regarding the importance of monasticism—and these are not tailored to modern, Western sensibilities. In the *Vinayavibhaṅga* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* we find a brief but telling exchange between a young boy and a Buddhist monk.³¹ The monk has just explained the wheel of rebirth with its various destinations

³⁰ Robert A.F. Thurman and Sheldon Rochlin, *Robert A.F. Thurman on Buddhism*. (New York: Mystic Fire Video, 1999).

³¹ *Vinayavibhaṅga*, Derge ‘dul ba Ja 113b.3-122a.7.

to the boy. The boy then asks how one can secure rebirth in the realm of the gods. The monk ensures the boy that the way to secure a higher rebirth is by entering the order of the well-spoken *dharma* and discipline (*S. vinaya*). The boy then asks what entering the Buddhist monastic order entails. The monk replies, “For as long as one lives, celibacy is practiced.” The boy states flatly that this is impossible and asks if there is another way. This episode may have been intended to provoke laughter among the monks who heard it. And the monk’s concise report of his vocation is certainly an oversimplification. Nevertheless, here a monk sums up his entire religious program in one word: celibacy.

Monastic discipline, meditation, recitation, and host of other ritual, practical, and administrative responsibilities were all features of the spiritual regimen that we find in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. The first of two these—monastic discipline and recitation—are repeatedly emphasized as the most valuable of all of these practices. This should come as no surprise given that we are examining the work of monks whose specialization centered on the preservation and compilation of stories that outlined and explained the rules that monks were expected to live by.

In the previous section we saw two stories in which monks and nuns who specialized in meditation were unable to practice in the presence of those who specialized in the recitation of scripture. In both stories, the differences were irreconcilable. We saw that, in the one story where our authors did cast blame, they did so upon the meditating monk. So here, recitation trumps meditation in terms of its perceived importance.

There is another *Mūlasarvāstivādin* story in which adherence to monastic rule also trumps meditative practice. This is the story of Nandika, and it sends a clear message regarding the importance of strict obedience to monastic rule versus meditative practice. In Nandika’s story, it

is made clear that when pursuit of meditation—despite being “one of the two activities of a monk”—might lead one to compromise his vows, it must be abandoned.

Nandika’s story begins in the following way:

The Buddha, the Blessed One was staying in Śrāvastī, in Jetavana, the park of Anāthapiṇḍada. In Śrāvastī, there dwelt a monk named Nandika. Because he always practiced meditation in solitary places, he became known as “Nandika the meditator.”

At one time he, having assumed the cross-legged position, began to practice meditation (*S. dhyāna*, *T. bsam gtan*). Gods from the realm of Māra afflicted him. Later, when he was sitting in the cross-legged position, a goddess from the realm of Māra sat atop him in his cross-legged position (*S. paryaṅka*, *T. skyil mo krung phyed*). Because females are poisonous to the touch, he engaged in sex with her.

He was immediately injured by the wrong action, and was pierced with torment. He thought, “I have partaken of sensuality and practiced impure action. I have fallen. So that this fact will not be concealed with even one thought of hiding it, I will go now to the Blessed One. If there is something that can help me, I will remain a monk. If there is not, I will be as those who partake in sex [i.e. a layman].” With his right hand he carried his robes, and with his left hand he covered his penis. With tears he went to the Blessed One.

At that time, the Blessed One was sitting on a seat arranged in the middle of many hundreds of thousands of monks, and he was teaching the *dharma*. The Blessed One saw the Venerable Nandika from far away. Having seen him, the Blessed One thought, “If I do not speak to Nandika, he will vomit warm blood and die.” Having thought that, the Blessed One said to the Venerable Nandika, “Nandika, welcome! Why are you weeping?”

Nandika answered, “Lord, before I was full of joy (S. *nandika*), but now I am devoid of joy (S. *anandika*).”

“Nandika, why do you say this? What have you done?”

“Oh Lord, I, though not giving up my training, partook in sensuality and practiced impure action. However, this deed was not concealed with even one thought of hiding it.”

“Nandika, will you proceed in the training of the precepts for the rest of your life?”

“Oh Blessed One, I will proceed so.”³²

³² Nandika’s story is found at *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 102a.5-104b.2, Tog ‘dul ba Ta 154b.2-155b.2; *sangs rgyas bcom ldan ‘das mnyan yod rgyal bu rgyal byed kyi tshal mgon med zas sbyin gyi kun dga’ ra ba na bzhugs so // mnyan yod na dge slong dga’ ba can zhes bya ba zhid gnas pa de rtag tu dgon ba nags mtha’i gnas mal dag na bsam gtan byed pa zhid pas / de’i ming bsam gtan pa dga’ ba can zhes bya bar chags so // de gang gi tshe skyil mo krung bcas nas bsam gtan byed pa de’i tshe bdud kyi ris kyi lha dag gis gtsets so // de dus gzhan zhid na skyil mo krung bcas te ‘dug pa dang / bdud gi ris kyi lha mo zhid gis de’i skyil mo krung gi ste du ‘dug pa dang / bud med ni reg pa’i dug yin pas des de dang lhan cig log par spyad do // log par spyad ma thag tu zug rngus zug pa bzhin du gzhan nas sems bskyed pa bdag gis mi tshangs par spyod pa ‘khrig pa’i chos bsten pas / bdag song la ‘babs so snyam mo // yang bsams pa / bdag gis bcab pa’i sems gcig gis kyang ma bcabs bas re zhid bcom ldan ‘das kyi skyan sngar song ste / gal te skal ba yod pa zhid tu gyur na ni gnas so // ‘on te med na ni dga’ mgur spyad par bya’o snyam du bsams nas / lag pa g.yas pas ni chos gos rnams khyer / lag ba g.yon bas ni yan lag skyes bkab nas ngo mzud gnag cing mchi ma dang bcas bzhin bcom ldan ‘das gal ba der song ngo // de’i tshe bcom ldan ‘das ‘khor dge slong brgya stong du ma’i gung la gdan bshams pa la bzhugs te chos ston to // bcom ldan ‘das kyis tshe dang ldan pa dga’ ba can rgyang ring po kho na nas*

There are a number of important points to be made here. The first important thing to emphasize is that Nandika was a meditation specialist. Presumably, this was an area of monastic practice that he chose for himself. In Chapter I, I discussed how the phrase “the two activities of a monk are meditation and recitation” is at times deployed in stories when a monk is ordained. In the example I cited, the monk Mahāpanthaka is asked which of the two he will choose. Nandika had clearly made his choice; he practiced meditation so often that he earned the name “Nandika the meditator” (T. *bsam gtan pa dga’ ba can*). The original Sanskrit construction is probably *dhyāyin nandika*.

But the path he has chosen does not ensure his enlightenment. Nor does it earn him a place of esteem in the annals of Indian Buddhism. On the contrary, his pursuit of this religious ideal leads him into trouble. This is not the first time we have seen this narrative pattern in our treatment of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. Meditating monks are frequently portrayed as troublesome. In the previous chapter we saw the story of a monk whose penis repeatedly became aroused as he was trying to meditate. This led him to smash his penis between two rocks. In a previous section of this chapter we saw the story of a meditating monk who was persistently

gzigs so // gzigs nas kyang dgongs ba / gal te dga’ ba can la ma smras na gang khrag dron por skyugs nas dus byed par ‘gyur ba’i gnas de yod do ma du dgongs nas / tshe dang ldan pa dga’ ba can la ‘di skad ces bka’ stsal to // dga’ ba can ‘ongs pa legs so // khyod ji ste ngom zung gnag / des gsol pa / btsun ba bdag sngon ni dga’ ba can lags kyi da ni mi dga’ ba can lags so // dga’ ba can ci ste de skad smra / khyod kyis ci zhig byas / ctsun pa bdag gis bslab pa ma phul bar mi tshangs par spyod pa ‘khrig pa’i chos bsten te / de ni bcab pa’i sems gcig gis kyang ma bcabs lags so // dga’ ba can khyod ji srid ‘tsho’i bar du bslab pa la slob par spro ‘am / bcom ldan ‘das spro lags so //.

enraged by the reciters who surrounded him. His anger led him to actions unwholesome enough to warrant rebirth as a frog. In Mūlasarvāstivādin literature, meditating monks are consistently presented in this way—bothersome, and even harmful to themselves and other monks. We will talk much more about this in Chapter III. There we will see that this dynamic runs throughout the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. These meditating monks formed a kind of fraternity that stood on the fringe of the monastic order—ordained monks who did not mesh seamlessly with the larger community.

However, it is important to note that in this story Nandika’s mistake was not that he meditated, nor that he did so incorrectly. Rather, his mistake was that he devoted himself to a practice that took him away from the larger community for long periods of time. By separating himself from the monastery Nandika invited the circumstances that led to his infringement of one fundamental tenant of ordination: celibacy. Here we can begin to see the relative value placed on adherence to monastic rule—which, as we saw in the enlightenment of Jyotiṣka, was essential for the highest attainment of the tradition—versus a practice like meditation. Lauded though the practice may be, meditation itself was not a sufficient reason to distance oneself from the community of monks, even though long periods of practice may not have been possible inside the monastery. In the story of Nandika, Mūlasarvāstivādin monks are expressing anxiety over a certain danger that they perceived. This was the danger of monks spending long periods of time alone, without other monks to hold them accountable to the rules they had agreed to live by. As we will see in the chapter that follows, in Mūlasarvāstivādin stories, when monks go into the forest to meditate they inevitably encounter danger. The preference of the composers of our text was that monks stay close to the community, for their own safety and for the sake of maintaining their vows.

Presumably, the trouble Nandika finds himself in is rather dire. By sleeping with this goddess, he has committed one of four *pārājika*-class offenses—the most severe in the monastic code. In fact, this is the very first rule listed in all the lists of core rules (*S. prātimokṣa*) from the various monastic codes that survive, including the *prātimokṣa* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. The Mūlasarvāstivādin version of the rule reads:

Whatever monk, having undertaken the proper course and training of the monks, should, not having rejected the training, indulge in sexual intercourse, an unchaste thing, even so much as with an animal, this monk is *pārājika*, expelled.³³

However, because he was open about his infraction, without trying to hide it, he is granted a degree of leniency. Our story continues in this way:

Then, the Blessed One said to the monks, “Oh monks, the monk Nandika has engaged in inappropriate behavior. However, because it has not been concealed with even one thought to hide it, this is not a defeating violation (*S. pārājika*) of the rules. The monk Nandika and those who are like him are to be given a penitent stricture of discipline that lasts for the rest of their lives. And it must be given in this way...”³⁴

³³ This is Charles Prebish’s translation of the rule. See Charles Prebish, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline: The Sanskrit Prātimokṣa Sūtras of the Mahāsāṃghikas and Mūlasarvāstivādins* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), 51.

³⁴ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 102b.6-102b.7; *de nas bcom ldan ‘das kyis dge slong rnams la bka’ stsal ba / dge slong dag dge slong dga’ ba can gyis spyad bar bya ba ma yin pa spyad kyang sems gcig gis kyang ma bcabs pas / ‘di phas pham par ma gyur gyi / dge slong dga’ ba can dang gzhan yang rung ste / ‘di lta bu gang yin pa la ji srid ‘tsho’i bar du bslab pa’i sdom pa byin cig / sbyin pa yang ‘di ltar bya ste /*

Because Nandika came forward and freely admitted his mistake, the Buddha waved the penalty of expulsion. Thus Nandika was granted the state of a *śikṣādattaka*, “a monk who is given penance.”³⁵ The Sanskrit phrase *śikṣādattaka* is a bit ambiguous. The language warrants a closer look as it bears on our present discussion. The first member of the compound is *śikṣā*, which simply means “training.” The second member of the compound could be *dattaka*, *adattaka*, or *ādattaka*. This is the past passive participial form of the root $\sqrt{dā}$, meaning “to give,” with either no prefix, the negating prefix *a*, or the prefix *ā*, *ā* + $\sqrt{dā}$ meaning “to take.” At the end of the construction, we find the agentive suffix *-ka*. The term *śikṣādattaka* therefore carries one of three meanings: “one who is given training,” “one who is not given training,” and “one from whom training is taken.” Given the circumstances we find here, the first of these—“one who is given training”—seems most likely. This is the way Franklin Edgerton understands the compound.³⁶ The understanding of the term that makes the most sense here is that a *śikṣādattaka* is a monk whose training is given to him, as in “prescribed” or “designated,” rather than left to his own choosing. Nandika chose his religious specialization and it led him to disaster. Therefore a training schedule was imposed upon him. The status of “a monk who is given penance” was a life-long punishment, and could not be worked off. So what we have here is a standardized training meant to govern monks who have demonstrated that they could not govern themselves.

This is an important distinction because we know from the story that Nandika had previously chosen his general area of monastic training. He was a specialist in meditation. And we know that he spent a lot of his time going into the forest to meditate. This was not a monastic

³⁵ For more on the penitent monk, see Shayne Clarke, “Monks Who Have Sex: *Pārājika* Penance in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* (2009) 37: 1-43.

³⁶ See Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, s.v. *śikṣādattaka*.

vocation that he was relatively new to. He had gone into the forest to meditate enough that he earned the name “Nandika the meditator.” Because long periods of meditation generally occurred outside the monastery, they made him more susceptible to dangers. Nandika landed himself in serious trouble and was thus stripped of the disciplinary path he had chosen.

So let us consider the spiritual program that was imposed upon Nandika. After the last passage quoted above, the Blessed One enumerates a long list of behavioral restrictions for “a monk who is given penance” (S. *śikṣādattaka*) such as Nandika. To cite a few examples, such a monk could not be saluted by other monks, could not teach nuns, could not accuse another monk of a moral failing, and could not accept a high seat. But for the purpose of this discussion what is more telling is what Nandika *must* do, rather than what he *must not* do. After this list of behavioral restrictions, we find a long list of duties that are expected of the “a monk who is given penance.” The list reads:

Rising in the early morning, he must open the door. The vessels for the oil lamps must be removed. The monastery must be watered down, swept, and smeared with fresh cow dung. The toilet house must be cleaned. Dirt and leaves, or cold water, must be set out, depending on the season. Then the mouths of the drain pipes must be cleaned.

Knowing the proper time, he must arrange the seats, and set out the censer and incense. If he is able recite the qualities of the Teacher (the Buddha), he must do it himself. But if he is unable to do this, he must entrust it to one who knows what to recite.

He must attend to food preparation. When the food has been prepared, he must go to the roof and strike the gong (S. *gaṇḍī*).³⁷ He must fan the monks in the hot season. Then,

³⁷ On the translation of *gaṇḍī*, see Gregory Schopen, “Marking Time in Buddhist Monasteries,” 277, n. 11.

following those who are ordained but prior to those who are not ordained, with calm deportment, keeping in mind that he is not a monk, he must eat. Having eaten, the bedding and seats are to be covered, and the stands for the bowls removed.

When he sees the proper time, he must sweep the *stūpas* containing the hair and nails of the Tathāgata and cover them with fresh cow dung.

When it is time for the monks to assemble, he must arrange the bedding and seats and set out the incense and the incense burners. He must recite the qualities of the Teacher (the Buddha). He must announce the date saying: “Today is the tenth day of the half-month.” The verse to benefit the owner of the monastery and for the deities of the monastery must be recited.” But if he is unable to do this, he must entrust it to another monk.³⁸

³⁸ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 103b.6-104a.4; nang par sngar langs te sgo dbye bar bya / mar me’i snod bsal bar bya / gstug lag khang chag chag gdab par bya / phyag bdar bya / ba lang gi lci ba sar pa bzang pos byug par bya / bshang gci khang phyag bdar bya / sa dang / lo ma dag dang / chu grang mo ‘am / dron mo dus dang mthun par gzhag par bya / de nas wa’i kha phyag par bya / dus shes par bya ste / stan bsham par bya / bdug pa’i snod dang bdug pa nye bar gzhag pay bya / gal te ston pa’i yon tan sgrog par nu na / bdag nyid kyis bya / ci ste mi nus na smra ba po la gsol par bya’o / zas kyis skos sa la brtag par bya zhing / zas bkos zin nas khang steng du song ste / gaṇḍī brdung bar bya / tsha ba’i dus su dge slong rnams la bsil yab kyis g.yab par bya / de nas bsnyen par rdzogs pa thams cad kyis ni ‘og / bsnyen par ma rdzogs pa rnams kyis ni gong du spyod lam zhi bas dge slong gi ‘du shes nye bar bzhag ste zas bza’ bar bya / zas kyis bya ba byas nas gnas mal phug tu brtul bar bya / lhung bzed kyis gzhi dor bar bya / dus shes par byas nas / de bzhin gshegs pa’i dbu skra dang sen mo’i mchod rten dag phyags bdar bya zhing /

Notice first that this schedule keeps Nandika close to the monastery. All of the duties prescribed are duties that would have kept him close to the larger community of monks—for example, to the place where food was prepared and to the place of assembly. More importantly, this daily schedule affords Nandika no time to leave the monastery, and therefore no time to pursue meditation. Even if Nandika wanted to meditate inside the monastery, this schedule does not have periods of meditation built into it, and it is so busy that it certainly would not have allowed for long periods of seated, silent contemplation. On the contrary, those who designed this schedule seemed determined to keep a penitent monk on his feet—preparing food, arranging seats, and so on.

So in our story so far, Nandika “the meditator” invited trouble on himself when he spent long periods of time in the forest. In the solitude of the forest he was seduced by a goddess. As a result of the infraction he committed, he was given a schedule that excluded his continued specialization in meditation. Given the important place that meditation has occupied in Western studies on Indian Buddhist soteriology, we might assume that Nandika must therefore abandon any hope of realization or liberation. Apparently, the Mūlasarvāstivādins thought differently. Our story ends in this way:

*ba lang gi lci ba sar pa bzang pos byug par bya / 'du ba 'i dus su gnas mal bsham par bya zhing /
bdug pa dang bdug pa 'i snod gzahag par bya / ston pa 'i yon tan bsgrags par bya / dge 'dun btsun
pa rnams gsan du gsol / deng dge 'dun gyi tshes gcig lags te / gtsug lag khang gi bdag po dung /
gtsug lag khang gi lha rnams kyi don du tshigs su bcad pa gsungs shig ces nyi ma brjod par bya /
ci ste mi nus na dge slong la bcol bar bya 'o //* For the Sanskrit version, see *Pārivāsikavastu*,
Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts* iii 3, 97.12-98.10.

Then by setting to work, exerting himself, and struggling, [Nandika] understood this very wheel of rebirth with its five possibilities, both moving and stopped. And he understood the nature of all conditioned things with their inherent ruin, fall, dispersal and destruction. When he had abandoned all impurities he directly realized the condition of a liberated being (*S. arhat*).³⁹

So Nandika attained enlightenment. And we know exactly what spiritual program he undertook. We know that this program centered on the administrative and logistical duties listed above and did not include long periods of meditation. Nevertheless, the authors of this text understood—or at least wanted it to be understood—that such a program would lead one to the highest aim of the tradition. And it centered on doing what you were told when you were told to do it—a kind of selflessness, we might say. The message is clear: Diligence in meditative practice may or may not lead one to enlightenment, but strict adherence to monastic rule certainly will.

Now that we have visited Nandika's story at length, we can consider him for what he is—a literary creation that served a number of functions for the authors of our text.

Mūlasarvāstivādin monks used this narrative to explain the origins of, first, the exception to expulsion from the monastic community, and second, the state of penance that follows. Nandika is therefore put forward as a model for monks who might break or have broken the rule of complete abstinence. His story informs the procedural dimensions of future instances of a "defeating" (*S. pārājika*) violation of the rules.

³⁹ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 104a.6-7; *de nas 'bad brtsal bsgrims pas 'khor ba'i 'khor lo g.yo ba dang mi g.yo ba cha lnga pa 'di nyid rtogs nas 'dus byas kyi rnam pa thams cad chos nyid kyis 'jig pa / lhung ba / 'gyes pa / rnam par 'jig par bsgoms te nyon mongs pa thams cad spangs nas dgra bcom pa nyid mngpn sum du byas te /*.

This story served as a warning for monks to stay within the *legal boundaries* of the larger monastic community. Nandika's penance is not a relaxed one. It includes a host of undesirable duties and restrictions—cleaning the toilet, fanning the monks in the hot season, and eating after everyone else is finished. All this is brought upon Nandika because he strayed beyond one of the principal legal demarcations of the monastic community.

Beyond this, the story is also a warning for monks to exercise caution while they are outside the *physical boundaries* of the monastery. Nandika's trouble with the seductive goddess occurred because he placed himself in a position where such an encounter was possible. This is a common motif in Mūlasarvāstivādin literature, which we will discuss in greater detail in Chapter III. There seems to have been an anxiety among Mūlasarvāstivādins regarding the dangers of wondering in the untamed wild. Reasons for going into the wilderness, specifically the forest, vary in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. But meditation is frequently the reason, and the wilderness is consistently presented as dangerous and even deadly. In Nandika's story, the danger is articulated as a vulnerability to temptation that may lead to the breaking of monastic rules. So beyond simply providing the procedural norms in certain cases of a violation of monastic rule, the story serves as a warning for monks to stay within the legal and physical boundaries of the larger community.

But why would our authors have chosen a meditating monk to serve as the model of wrong behavior? Why not choose one of the infamous Group-of-Six monks? Or Devadatta? Or even Nandika “the reciter” for that matter? The choice of Nandika “the meditator” does not seem accidental for a number of reasons. First, when we consider again the story of the meditating monk who smashed his penis with a rock it would seem that at least some Mūlasarvāstivādins perceived meditating monks to be lascivious. This perception is most likely related to the fact

that, in order to practice long periods of meditation, such monks would have to spend long periods away from the monastery, without supervision. So the story is certainly indicative of the more general pattern we have seen in this *vinaya*—a prejudice against monks who specialize in meditation.

But there is another way to understand this choice. This story presents us with an interesting dichotomy—one that is only possible with the choice of “Nandika *the meditator*.” This dichotomy is defined by two religious practices: meditation and adherence to monastic rule—specifically the rule of absolute celibacy. We—and certainly Mūlasarvāstivādins also—associate meditation with blissful mind states and transcendent awareness. “The sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception,” “the attainment of cessation,” “one-pointedness of mind”—these are all lofty, otherworldly attainments that transcend the concerns of the mundane world. These ambitions are represented by Nandika’s aspirations in the beginning of the story; he repeatedly left the monastery in pursuit of such meditative attainments. There is no doubt that such concerns and aspirations had a marked influence on the Indian tradition. Otherwise we would not have an answer to questions like “What mental factors are present in the fourth *dhyānic* state?” Clearly such questions were present in the ancient Indian community of monks.

However, at the other end of our dichotomy, this story presents us with another concern, which was probably more widespread than questions about the mental factors present in the various *dhyānic* mind states. The practice of celibacy must have presented the Indian monastic community with a hefty set of very real concerns. And there is a wealth of evidence throughout the classical tradition to suggest that this was the case. Consider the core rules (*S. prātimokṣas*) that survive from the various ancient Indian schools. Among the first three categories of rules—the three most severe categories: *pārājika*, *saṅghāvaśeṣa*, and *aniyata*—eight of the nineteen

rules deal directly with restricting sexual contact and circumstances that could lead to sexual contact.⁴⁰ This was an aspect of monastic life that Indian monks spent a lot of time discussing and refining.

Consider also the conversion story of the Buddha’s half-brother, Nanda, which we looked at in detail in the previous chapter. Nanda’s greatest obstacle to religious attainment is, first, his lust for his wife, and then his lust for the nymphs he sees in heaven. The story of Nanda speaks directly to the challenges of maintaining celibacy. And in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* we find couched within Nanda’s story the teaching on “entering the womb”, which, as we have seen, is a prolonged treatment of the disgusting features of physical existence. In this *sūtra* we find one of only two places in the entire *Kṣudrakavastu* where meditation is explained in any detail. And in both instances the instructions are for “contemplation of the repulsive” (*S. aśubhabhāvana*), which was intended to combat lust specifically. So the Mūlasarvāstivādin recension of Nanda’s story is devoted entirely to the practice of celibacy. And there is a host of evidence to demonstrate that the story of Nanda was one of the most popular hagiographical narratives in the entire Indian tradition. Several versions of the story exist in Pāli—*Udāna* 3.2, and *Jātaka* 182. Section 5.4 of the Pāli *Therīgāthā* is understood to have been written by Nanda and focuses on the theme of overcoming passion. Two great Sanskrit poets created more elaborate versions of the story. Kṣemendra included his version of the Nanda story in “The Many Lives of the Bodhisattva” *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā*. And the Sanskrit poet Aśvaghōṣa himself composed

⁴⁰ See Prebish, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline*, where we find the core rules for both the Mūlasarvāstivādins and the Mahāsāṃghikas.

a long version of the story called “Handsome Nanda” *Saundaranandakāvya*.⁴¹ The story appears in Tibetan and Chinese versions, and it is referenced in several commentaries. The story is also widely attested in Indian art. Amaravati, Nagarjunikonda, Gandhara, and Ajanta all contain reliefs that depict Nanda, lavishly dressed and carrying an alms bowl behind the Buddha.⁴² This is in reference to the scene at the beginning of this narrative, in which the Buddha visits Nanda for alms but leaves before Nanda can feed him. A painting on the left wall of Cave XVI at Ajanta depicts Sundarī—Nanda’s wife—fainting at the news that her husband has renounced and will not return to her. There are also renderings of a wistful Sundarī in two reliefs at Amaravati and one at Borobudur.⁴³ Clearly this is a story that monks would have known and identified with. The story and its popularity demonstrate that the maintenance of celibacy was a great concern.

I have been describing two kinds of values and concerns—the original lofty and disembodied aspirations of Nandika “the meditator” versus practical concerns regarding the challenges of adhering to strict monastic regulations like celibacy. Given that Nandika does in fact attain liberation, it is clear which of these two concerns the authors of this text wished to emphasize. Nandika’s finds liberation through strict adherence to the rules given to him as a result of his infraction, not as result of his efforts in meditation. His pursuit of blissful mind

⁴¹ Aśvaghōṣa and Linda Covill (trans.), *Handsome Nanda* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

⁴² For more on the story of Nanda in Indian art, see Monica Zin, *Mitlied und Wunderkraft. Schwierge Bekehrungen und ihre Ikonographie im indischen Buddhismus* (Druck und Verarbeitung: Hubert & Co., 2006).

⁴³ Monica Zin, “The Story of the Conversion of Nanda in Borobudur,” in *Vanamālā, Festschrift für Adalbert Gail* (Berlin: 2006): 265-75.

states and transcendent awareness, which took him out of the monastery, led him to nothing but trouble, and he was consequently cut off from any such pursuits. The story of Nandika communicates clearly that, whatever lofty attainments are to be had, they are to be realized first and foremost within the context of strict monastic practice; this is the Mūlasarvāstivādin monk's primary concern. Any action—including meditation—that might lead one away from monastic discipline is to be cut off.

Nandika's story tells us something important about the place of meditation in the Mūlasarvāstivādin monastic program. Given what we have seen, it may be more fitting to say that celibacy was the defining practice of the Indian tradition, rather than meditation. It is after all the first rule—and therefore presumably the most important—in the long list of behavioral restrictions that defined monks and nuns, who were the only followers able to attain the highest aspiration of the tradition. In the story of Nandika, and the other stories we have seen, meditation is presented as an ancillary practice, which may or may not have been included in a monk's training. Nandika had practiced meditation enough that he had a reputation for it. But it did not lead him to any security or safety. And the exclusion of meditation from his training did not mean that he was cut off from the highest aims of the religious life. Nandika attained enlightenment, but he did so by following the rules and schedule that were given to him.

2.3 The Importance of Morality in *Śamatha* and *Vipaśyanā*

I would now like to turn to another biography from the *Kṣudrakavastu*, the story of the nun Somā. I want to look at this story not for its narrative, but for one passage it contains regarding meditation. This passage reinforces what has been said so far on the relationship between meditation and adherence to monastic rules—the former being subordinate to the latter. This passage from the story of Somā is one of the rare instances in which the *Kṣudrakavastu* mentions the popular categories of calm (S. *śamatha*, T. *zhi gnas*) and insight (S. *vipaśyanā*, T. *lhag mthong*) meditation.

Before looking at this passage, however, it will be helpful to look more generally at the Sanskrit compound *śamathavipaśyanā*. In the classical Buddhist tradition we find that meditation is often grouped into two closely related categories—*śamatha*, meaning “calm,” and *vipaśyanā*, meaning “insight.” Cultivation in the former of these two categories (*śamatha*, calm) is understood to engender unimpeded concentration (S. *samādhi*), and thus entrance into deep meditative states (S. *dhyāna*). The untrained mind is restless and dissatisfied. Calming meditation focuses the mind on one object to the exclusion of the myriad defilements (S. *kleśa*) that plague such a mind. Once the mind is trained to settle on one object for long periods of time, concentration (S. *samādhi*) has been attained. Following the cultivation of calm, the meditator can turn the focus of his or her mind towards the external world and see it as it is (S. *yathābhūta*), without the intervention of overpowering defilements. This produces wisdom (S. *prajñā*) and insight (S. *vipaśyanā*) about the true nature of reality, which is described in a variety of ways in the tradition.

The compound *śamathavipaśyanā* is found only twice in the *Kṣudrakavastu*. In the first case, it appears in a passage that recounts the attainments and qualities of the Buddha. The Buddha is praised as:

The sole guardian, singularly fearless, unrivaled, never speaking falsely, dwelling in calm (S. *śamatha*, T. *zhi gnas*) and insight (S. *vipaśyanā*, T. *lhag mthong*), master of the three modes of training.⁴⁴

This is reminiscent of what we saw in our examination of the term *dhyāna*. Here, again, meditative attainment is presented as a kind of superpower exhibited by an enlightened being.

The second instance of the compound *śamathavipaśyanā* is found in the story of the eminent nun Somā. When Somā begins her training as a nun, we find the following passage:

The Blessed One said, “Having depended upon morality (S. *śīla*, T. *tshul khrims*), and abiding in morality, the two teachings of calm (S. *śamatha*, T. *zhi gnas*) and insight (S. *vipaśyanā*, T. *lhag mthong*) must be cultivated (S. *bhāvanā*, T. *bsgom pa*).”⁴⁵

There are no other references to meditation in Somā’s story. She is renowned as the foremost among the Buddha’s nuns who can remember his sermons, suggesting an emphasis on scripture and recitation. Nevertheless, we find this passage on “calm” and “insight” set in the middle of her story.

⁴⁴ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 284a.5-6; *srung ba gcig pa / gcig tu dpa’ ba / zla med pa / gnyis su mi gsung ba / zhi gnas dang / lhag mthong la gnas pa / gdul ba’i dngos po gsum la mkhas /*.

⁴⁵ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 211a.1-2; *bcom ldan ‘das kyis tshul khyims la brten cing tshul khrims la gnas nas zhi gnas dang lhag mthong gi chos gnyis bsgom par bya’o zhes rig ste /*.

It is unfortunate that we do not have the original Sanskrit for this passage. Though the quote certainly reads like a stenciled passage, the Tibetan is never repeated in the *Kṣudrakavastu*. And the Sanskrit does not appear anywhere in any of the Sanskrit *vastus* of the Gilgit manuscripts. Our commentary—the *Āgamakṣudrakavyākhyāna*—is also silent on this passage. Still, the passage can offer some insights to our conversation on meditation and adherence to monastic rule. What is most interesting is that it asserts that calm (S. *śamatha*) and insight (S. *vipaśyanā*) are aspects of religious practice that depend upon morality (S. *śīla*). Though it could be rendered in English in a number of ways, the Tibetan is clear. It says that *śamatha* (T. *zhi gnas*) and *vipaśyanā* (T. *lhag mthong*) should be cultivated, and it introduces two conditions to this cultivation. First, the cultivation of these two is “dependent upon morality” (T. *tshul khyims la brten*). Here the Tibetan *brten* is probably translating one of two Sanskrit terms—*pratisaraṇa*⁴⁶ or *āśraya*⁴⁷. Both of these terms mean “leaning, resting, or depending upon.” Second, the cultivation of these two is done while “abiding in morality” (T. *tshul khrims la gnas*). Here, the Tibetan verb *gnas pa* is probably translating some form of the Sanskrit root *√sthā*, a word generally meaning “to abide”. Whatever the original Sanskrit, the meaning of the passage is clear. In the Mūlasarvāstivādin model of religious practice, meditation is only to be undertaken in the context of moral discipline.

The importance of this passage can be seen when we look at several studies on modern Buddhist monastic traditions. In fact, three studies from three separate geographical regions can be cited to demonstrate that this attitude towards meditation as subordinate to moral discipline is a widespread feature of the Buddhist monastic tradition. We might begin in Sri Lanka, with

⁴⁶ *Mahāvīyūtpatti*, #1301, #2316.

⁴⁷ *Mahāvīyūtpatti*, #1605, #2352, #6368, #6755, #6931, #7553, #7554, #7726.

Michael Carrithers and his work *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka*. Carrithers conducted interviews with several forest monks in order to gain insight into their practices and lifestyle, and one of his conclusions resonates with what we have seen here. Carrithers asked the various monks to explain the main purpose of their life in the forest. Despite the fact that these forest monks are widely known as meditation specialists, none of them answered meditation. They all answered morality (P. *sīla*).⁴⁸ At one point, Carrithers challenged the monks, arguing that morality need not be the basis of meditation and that meditation could instead be pursued for the sake of bolstering morality. He writes:

I proposed, as a contrast to the doctrinal position, that the list should be reversed, and the path should begin with meditation and end in generosity. That is, after first meditating, one would realize the significance of living a moral life by the Buddhist precepts; and such a moral life could in turn be the foundation of generous and compassionate activity in the world...

There are many doctrinal reasons for rejecting my conjecture, but the impatience and even outrage with which the monks heard it, and the unity of view with which it was rejected, left no doubt that *the monks place moral purity in the central position I had wished to accord to meditative experience*. I was, in effect, attacking the very ground of their way of life... [Morality (P. *sīla*)] is the basic emotional referent of the forest life.⁴⁹

We find a similar theme in the autobiographical work of Robert E. Buswell, who spent five years as a Zen monk in a Korea. In *The Zen Monastic Experience* Buswell recounts his time as a monk, offering detailed accounts of many features of monastic life, including the lay out of

⁴⁸ Carrithers, *Forest Monks of Sri Lanka*, 19.

⁴⁹ Carrithers, *Forest Monks of Sri Lanka*, 19-20. Italics are mine.

the monastery, the relationship between monks and their families, meditation sessions, the division of labor and administrative duties, textual study, and so on. In his conclusion to this work—titled “Toward a Reappraisal of Zen Religious Experience”—Buswell writes:

...[E]ven this seemingly obvious claim that Zen is intent on enlightenment—and that, by extension, its monasteries were formed to train people in such attainment—is not necessarily borne out when looking at its monastic institutions. While it is true that the meditation hall and the monks practicing there are the focus of much of the large monastery’s activities, the majority of its residents spend no time in meditation, and many have no intention of ever undertaking such training...

The testimony of the Korean monastery, however, suggests instead that a disciplined life, not the transformative experience of enlightenment, is actually most crucial to the religion. This need not necessarily be even an examined, or an informed life, though those would be highly prized, but one that is so closely and carefully structured as to provide little opportunity for ethical failings or mental defilements to manifest themselves.⁵⁰

In light of Buswell’s comments, consider again the story of the penitent monk Nandika, whose story we visited in detail in the previous section. I would argue that Buswell’s last sentence could be applied to Nandika with little or no emendation. All of Nandika’s actions were chosen for him because he demonstrated that he could not govern his own behavior without allowing “ethical failings or mental defilements to manifest themselves”. The fact that he chose to spend his time meditating won him no favor from the monks around him, and it brought him

⁵⁰ Robert E. Buswell, *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 218-219.

no leniency. Where Nandika's story diverges from Buswell's experience is in the notion of attainment. According to the story it was his adherence to the rules and schedule set for him that earned him liberation. Still, Buswell's analysis of the relationship between meditation and monastic discipline in modern Korean Zen resonates with what we find in our sources, despite some 2,000 years of separation between the two traditions.

Finally, we turn to Georges B.J. Dreyfus and his work on modern monasticism in Tibet. Like Buswell, Dreyfus undertook monastic training. His training centered on recitation of scriptures that were, in many instances, complete gibberish to him. Regarding the relationship between meditation and monastic discipline, he wrote:

...[M]editation has never been the concern of more than a minority. Some may believe that this lack of interest reflects a degeneration from some purer form of the tradition, but they are wrong. There is no obligation for a Buddhist monk to practice meditation. Being a good monk entails abiding diligently by the numerous rules of the Vinaya, and practicing meditation is not included in those rules. In general, to meditate is not a moral obligation, whereas to follow the precepts is. This is not to deny meditation an important role in Buddhism and in monastic practice, but to underscore that its role must be understood properly.⁵¹

From what we have seen, the attitude of these modern monks—again, from a variety of monastic traditions—appears to be a very old one. The stories cited above indicate that adherence to monastic precepts was the first and foremost concern of the Mūlasarvāstivādin program, not meditation. Meditation was not an obligatory practice. And, as the story of Nandika makes clear, when meditation renders a monk vulnerable to the breaking of his vows, it must be

⁵¹ Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 169.

abandoned. The passage cited above—from the hagiography of the nun Somā—again demonstrates an understanding of moral discipline as the dimension of religious practice that all others, including meditation, were oriented around.

This model of attainment within the tradition stands in contrast to the practices and assertions of modern meditation movements. Movements that have gained traction in the West are intended primarily for a lay audience, and they assert that monasticism—or at least some form of rigorous moral training—is not a necessary prerequisite for the highest spiritual aspirations of the tradition. Consider, for example, the Vipassana meditation program led by S.N. Goenka and his assistant teachers. Goenka and his assistant teachers offer ten-day courses in *vipassana* meditation. These courses accept all who apply, without any consideration of preliminary moral training. During the course, participants are asked to meditate for as much as twelve hours in one day. William Hart, one of Goenka’s assistant teachers, purported to outline the Buddha’s original spiritual program in a book called *The Art of Living*. The book centers entirely on the practice of *vipassana* meditation as it is prescribed by S.N. Goenka. Institutional monasticism is never mentioned.⁵² The same is true of other works that seek to introduce Buddhist meditation to a Western audience.⁵³ Given what we have seen, one cannot help but think that Mūlasarvāstivādin monks, and the forest monks of modern Sri Lanka, would be

⁵² William Hart, *The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation as Taught by S.N. Goenka* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

⁵³ For a few examples, see also Venerable Henepola Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2002); Noah Levine, *Against the Stream: A Buddhism Manual for Spiritual Revolutionaries* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007); Stephen Levine, *A Gradual Awakening* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1979).

incredulous regarding the efficacy of such an approach. And they would certainly disagree that such an approach constituted the Buddha's original teaching. The *Mūlasarvāstivādin* model of religious practice that we find is one in which the observance of rules is the keystone.

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Before moving on, there are a few observations to be made about the sociological implications of this emphasis on adherence to monastic rule. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* makes clear that Indian monks had good, practical reasons for following their own rules carefully. We see here a strong link between the social and legal dimensions of the tradition. Certain followers of the Buddhist tradition became monks, i.e. they chose to place themselves under a more stringent set of behavioral, legal restrictions. And for this they were afforded a much higher place in the social milieu of the tradition. Observance of the list of monastic rules is what defined one as a monk or nun. Every piece of evidence that we have from the ancient tradition indicates that some form of renunciation—be it the renouncing as a monk or dwelling in the forest, as is the case in the *Aṭṭhakavagga*—was fundamental to the Buddha's spiritual program. But if the rules of renunciation were somehow compromised, even if by only one monk, then the social status afforded to all monks came under scrutiny.

As we have seen, the composers of this *vinaya* insisted that monks exhibit deportment for the sake of ensuring continued support from the laity. In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, we find several instances of a stenciled passage in which a form of the Sanskrit root $\sqrt{śam}$ is used to describe the “calm”⁵⁴ that results from monastic training. It is not uncommon for lay followers to criticize monks who lack such calm. Given the frequency of these passages, a few instances will have to suffice. In the *Kṣudrakavastu*, we find a narrative in which the householder

⁵⁴ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. $\sqrt{śam}$.

Anāthapiṇḍada pays a barber to visit and service the monks of Jetavana monastery. Upananda and his infamous Group of Six monks cannot be satisfied with the hair cuts they are given. When Anāthapiṇḍada sees this, we find this passage:

The householder Anāthapiṇḍada commenced to blaming them, saying “See there! There is no calm for these renouncers in the well-spoken teaching and training.”⁵⁵

From this same *vastu*, in the story immediately following this, Anāthapiṇḍada has the same thought, worded exactly the same, again concerning the Group of Six, when he sees that they cannot be satisfied with how their nails are trimmed.⁵⁶ In these instances there is no doubt about the original Sanskrit. The Tibetan construct *nye bar* was used to represent the Sanskrit prefix (*upasarga*) *upa*. And *zhi ba* is consistently used to translate the Sanskrit root $\sqrt{\text{śam}}$. So the householder Anāthapiṇḍada is blaming the Group of Six monks for having no *upaśama*—“calm, tranquility”⁵⁷—despite their involvement in the teaching and the training (*dharmavinaya*) of the Buddha. This stencilled passage reflects a sensitivity to the watchful eyes of the community at large, which we have seen before.

We also find another stenciled phrase with a similar sentiment. When householders and brahmins want to criticize Buddhist monks, they very often blame them for being “certainly

⁵⁵ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 9a.2; *khyim bdag mgon med zas sbyin legs par gsungs pa’i chos ‘dul ba la ran tu byung ba rnams la nye bar zhi ba med pa lta ‘phya ba la zhugs so //*. The entire story can be found at *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 8b.1-9a.6.

⁵⁶ The story immediately following this presents the exact same scenario. See *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge Tha 9a.6-9b.6.

⁵⁷ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *upa* $\sqrt{\text{śam}}$.

oppressed by qualities of desire.”⁵⁸ So it seems that not only were their religious aspirations dependent on morality, but their material aspirations were as well. Ancient India was full of religious specialists from a wide array of traditions, all competing for donated resources. Outward deportment and controlled behavior would have been one of the chief features that marked the Buddhist monk as a suitable recipient of gifts.

⁵⁸ ‘*dod pa ’i yan tan dag gis gzir par nges so*. This phrase is found dozens of times in this *vastu* and others from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. For just a few examples from the *Kṣudrakavastu*, see Derge ‘dul ba Tha 32a.1, 32b.2, 33a.5, 33b.3, 68b.7.

2.4 Meditation and Supernatural Power

In his book *Finding the Quiet Mind*, which serves as an introduction to Buddhist meditation, Robert S. Ellwood writes:

Meditation is not magic... It will not remove temptations and distractions, pay the bills or solve family problems.⁵⁹

Here, meditation is presented as a practice that is meant simply to calm the mind. And this understanding of meditation is generally what we find in instruction manuals intended for a Western audience.

The fact that meditation has been distanced from the supernatural is ironic, particularly in the context of discussions on meditation in Indian religious traditions. In India these contemplative practices have long been associated with the attainment of supernatural power. As Alfred A. Foucher once noted, in India, supernatural powers do not actually exceed the limits of nature.⁶⁰ They are the natural and inevitable result of applying oneself to a spiritual program, or *yoga*. Different Indian religious traditions understood these powers to be unlocked in different ways.

⁵⁹ Robert S. Ellwood, *Finding the Quiet Mind* (Wheaton, Ill: Theosophical Publishing House, 1983), 7.

⁶⁰ Foucher, *La Vie du Bouddha: d'après les Textes et les Monuments de l'Inde*. Paris: Payot, 1949. Here I am using the abridged English translation by Simone Brangier Boas (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1963), 270-271.

In this section, we will look at the relationship between meditation and supernatural power in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. And perhaps no other story therein is more replete with miracles than The Descent at Sāṃkāśya, a narrative that is frequently depicted in Indian Buddhist art. In this story, the Buddha traveled to “the heaven of the gods of the thirty-three” to teach the *dharma* to his mother, who died only a few days after his birth. Not surprisingly, he was sorely missed on earth. At one point, the community of monks wished to know if the Buddha was doing well, and if he was still dwelling in heaven. The Venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana, one of the Buddha’s foremost followers, travelled to heaven to find out. But the fact that Mahāmaudgalyāyana traveled to heaven is not so telling as how he did it. The text reads:

Then, after the four assemblies had departed, the Venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana, aware that not much time had passed, entered into such a state of concentration (S. *samādhi*, T. *ting nge ‘dzin*) that, when his mind was settled in that way, he disappeared from Śrāvastī as quickly as a man might straighten his arm after he had bent it, or bend his arm after he had straightened it. And the Venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana saw the Blessed One in the heaven of the thirty-three, sitting on the throne of Indra near the *kovidāra* tree, teaching *dharma* to an assembly of gods.⁶¹

⁶¹ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Da 89a.4-7; *de nas tshe dang ldan pa maud gal ya chen pos ‘khor bzhi bo dag dong nas ring po ma lon par rig pa dang de ‘dra ba’i ting nge ‘dzin la mnyam par gzhag go // ji ltar sems mnyam par gzhag pa na ‘di lta ste / stobs dang ldan pa’i skyes bus dpung ba bsgrum pa las brkyang ba ‘am / brkyang ba las bskum pa tsam du de ltar de bzhin tshe dang ldan pa maud gal ya na chen po mnyam du yod pa nas mi snang bar gyur te / sum bcu rtsa gsum gyi lha’i gnas la brdod kar las shing pa ri dzā ta ka dang / ko bi da ra dang / shin tu mi*

Having seen the Buddha, Mahāmaudgalyāyana returned to earth in the same way.

Then, the Venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana, agreeing with the Blessed One and venerating the two feet of the Blessed One with his head, entered into such a state of concentration (S. *samādhi*, T. *ting nge 'dzin*) that, when his mind was settled in that way, he disappeared from the heaven of the gods of the thirty-three as quickly as a man might straighten his arm after he had bent it, or bend his arm after he had straightened it, and he reappeared in Jambūdvīpa.⁶²

It has been noted more than once that in classical Buddhist literature, meditation is often discussed as a means of cultivating supernatural power.⁶³ Long ago, Étienne Lamotte wrote that “the most ancient sources insist on the fact that *abhijñā* [“super knowledge”] is the fruit of

*ring ba zhig tu de'i dus na bcom ldan 'das lha'i 'khor brgya stong du ma'i mdun na bzhugs
shing chos 'chad ba tshe dang 'dan pa maud gal ya na chen pos mthong ngo //.*

⁶² *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Da 90b.4-6; *de nas tshe dang ldan pa maud gal ya na chen pos
bcom ldan 'das las mnyan te zhabs la mgo bos phyag 'tshal nas de 'dra ba'i ting nge 'dzin la
mnyam par bzhag go // ji ltar sems mnyam par bzhag pa na 'di lta ste / stobs dang ldan pa'i
skyes bus dpung ba bsgrum pa las brkyang ba 'am / brkyang ba las bskum pa bzhin tshe dang
ldan maud gal ya na chen po sum bcu rtsa gsum gyi lha'i gnas nas mi snang bar gyur te /dzam
bu'i gling du phyin to //.*

⁶³ See Luis Gómez, “Meditation,” in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*; see also D.V. Fiordalis, *Miracles and Superhuman Powers in South Asian Buddhist Literature* (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2011).

meditation (*samādhi*).⁶⁴ However, with Mahāmaudgalyāyana’s trip to heaven we see a slightly different relationship between meditation and supernatural power. Here, Mahāmaudgalyāyana, who cultivated his superpowers long ago, enters into a meditative state to summon those powers. In other words, here meditation is not used to cultivate magical power, but to access magical power that has already been cultivated. This is a common motif in classical Buddhist literature. John Strong has cited several classical stories in which monks lose the ability to fly because their state of trance is broken.⁶⁵ So meditation not only serves as a means to cultivate magical power, it also serves as the basis of such power for those who are already enlightened. This is evident in other stories from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*.

In another narrative from the *Kṣudrakavastu*, the Buddha encourages his followers to use their magical powers. Here, again, we see that entrance into a meditative state is the first step in conjuring such power. In this story, the Buddha wishes to scare the monks Dāsaputra and Pāla into taking the religious life seriously.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Étienne Lamotte, *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse* 5 Vols. (Louvain: Bureaux du Muséon, 1944-1980), vol 4: 1814.

⁶⁵ See John S. Strong, “When Magical Flight Fails.” *The Mahachulalongkorn Journal of Buddhist Studies* 1 (2008): 107-26.

⁶⁶ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 177b.3-177b.7; *de nas bcom ldan ‘das kyis tshe dang ldan pa kun dga’ bo la bka’ stsal ba / kun dga’ bo khyod kyis bran bu dang / skyong ba dag drung du snyol cig / dge slong rnams la yang ngas dge slong dag khyed kyis dge ba mi sbyams pa dang / sdig pa bshags te gnas par bya’o zhes gsungs mod kyi ‘on kyang bran bu dang / skyong ba dag lta ba dbral bar byad gos pas khyed las gang gis gnas pa’i snyoms par ‘jug pa gang thob pa des gnas pa’i snyoms par ‘jug pa des gnos shig ces byos shig / btsun pa ltar ‘tshal lo zhes tshe dang*

The Blessed One said to the Venerable Ānanda, “Ānanda, tonight, sleep near Dāśapūtra and Pāla. Although I have told them not to boast about their qualities and that they must confess doing so as a wrong, say to the other monks that they may enter into deep meditative states (S. *samāpatti*, T. *gnas pa’i snyoms par ’jug pa*) and make a display by the attainment of such deep meditative states. Since these two monks who live among them need to be separated from their perverse views, this is allowed.”

Then, saying “Lord, it will be so,” Ānanda, consenting to the Blessed One, said this to the monks: “Monks, although the Blessed One has told you not to boast about your qualities and that you must confess doing so as a wrong, you may enter into deep meditative states and make a display [of magic] by the attainment of such deep meditative states. Since these two monks who live among us need to be separated from their perverse views, this is allowed.” Then he lay in bed near Dāśapūtra and Pāla.

ldan ba kun dga’ bos bcom ldan ’das kyi ltar mnyan nas bran bu dang / skyong ba la smras ba / khyod kho bo kho na’i drung du nyol cig / dge slong rnams la yang smras pa / tshe dang ldan pa dag bcom ldan ’das kyi zhal nas ngas dge slong dag khyed kyis dge ba mi sbyoms pa dang / sdig pa bshags te gnas par bya’o zhes gsungs mong kyi ’o na kyand bran bu dang / skyong ba dag lta ba dbral bar byad gos bas khyed las gang gis gnas pa’i snyoms bar ’jug ba gang thob des gnas pa’i snyoms bar ’jug ba des gnos shig ces de skad bka’ stsal to // btsun ba kun dga’ bo bcom ldan ’das kyis ji skad bka’ tstal ba de bzhin ’tshal lo zhes smras nas / mtshan mo thun dang po la rju ’phrul bstan pa brtsams te / kha cig ni ’bar bar byed / kha cig ni glog ’gyu bar byed ba dang / bran bu dang / skyong bas smras ba / ’phags ba kun dga’ bo ’di ci zhig lags / des smras ba / ’di dag ni dgra bcom pa rdzu pa brul gyis rnam par rtse ba yin no //

Then, because Ānanda spoke as he was instructed by the Blessed One, the monks commenced to making displays of magic. Some of them made fire. Some of them made lightning.

Dāśapūtra and Pāla said, “Noble Ānanda, what is this?”

Ānanda replied, “What you see is the result of liberated beings (S. *arhat*, T. *dgra bcom*) playing with magic.”

As we have seen, the term *samāpatti* (T. *gnas pa'i snyoms par 'jug pa*) indicates the “attainment of deep meditative states (S. *dhyāna*).” The magical power that is obtained by entering the *dhyānas*—the same power by which the monks summon fire and lightning—is *rdzu 'phrul* in Tibetan. This is certainly translating the Sanskrit *ṛddhi*.⁶⁷ In Sanskrit, *ṛddhi* (P. *iddhi*) literally means “success.” But in classical Buddhist literature it is used to indicate “*supernatural or magical power*.”⁶⁸ It is often listed as one of the results of attaining “super knowledge” (S. *abhijñā*.)

There are two dimensions of the way in which these superpowers are presented in Mūlasarvāstivādin sources that should be pointed out. And both of these features can be seen in the story of Dāśaputra and Pāla. First, note that in this story magical powers are very much put on display. This fact presents us with a curious opposition that exists in classical Buddhist literature—between exhibiting supernatural powers and keeping them in check. In the *Divyāvadāna*, King Prasenajit invites the Buddha to outdo rival ascetics. The Buddha answers the king in this way:

⁶⁷ *Mahāvīyutpatti*, #208, #215, #232, #779, #966, #967, #968, #969, #970.

⁶⁸ Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, s.v. *ṛddhi*.

Great King, I don't show the *dharma* to my disciples by saying, 'Monks, go and display miracles of superhuman power, which are above ordinary humans such as brahmins and householders.' Instead, I show the *dharma* to my disciples by saying, 'Live with your virtues covered and your faults uncovered.'⁶⁹

Though this passage may present an admirable sentiment, it would be a mistake to view it as normative for the entire Indian tradition. In Mūlasarvāstivādin literature the Buddha is rather fond of displaying his magical powers for the sake of proving himself as someone worthy of the various epithets bestowed upon him. The Descent at Sāṃkāśya is just one of many examples of this. In the story of Dāsaputra and Pāla, monks are called upon by the Buddha himself to display their magical powers for the sake of securing the conversion of these two wayward monks.

Second, and more importantly, notice that when Dāsaputra and Pāla ask Ānanda what is happening he responds, "What you see is the result of liberated beings (*S. arhats*) playing with magic."⁷⁰ This resonates with what we saw in Chapter I and our treatment of the term *dhyāna*. It seems that the ability to enter into these deep meditative states and thereby conjure such magical effects was, by default, the prerogative of liberated beings (*S. arhats*). However, as we have seen, in Mūlasarvāstivādin literature monks and nuns attain the state of an *arhat* in a variety of ways, and meditation is very rarely mentioned as an aspect of their training. In other words, as per Lamotte, it seems that magic is indeed the fruit of deep meditative states such as *samādhi* and

⁶⁹ Cowell and Neil, *The Divyāvadāna*, 150; *nāhaṃ mahārājaivaṃ śrāvakāṇāṃ dharmāṃ deśayāmy evaṃ yūyaṃ bhikshava āgatāgatānāṃ brāhmaṇagrihapatīnāṃ uttare manushyadharme riddhiprātihāryaṃ vidarśayateti / api tv aham evaṃ śrāvakāṇāṃ dharmāṃ deśayāmi praticchannakalyāṇā bhikshavo viharata vivṛitapāpā iti /*

⁷⁰ 'di dag ni dgra bcom pa rdzu pa brul gyis rnam par rtse ba yin no //.

dhyāna, as in the stories cited above. However, that does not mean that the “super knowledge” (S. *abhijñā*) that engenders magical power is necessarily cultivated or originally earned through meditation, or that access to the deep meditative states that are used to evoke magic are only attained through meditation itself.

The preceding point is further demonstrated in two other narratives from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* in which magic is displayed. One story involves the remarkable nun Dharmadinnā and the other involves the remarkably dull-witted monk Panthaka. We visited Dharmadinnā’s story in a previous chapter. It was decided at birth that she would marry the son of her father’s best friend. But she felt moved to renounce and become a nun instead, despite her father’s wishes. She was subsequently ordained while living in her house. Yet, even after Dharmadinnā’s full ordination and her enlightenment, her father and the groom he had chosen were persistent in trying to secure her marriage. Ultimately Dharmadinnā escapes this marriage by demonstrating that she is unquestionably best suited to the religious life. She does so in the following way:

The time of accepting the bride having arrived, the householder Mṛgāra’s son Viśākha, together with friends, kinsmen, relatives, youths, ministers, inhabitants of the city, and many beings from the country, began to play a variety of musical instruments in that place. Dharmadinnā emerged from the house, desiring to go along with the Blessed One. Then Viśākha, the son of the householder Mṛgāra stretched out his arm, intending to grasp the arm of Dharmadinnā. And Dharmadinnā, seen by hundreds of thousands of beings, flew into the air like the king of geese with wings outstretched. She exhibited miracles of various kinds. There, the son of the householder Mṛgāra, along with friends, kinsmen, relatives, youths, ministers, and inhabitants of the city were completely amazed

by that spectacle. They fell before her, like a tree that is cut from its roots, and said, “Oh Venerable Sister, since you have obtained many good qualities such as these, there is not time or place for you to engage in sensual desires. We beg your pardon.”⁷¹

This episode clearly demonstrates the two points made earlier. First, Dharmadinnā’s use of magical powers is very much a display. Here neither she nor the Blessed One have any qualms about her exhibition of miraculous attainments. The miracles she performs are viewed by “hundreds of thousands” of onlookers, and the display was clearly intended to squelch any doubts regarding her status as an enlightened being.

The second point, which is more salient to our study involves meditation, or in the context of Dharmadinnā’s story, the absence of meditation. In this episode, entrance into deep meditative states is not mentioned as a prerequisite for conjuring magical ability. However, flight is often listed as one of the many powers that are obtained with the attainment of “super knowledge” (S. *abhijñā*). What is more telling is the fact that, as we saw in the previous chapter, meditation is never mentioned as an aspect of Dharmadinnā’s training. Her attainment of the various degrees of enlightenment was governed by two things: 1) the number of vows she had taken and 2) her hearing the *dharma* from the nun Utpalavarṇā. After she realized the fruit of a stream-enterer (S. *śrotāpanna*, T. *rgyun du zhugs pa*,) the next stage of her enlightenment was the result of a new set of rules she was expected to follow. Each of her attainments was brought about by her adherence to monastic vows and her hearing the *dharma*. Despite the fact that seated, silent contemplation was never mentioned as a part of her spiritual regimen, the text says

⁷¹ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Da 251a-251b.

specifically that Dharmadinnā attained “super knowledge” (S. *abhijñā*, T. *mngon par shes*) and the powers that come with it.⁷²

We find a similar set of circumstances in another section of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, with the story of the monk Panthaka. This narrative comes from the *Vinayavibhaṅga* and tells of how Panthaka became enlightened.⁷³ Panthaka was, by his own admission, a very dull-witted monk. In fact, when his brother Mahāpanthaka ordained him, Mahāpanthaka gave his little brother a simple four-line verse to memorize. However, after three months, Panthaka could not memorize the verse that Mahāpanthaka had given him. Consequently, the Buddha ordered Ānanda to teach Panthaka how to read, but Panthaka was too dim and Ānanda was unable. The Buddha instructed Panthaka to sweep the monastery and, as he did so, to recite one simple phrase. The recitation of this one phrase led to Panthaka’s realization of the state of an *arhat*.

So Panthaka’s enlightenment was the result of his engagement in recitation and monastic labor—sweeping the monastery. This emphasis on recitation and monastic discipline is very much in line with everything we have seen so far. Seated, silent contemplation was never mentioned as an aspect of his training. Nevertheless, like Dharmadinnā, he was said to have obtained “super knowledge” (S. *abhijñā*, T. *mngon par shes*). And, like Dharmadinnā, he displays these powers without hesitation. After his enlightenment, Panthaka was ordered by the Blessed One to give instruction to the nuns. Knowing of his reputation as an exceedingly dull monk, the nuns were contemptuous and sought to embarrass him by inviting many householders to hear his sermon, which the nuns were convinced would be a catastrophe. The householders

⁷² See above, section 1.1—*Dhyāna* as the General Practice of Meditation.

⁷³ See *Vinayavibhaṅga*, Derge ‘dul ba Ja 61a.4-71b.4. The Sanskrit of this story has been preserved at Cowell and Neil, *The Divyāvadāna*, 483.20-495.22.

were aware of Panthaka's reputation as well. And it was in this context that Panthaka used meditation to make a magical display. The episode reads:

“How will someone who cannot even memorize one verse in three months instruct nuns or teach *dharma*? We are leaving.”

But someone else said, “Let us stay. If he will preach the *dharma*, then we will listen.”

“We will stay then.” The group remained there.

When the Venerable Panthaka saw the manner in which the lion-seat was arranged, he thought to himself: “Has this been arranged by one who has good intentions, or by someone who has bad intentions?” He then saw that it was done by those with bad intentions. Then the Venerable Panthaka stretched out his hand like the trunk of an elephant and situated the lion's seat properly. Then he sat down upon it in such a way that some saw him and others did not. Then, when he was seated, he entered into such a meditative state that while his mind was fixed in that way he disappeared from the seat and rose into the air in the eastern direction... as before up to... having summoned magical power and miraculous effects, and then having withdrawn those displays of magical power he was once again seated on that very seat.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ The Sanskrit of this story has been preserved at Cowell and Neil, *The Divyāvadāna*, 494; *yena tribhir māsaṁ ekā gāthā paṭhitā sāpi na pravṛttā sa kiṁ bhikṣuṇir avavadiṣyati dharmam vā vādayiṣyati / gacchāmaḥ / apare kathayanti tiṣṭhāmo yadi dharmam deśayiṣyati śroṣyāmaḥ / atha na gacchāma iti sā parṣat samavasthitā / āyusmatā panthakena siṁhāsanaṁ dr̥ṣṭam parjñaptam / dr̥ṣṭvā saṁlakṣayati / kiṁ tāvat prasādajātābhiḥ prajñaptam āhosvit viheṭhanābhiprāyābhiḥ / paśyati yāvad viheṭhanābhiprāyābhiḥ / āyusmatā panthakena*

Panthaka then delivered a sermon by which many who were present attained various degrees of liberation.

The story of Panthaka was not an obscure one. It was redacted into the *Divyāvadāna*, and this tells us that it was relatively well-known. Here, again, we see that magical power was not something to be locked away and kept hidden. Both Dharmadinnā and Panthaka exhibit their power in front of a large gathering of both monastics and lay followers. And in both instances the point of exhibiting such power is clear. As it is in The Descent at Sāṃkāśya, the display of magical powers was intended to remove any doubt that onlookers may bear regarding the elevated spiritual status—and therefore the elevated social status—of the person who displays them.

But what is more telling is Panthaka’s religious program. As I noted, he attained the state of a liberated being (*S. arhat*) by way of recitation and monastic labor. Meditation is not mentioned in his story. Nevertheless, once he reached this attainment, he was understood to have access to deep meditative states (*S. dhyānas*) that give rise to magical power (*S. ṛddhi*). This points us directly back to a point that was made in the previous chapter regarding the Mūlasarvāstivādin understanding of these deep meditative states. Here, again, access to the *dhyānas* and the magical powers they afford was not seen so much as a prerequisite to

*gajabhujasadṛśaṃ bāhum abhiprasārya taṃ siṃhāsanaṃ yathāsthāne sthāpitam / āyusmān
panthakas tatra niṣaṇṇaḥ / sa niṣīdan kaiścid dṛṣṭaḥ kaiścin na dṛṣṭaḥ / athātrastha āyusmān
panthakas tadrūpaṃ samādhiṃ samāpanno yathā samāhito citte sve āsane ‘ntarhitāḥ pūrvasyām
diśi uparivihāyasam abhyudgamyā pūrvavad yāvad ṛddhiprātihāryāṇi vidarśya tān
ṛddhyabhisamskārān pratiprasābhya prajñapta evāsane niṣaṇṇaḥ /* For the Tibetan version of Panthaka’s story, see *Vinayavibhaṅga*, Derge ‘dul ba Ja 61a.4-71b.4.

enlightenment, but rather as an effect of enlightenment. This is certainly the case with both Dharmadinnā and Panthaka. Meditation is not mentioned in either narrative. But this did not exclude them from the acquisition of “super knowledge” (S. *abhijñā*), which they used to display supernatural powers.

Chapter III: Monks Who Meditate

3.0—Introduction

3.1—Ambivalence towards the Forest

3.2—The Meditating Monk as a Model of Wrong Behavior

3.3—The Fate of the *Prahānika* Monk

3.0 Introduction

Throughout this study, we have visited variations of this phrase, which is found throughout the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*:

The activities of a monk who has entered the well-spoken *dharma* and *vinaya* are two. They are these: meditation and recitation.¹

The preceding chapters demonstrate that there was by no means an even distribution between these two fields of specialization in the Mūlasarvāstivādin community. The monastic community responsible for the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* was centered on the recitation of texts. The fact that they produced a work such as the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* is evidence enough of this, and everything we find within the *vinaya* supports this way of thinking about the tradition. The practice of recitation is treated in more detail, and monks who recite are afforded a higher place than monks who specialized in meditation. Our sources make it clear that instances of recitation would have been encountered regularly both inside and outside the monastery. On the other hand, meditation was not treated as an obligation.

¹ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 175a.7-b.2; *legs par gsungs pa’i chos ‘dul ba la rab tu byung ba’i dge slong gi las ni gnyis te / bsam gtan dang ‘dan pa’o //*.

Nevertheless, many of the stories we have seen feature monks who specialized in meditation, and here too we find definite patterns. In this chapter, we will explore in more detail those stories that center on these monks. Generally speaking, as many of the stories we have already seen make clear, meditation monks were not viewed or presented favorably in our sources. In fact, these monks were often used by our *vinaya* specialists in an unexpected way: they served as deviants. The notion that these monks “served” the larger community as “deviants” might seem ironic. But if we consider these stories for what they are—literary creations and not historic accounts—this idea and its helpfulness in understanding the attitudes our sources represent becomes clearer. In our stories, meditating monks frequently find themselves both literally and figuratively outside the boundaries of the larger monastic community. It will therefore help our analysis to begin by looking at the work of two scholars who have treated notions of physical space, legal space, and the function of deviance in a community’s maintenance.

In the 1960’s, sociologist Kai Erikson published a study called *Wayward Puritans*, which centered on the Salem Witch Trials. In this study, Erikson explored social deviance and its effects—both positive and negative—on society in colonial New England. In Erikson’s words, all communities work within a “geographical” and “cultural space.” In both senses of the word “space,” a community must maintain its boundaries. In the geographical sense, the community maintains the physical space in which it functions. In the cultural or legal sense, the community demarcates a field of behaviors which its members are expected act within, with varying degrees of importance assigned to various behaviors. The maintenance of cultural boundaries is just as essential for the perpetuation of the community as is the maintenance of its geographical or spatial boundaries. Cultural boundaries must therefore be demonstrated, learned, contrasted with

the boundaries of other communities, and reinforced regularly. So the question, in Erikson's own words, becomes "[H]ow do people learn about the (cultural) boundaries of their community? And how do they convey this information to the generations which replace them?"²

While the subject of Erikson's study is far removed from ours in both space and time, his ideas on boundary maintenance offer another means to understand what we find in the Indian monastic community. One of the principle ways that Indian monks maintained their "cultural" or legal boundaries was the *poṣadha* ceremony—a bimonthly ritual in which the core list of monastic rules (*S. prātimokṣa*) was recited. During this ritual, monks were expected to confess any infractions they had committed since the previous recitation of the rules. Here the boundaries of the community were both reinforced and transmitted to the next generation of monks.

Erikson's ideas on social deviance also speak to the dynamic we find between monks who specialized in meditation and the larger community. In his consideration of questions on boundary maintenance—i.e. How do people learn cultural boundaries, and how are they preserved?—Erikson turns to Emile Durkheim. In Durkheim's work on deviance, we find a rather ironic sociological hypothesis. Durkheim suggested that "crime (and by extension other forms of deviation)" may do a great, perhaps even essential, service to society as a whole. This service is to draw members of the community together in one unified vision of what is moral and what is immoral. The deviant party "violates rules of conduct which the rest of the community holds in high respect" and in so doing initiates bonding within the community.³

² Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Wiley, 1966), 9.

³ Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*, 4.

Erikson uses Durkhiem’s ideas to explore the question “How are cultural boundaries maintained?” These boundaries are, of course, maintained by people. But the people who operate within these boundaries are not always the ones who are the most helpful in demonstrating and maintaining them. The deviant helps to transmit a community’s boundaries by opening a dialogue between an individual who is outside the boundaries (the deviant him or herself) and the community, usually its officials.

Erikson’s ideas come to bear on our conversation when we begin to consider the depiction of monks who specialize in meditation in Mūlasarvāstivādin literature. As one example, in the previous chapter we looked at the story of a monk who was known as “Nandika the meditator.” While meditating in the forest, Nandika was lured into breaking one of the most fundamental—if not *the* most fundamental—monastic precept: he engaged in sexual intercourse. Whether his story reflects any historical reality is, of course, uncertain. He is most likely a straw man, a literary creation built to house certain qualities that the composers of our text wished to highlight and comment upon. He is a deviant who is used to help the community maintain its cultural or legal boundaries.

The *vinaya* specialists who composed our text had a veritable grab bag of “deviants” that they could reach into whenever they wanted to demarcate the legal boundaries of the community. Devadatta, the infamous Group-of-Six Monks, their leader Upananda, and King Ajātaśatru before his conversion are just a few examples. In the Buddhist world, all of these characters are well-known for their nefarious dealings. But another deviant type that is frequently used in Mūlasarvāstivādin literature is a rather surprising one. This is the monk who specializes in meditation. It seems that when the composers of our *vinaya* wanted a deviant upon which to

project behaviors that were unfit for the larger community, the meditating monk was a popular choice.

In this chapter we will look closer at this dynamic within the Mūlasarvāstivādin community. First, we will consider tensions related to meditation and physical space, for here it seems that meditating monks found themselves in what we could call a “no-win scenario.” The bustle of the typical monastery described in our sources made long periods of meditation impossible. Monks who wished to specialize in meditation therefore had little choice but to practice outside the monastery, usually in the forest. But the composers of our text were more than a little anxious about monks spending long periods of time away from the larger community. Although solitary practice in the forest is at times lauded, the forest is most often depicted as a dangerously unpredictable space. And more than once in our *vinaya* the Buddha forbids monks to stay there.

Next, we will look at stories that specifically reference meditating monks. These monks were often denoted as *prahāṇikas* in Sanskrit (T. *spong ba pa*). In this section we will look closely at this term, what it may or may not indicate, and how these monks are presented in our sources. Here we see a natural connection between the physical and legal spaces of the Mūlasarvāstivādin community. The fact that these monks were frequently painted as deviants—i.e. falling outside the legal space of the larger community—was clearly tied to the fact that they spent time away from the physical space of the larger community.

Finally, we will look at evidence—both from inside and outside our primary textual sources—to suggest that this group of meditating monks (*S. prahāṇika*) played a part in the development and values of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India. The ideals and practices of *prahāṇika* monks are often criticized in our mainstream literature. However, we find the opposite to be true

when we look at certain Mahāyāna sources that speak in praise of forest meditation and even mention the *prahāṇika* monk specifically as most worthy of gifts and veneration.

3.1 Ambivalence towards the Forest

We begin this chapter by looking at a tension surrounding the “geographic space”—to use Erikson’s term—of the Mūlasarvāstivādin community. This tension centered on the physical space in which meditation was most often practiced. When we consider Mūlasarvāstivādin stories that include meditation and look for general themes therein, one definite pattern presents itself. It is clear that the typical Mūlasarvāstivādin monastery was unsuitable for long periods of meditation practice. This is made evident, first, by the fact that tension between reciters and meditators is a reoccurring theme, and, second, by the fact that monks—when they are cited as practicing meditation—usually leave the monastery in order to do so. Many of the stories we have already looked at demonstrate both of these patterns.

However, practicing outside the monastery and/or village was an option that many of the composers of our text were not comfortable with. Contributors to the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* frequently expressed anxiety over their fellow monks going far outside the monastery for any reason, and meditation is often the reason cited. To begin with, the composers of our text saw the wilderness as a space replete with physical danger. They also saw danger in monks remaining unchecked by the eyes of the larger community; such a state made monks susceptible to baser impulses that could result in a lapse in the vows they had taken. On the other hand, rhetoric in praise of solitary practice, which is a prominent theme in our earliest textual sources for the Indian tradition, was also employed in Mūlasarvāstivādin literature. The result is a tangle of voices. In some instances the Buddha praises solitary forest life, admonishing his monks to retreat to private spaces for the sake of contemplation. But in other stories such pursuits of

solitude lead to disaster, and in response the Buddha goes so far as to forbid his monks to linger in the forest away from the larger community.

*

From early in the Indian tradition, “the wilderness” was an important space. Our oldest textual evidence—represented by works such as the *Aṭṭhakavagga* and the *Khadgaviṣāṇa Gāthā* (or *Rhinoceros Sūtra*)—speak of the spiritual perils of community life and praise solitary, forest renunciation. In these two texts the aspiring renunciant is admonished to sever all ties with society and wander alone. The monastic ideal presented in the *Aṭṭhakavagga* and the *Rhinoceros Sūtra* is strikingly uncompromising; it speaks of the renunciant as one who has broken off all ties to family and the larger community and even to other renunciants.

Texts such as the *Aṭṭhakavagga* and the *Rhinoceros Sūtra* have led scholars to view the early history of the Indian tradition as a long series of compromises that were made against this radical religious ideal. As more and more individuals joined the order of Buddhist renunciants, more rules had to be made to accommodate those who were less inclined to the harsh conditions of “ideal” renunciation. Thus, according to this model, in the centuries following the Buddha’s death there emerged a settled, institutionalized monastic tradition, one that lauded the original ideal but was also representative of a less stringent program than what was first intended.

This “deterioration” model is problematic for a few reasons. To begin with, which monastic norms, traditions, or institutions were in place at the time of the Buddha is impossible to determine given the evidence that survives. For example, both Jain and Buddhist monks adhered to a tradition of settling from their itinerancy in the rain-season. It is therefore plausible that both these religious groups were drawing on a tradition that existed before their rules were codified. At present, we have no way of being certain.

Another problem with this “deterioration” model is that it excludes the possibility that texts such as the *Aṭṭhakavagga* and the *Rhinoceros Sūtra*—which, again, laud solitary renunciation—were themselves composed by a Buddhist monastic community that already had strong ties to urban centers in India. In other words, it is plausible—and probable—that the Buddha and his first followers had strong ties to Indian cities and their rulers from the tradition’s inception. The narrative tradition that survives does not speak of the Buddha as a recluse secluded in the wilderness. Instead these stories make it clear that the Buddha moved from urban center to urban center propagating his teaching and endearing himself and his followers to those who lived in these populated areas. After he died, his monks did the same for centuries. We know that from the beginning this religious group depended on society at large for their food and other basic material needs. These early texts that emphasize absolute renunciation may therefore have been a response to urban ties that already existed, rather than an original, ideal articulation that was later compromised.

What we know for certain regarding the dynamic between urban and solitary monastic practice does not surface until after the Buddha’s death. Our archaeological evidence demonstrates that large, permanent Buddhist monasteries did not become established until sometime between the Mauryan and Kuṣāna empires—between the 4th century BCE and the beginning of the Common Era. As Schopen has noted, how and why this happened is not clear, but this development must have complicated the dynamics of identity and practice among Buddhist monks.⁴ In the case of the Mūlasarvāstivādin community, the establishment of permanent, endowed monasteries resulted in tension—or perhaps it amplified a tension that

⁴ For more on these dates and the archeological evidence surrounding settled monasteries see Gregory Schopen, “A Well-Sanitized Shroud” in *Between the Empires*.

already existed—surrounding religious practices that, given their prominence in the early textual tradition, could not be ignored or abandoned but, at the same time, could not be facilitated in settled urban monasteries. For the Mūlasarvāstivādin community, engagement in long periods of seated, silent contemplation was clearly one such religious exercise. And the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* makes this tension clear in a variety of ways. To begin with, it is evident in two very different attitudes towards the forest and, more generally, the physical space that exists outside the monastery.

On the one hand, in our *vinaya* we find at least six instances of a stenciled passage in which solitary meditation is lauded. In this passage, the Buddha provides a list of remote spaces and admonishes his monks to go to them specifically for the sake of practicing meditation. Fortunately, the Sanskrit for this passage has been preserved. In the *Pravṛjyāvastu* section of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, the passage is credited to the previous Buddha Kāśyapa. It reads:

He [the Buddha Kāśyapa] taught the Law to his disciples *as follows*: These, monks, (are) lonely resting places: forests, spots at the bases of trees, empty houses, mountain-valleys, mountain-caves, straw stacks, spots in the open air, funeral places, and wooded tablelands. Meditate [S. *dhyāyata*] (there), monks, do not be inattentive, do not become remorseful afterwards! This (is) our instruction.⁵

⁵ This story was redacted with little change into the *Divyāvadāna*, see Cowell and Neil, *Divyāvadāna*, 344; *sa evaṃ śrāvakāṇāṃ dharmam deśayati etāni bhikṣavo 'raṇyāni vṛkṣamūlāni sūnyāgārāni parvatakandaragiriguhāpalālapuṃjābhyavakāśaśmaśānavanaprasthāni prāntāni śayanāsanāni dhyāyata bhikṣavo mā pramādyata mā paścād vipratīsarīṇo bhaviṣyatha asmākam iyam anuśāsanam iti* /. See also Volkbert Näther, rev. and trans. by Claus Vogel and Klaus Wille, "The Final Leaves of the Pravrajyavastu Portion of the Vinayavastu Manuscript

Here monks are admonished to find solitary places (S. *'raṇyāni vṛkṣamūlāni śūnyāgārāṇi*, etc.) in order to meditate (S. *dhyāyata*). This same passage is found with little variation in at least five other narratives in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, two of which occur in the *Kṣudrakavastu*.⁶

According to the “deterioration” model of Indian Buddhist history that I discussed above, this passage from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* represents a more pristine version of the Buddha’s teaching—one in which the emphasis was still on the solitary pursuit of enlightenment,

Found Near Gilgit," in *Sanskrit-Texte aus dem buddhistischen Kanon: Neuentdeckungen und Neueditionen III* (Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden. Beiheft 6) (Göttingen, 1996).

⁶ See pg. 35 of Gnoli’s edition of the *Śāyānasavastu*, where the Sanskrit reads:

uktambhagavatā:

*ekānyarāṇyānivṛkṣamūlāniśūnyāgārāṇiparvatakandaragiriguhapalālapuñjābhyavakāśaśmaśāna
vanaprasthānīprāntānisāyanāsanānidhyāyata, bhikṣavah, māpramādyata, mā paścad*

vipratīsarīṇobhūtaiti; āraṇyakatvasyacabahudhavarṇobhāṣitaḥ /. See also *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge

Da 137b.7, where the Tibetan reads: *byas zin gyis ni khyed cag gis dgon pa dang / shing drung*

dang / khyim stong pa dang / lung ba dang / brag phug dang / sog ma spungs pa blag ba med pa

dang / dur khrod dang / nags dang / ri dang / bas mtha' / 'di dag tu gnas shing sgoms shig / dge

slong rnam bag med pa ram byed cig / phyis 'gyod pa can du gyur ta re 'di ni nga'i bstan pa'o

//. For other instances, see *Kṣudrakavastu*—Derge 'dul ba Da 197a.5, *Vibhaṅga*—Derge dul ba

Nga 76a.3, and *Uttaragrantha*—Derge Pa 108b.1.

or “attainment” as Conze put it.⁷ And the fact that the passage is redacted with little variation in six different narratives of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* might suggest its relative age.

However, the picture becomes a bit more complicated when we look at other narratives that reference the “forest” or the “wilderness.” For then it becomes clear that our stenciled passage is not a reflection of the values of all monks, or even the majority of monks. It seems that the composers of our *vinaya* were rather anxious about the prospect of leaving, or seeing their fellow monks leave the monastery, particularly for the sake of practicing meditation. There was another theme developed more frequently and thoroughly in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* which ran contrary to the value of solitude that was expressed in the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, the *Rhinoceros Sūtra*, and the Mūlasarvāstivādin passage cited above. This was the theme of anxiety and danger involved in leaving the physical bounds of the monastery. These anxieties fall into two general categories: fear of nature and fear of monks engaging in inappropriate activities while away from the view of the larger community. Narratives that express both of these anxieties are found widely in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*.

First, leaving the monastery left a monk or nun vulnerable to the unpredictable features of nature. In our text, monks frequently “go wandering” (S. *√car*, T. *rgyu ba*). The itinerate monk is a common feature of classical Buddhist literature. In fact, the sixth rule of the *saṃghāviśeṣa* section of the Mūlasarvāstivādin list of core rules (S. *prātimokṣa*) states that if a monk is to build a hut, it must be inspected by other monks to be certain that it is “good for wandering about.”⁸ However, in the vast majority of narratives in which this wandering occurs, those who go

⁷ See above section 2.1 Recitation and Meditation: A Closer Look at “The Two Activities of a Monk”.

⁸ Prebish, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline*, 55.

wandering meet with disaster. In the *Kṣudrakavastu* we find a host of instances of this story type. On one occasion a group of monks went wandering and were left without enough blankets to keep out freezing weather.⁹ One monk set out on his own and contracted a case of boils so bad that he had to return to the village so a doctor could lance them. When he returned to the monastery his face was so mutilated that the other monks did not recognize him.¹⁰ These stories tell us something about our composers' attitude toward the practice of wandering and a practice such as meditation, which frequently led monks away from the larger community. Put simply, they did not look favorably upon them. In fact, the Buddha goes so far as to forbid his monks from wandering altogether. In one narrative, a monk and his novice set out to wander together but spent all their time quarrelling because they had too many things to carry. When the Buddha heard of their bickering he made a rule that monks were not to wander, saying: "A monk must not wander in the country and live wild like a lion."¹¹ In another story, a nun is raped in the forest and the Buddha therefore makes a rule that "A nun must not live in the forest!"¹² As I said, in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* monks frequently "go wandering." But any narrative that begins by stating "such and such a monk went wandering" is sure to introduce some disastrous consequence that followed. Note that the last two narratives culminate in the Buddha making a rule that monks and nuns are not to live outside the monastery.

This anxiety may seem ironic, given that one of the Sanskrit words used to refer to Buddhist monasteries is *ārāma*, or "garden." However, when we look closer at the "nature" of

⁹ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 67a.6-67b.4.

¹⁰ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 39b.5-40a.5.

¹¹ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Tha 71b.7-72b.4.

¹² *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge 'dul ba Da 151a.2-5.

the Buddhist *ārāma* the source of this anxiety becomes clearer. In his analysis of the layout and landscape of an Indian monastery, Schopen argues that the Buddhist *ārāma* was intended to mirror an Indian garden (*S. ārāma*), where nature is subdued for the sake of enjoyment. This stands in stark contrast to the inevitable connotations that arise from our rendering of these spaces as “monasteries” or “cloisters.” According to Schopen and his sources, these monastic spaces were even designed to include beautiful vistas from which large tracts of wild land could be observed from a safe distance. He writes:

That the Indian garden was—in spite of its trees and flowers and birdsong—a long way from natural does not seem in doubt... The nature encountered here was not natural, and since one is assimilated to the other by Buddhist authors, what holds for the garden must hold for the ideal Indian *vihāra* [monastery] as well—here nature, ideally, would have been tamed, trimmed, and manicured, and its unwanted natural elements elided. A certain distance from the wild would have been assured. But the situated monastery would have even more literally presented nature at a distance. Here nature would not have been a force to be encountered, but it would have been presented—rather like a landscape painting—as a carefully framed, distant object of view. Here too is nature at arm's length, and that is probably because that is where monastic builders, like monastic authors, wanted it: visible, but at a comfortable distance.¹³

¹³ Gregory Schopen, “The Buddhist ‘Monastery’ and the Indian Garden: Aesthetics, Assimilations, and the Siting of Monastic Establishments,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 126.4 (2006): 487-505, 505.

So it seems that Mūlasarvāstivādin monks preferred their nature to be tamed and contained. And the stories cited above are only a few of many that survive in which nature—and by extension any movement out of the monastery into nature—is presented as unpredictable and dangerous.

But it seems there was another, and perhaps greater, danger that lurked outside the physical bounds of the monastery. This was the danger of remaining unseen by, and therefore left morally unaccountable to, the larger community of monks. The composers of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* had clear anxieties over leaving the monastery grounds because it invited the opportunity for monks to engage in behavior that was deemed inappropriate by the larger community of monks, and possibly even to break their monastic vows. Furthermore, there arose the corresponding concern that such inappropriate behavior may be observed by lay society. We see this anxiety in many of the stories we have looked at already, and all of them center on monks who leave the monastery to meditate.

Consider, for example, the narrative of “Nandika the meditator,” which we looked at in detail in the previous chapter. It was Nandika’s decision to leave the monastery for the sake of practicing meditation that led him to a circumstance in which he might sleep with the goddess and break his monastic vows. As I said earlier, the story was clearly a warning to other monks that leaving the eyes of the larger community invites danger.

In a similar story from the *Kṣudrakavastu*—one that we will have visited before and will visit again—a goddess made sexual advances on a monk who was meditating in the forest. Unlike Nandika, this monk had the sense to reject her advances. For this rejection she hurled him on top of King Bimbasara. Consequently, the Buddha made the following rule: “If a monk stays in a place having so many dangers he comes to be guilty of an offense.”¹⁴ Here, as with so many

¹⁴ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ’dul ba Da 35b.2-36a.2, Tog Tha 50b.5-51b.2.

stories, the space outside the village or monastery is closely linked to meditation. And, as with other stories we've seen, the point of this story is not to encourage monks to meditate in the forest but rather to warn against it.

Finally, in the section of the *Poṣadhavastu* we looked at earlier, the forest is one of the many places that the Blessed One specifically admonished his monks *not* to practice *yoga*—i.e. seated meditation—in.¹⁵ And in the *Poṣadhavastu*, the Buddha's monks are continually criticized and taunted by the laity for attempting to meditate in the open.

So here we have what at first might seem like a puzzling set of data. On the one hand we have a stenciled passage, repeated at least six times in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, in which the Buddha admonishes his monks to go into unpopulated areas for the sake of practicing meditation. This passage would be in keeping with the values of an older textual tradition—represented by the *Aṭṭhakavagga* and the *Rhinoceros Sūtra*—that provide similar admonishments for solitary practice. On the other hand we have a spate of stories in which a monk or monks go into unpopulated areas only to meet with a variety of disasters. Furthermore, we find several stories in which a monk does go into an unpopulated space for the sake of practicing meditation, and in each instance when this occurs it results in embarrassment or, even worse, the breaking of monastic precepts.

These two sets of stories represent a degree of ambivalence towards the space outside the monastery. But what is clear is the general position of the composers of our *vinaya*. They did *not*

¹⁵ “Yoga is not to be practiced in the forest”; *nārāṇye yogo bhāvayitavyaḥ*; Hu-von Hinüber, *Poṣadhavastu*, 264. See above section 1.2 *Aśubhabhāvana*—Its Prominence in the Mūlasarvāstivādin Tradition, on “contemplation of the repulsive” (S. *aśubhabhāvana*) in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*.

like the idea of monks venturing outside the monastery for long periods of time, be it for meditation or some other activity. This position is made clear, first, by the sheer volume of stories present in our text that center on the disastrous consequences that follow from monks traveling in the wild. Second, this position is made clear by the Mūlasarvāstivādin treatment of monks who made meditation their specialization. For this was a religious program which it seems could only be facilitated in the seclusion offered by forest retreats. Yet it is apparent that meditation specialists had few, if any, options other than engaging in their religious program in the forest. Nevertheless, the authors of our text consistently held these monks in suspicion and even disdain. All of this evidence points to a monastic community that was quite comfortable being in a close proximity to urban areas, despite a thread within its textual tradition that praised remote, solitary practice.

*

The preceding discussion relates to another tension we find expressed in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, one that also indicates that the composers of our text were eager to keep meditation within the view of the larger community. It seems there was some anxiety in the Mūlasarvāstivādin community over monks practicing meditation without proper instruction. Two narratives from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* tell of individuals who practice meditation without guidance and are consequently propelled into some catastrophe. The first of these comes from the *Kṣudrakavastu*. Therein we find the story of the monks Dāsaputra and Pāla. The Buddha’s monks ask how these two monks came to be reborn in border regions—i.e. regions where wrong views were prevalent. The Buddha explains that in a previous life, these two were ordained into the monastic community of the Buddha Kāśyapa. However, they moved into a border region and “cultivated the mind without instruction” (T. *gdams ngag med par yid la bya ba bskyed*). Here,

the Tibetan *gdams ngag* is most likely translating the Sanskrit *avavāda*.¹⁶ Because they meditated without proper instruction, they developed perverse views. And as a result of this, they were continually reborn in border regions where they were taught wrong views, even up to their final lives. At the end of their story, the Buddha makes a rule that monks are not to practice meditation without instruction.

The second of these stories involving meditation and admonition is found in the *Vinayavibhaṅga*,¹⁷ where we find the past-life narrative of the dull-witted monk Panthaka, whose story we looked at in a previous section.¹⁸ In a previous life Panthaka was born as a pig trader. This pig trader mistakenly fell into the company of 500 solitary Buddhas (*S. pratyekabuddha*), who were all sitting in meditation. The pig trader sat beside them, mimicked their posture, and attempted to meditate as well. However, he entered into a state of meditative unconsciousness and at his death he was consequently reborn into a realm of unconsciousness. At the end of the story, as in the first, the Buddha makes a rule that monks are not to practice meditation without instruction.

Here again we see the impulse to keep religious practice—in these instances, meditation specifically—within the view of the larger community. In each instance the characters have gone beyond the physical boundaries of a monastery. Panthaka finds himself with “solitary Buddhas,” and Dāsaputra and Pāla find themselves in “border regions.” As in the story of the penitent monk Nandika, we see here that meditation itself has no value if it does not occur within the context of

¹⁶ *Mahāvīyūtpatti*, #1440, #6534.

¹⁷ *Vinayavibhaṅga*, Derge ‘dul ba Ja 79b.7-80b.3.

¹⁸ See above, section 2.4 Meditation and Supernatural Power.

a more comprehensive monastic program. If it is taken out of the larger monastic program, it is not only useless, but harmful.

3.2 The “Meditation Monk” as a Model of Wrong Behavior

Many studies on Buddhism have addressed and analyzed the distinction—and some have even addressed the tension—that exists between monks who specialize in meditation and the larger monastic community.¹⁹ As one example, in the modern Korean monastery described by Robert E. Buswell, meditating monks exist as an elite class and much of the activity of the monastery centers on the periods of extended meditation undertaken by these monks.

In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* we find a similar situation, wherein monks who specialize in meditation are set apart as a distinct class. In our sources, they are frequently referred to as *prahāṇikas* (T. *spong pa ba*), a term we will explore in detail below. However, in our source, this class of monk is anything but elite. Instead, they are consistently frowned upon and serve as a source of worry and frustration for the other monks. They are painted as unkempt, lascivious, ill-mannered, and spiritually inept. Wherever they go—i.e. in any narrative where they are found—there is bound to be trouble for the larger community and the episode is sure to end in the enunciation of yet another rule for monks to follow. Here we will look closely at this group, the values they represented, the trouble they caused, and the implications of their situation within the larger community.

In Chapters I and II, we talked at length about the opening narrative of the *Poṣadhavastu* section of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. In this narrative, the Buddha authorizes the construction

¹⁹ See chapter 11 of Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*; see also Stanley J. Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets: A Study in Charisma, Hagiography, Sectarianism, and Millennial Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), which looks at this distinction in modern Thailand; and finally, see Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 179.

of a “meditation hall” (S. *prahāṇaśālā*). Towards the end of the section of the *Poṣadhavastu* that I summarized, we find a passage that may help us begin to understand more about monks who made meditation their primary concern, over and against the ideas and values of the *vinaya* specialists (S. *vinayadhara*) whose attitudes were well-represented by texts such as the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. In the *Poṣadhavastu*, just after the Buddha orders the construction of a *prahāṇaśālā*, he goes on to discuss the specifications of its layout. And during this explanation, the Blessed One makes what is at first glance a curious rule. The Buddha has just told the monks that carpet (S. *kālakutha*, T. *par tang*) should be put down in the meditation hall. And immediately after he tells the monks to install this carpet he makes the following rule:

Oh monks, I will make known the rules of customary behavior regarding a *prahāṇika* monk. A *prahāṇika* monk must wash his feet every three days. A *prahāṇika* monk who does not follow the rule is guilty of an offense.²⁰

We might begin to analyze this passage by stating what is most obvious. Apparently there was at one time one kind of monk—called a *prahāṇika*—who lived (or at least walked) in North Indian monasteries and did not wash his feet often enough.

But what is a *prahāṇika* monk, and why must he be ordered not to dirty the carpet? The term *prahāṇika* is formed in the same way as the Sanskrit term *sūtrāntika*, and indicates a monk’s field of religious specialization. In the case of the *sūtrāntika*, this specialization is the field of *sūtra* literature. In the case of the *prahāṇika*, this field is the practice of *prahāṇa*. In

²⁰ Hu-von Hinüber, *Poṣadhavastu*, 280; *bhagavān āha: prāhāṇikasyāhaṃ bhikṣavo bhikṣor āsamudācārikāṃ dharmāṃ prajñapayaṣyāmi: prāhāṇikena bhikṣuṇā tṛtīye tṛtīye divase pādau prakṣālayitavyau: prāhāṇiko bhikṣuḥ yathāprajñaptān āsamudācārikāṃ dharmāṃ na samādāya varttate, sātisāro bhavati.*

classical Sanskrit, the term *prahāṇa* literally means “abandonment.”²¹ Franklin Edgerton understands the term *prahāṇa* to indicate “ascetic exertion.”²² Rhys Davids and Stede translate the Pāli cognate *padhāna* as “exertion, effort, striving, concentration of mind.”²³ In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* it is often used to refer to the abandonment of unwholesome mental states. In story after story, many of which we have looked at in this study, we find the Sanskrit formula *sarvkleśaprahāṇād arhatvaṃ sākṣātkṛtam*, meaning “the state of *arhat* was directly realized because of the abandonment of the defilements.”²⁴

It is fairly clear what *prahāṇa* indicates in the *Poṣadhavastu*. In this context, the term *prahāṇa* in the compound *prahāṇaśala* is used in reference to a certain religious practice that, as we saw, was synonymous with *yoga* and *niṣadyā*, or “sitting.” This tells us that the authors of our text, at least, understood practices associated with the term to occur in a seated posture. Furthermore, again as we have seen, the Buddha’s instructions for this practice correspond to what is now widely known as *aśubhabhāvana* meditation, or “contemplation of the repulsive.” Thus, we know that this practice was performed while seated, in silence, and that it involved focusing the mind on the constituents of the body. In other words, the practice conformed to our parameters for the term “meditation.”

²¹ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *pra* √*hā*.

²² Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, 389.

²³ Rhys Davids and Stede, *Pali-English Dictionary*, 411.

²⁴ This exact phrase occurs in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* dozens of times. For more on *prahāṇa* as a term indicating the relinquishment of unwholesome mind states, see Richard Nance, *Speaking for Buddhas: Scriptural Commentary in Indian Buddhism*, (New York: Columbia University Press: 2012), 144.

So what of monks who specialized in *prahāṇa*? Both Lüders and Damsteegt translate *prahāṇika* as “meditating monk.”²⁵ Edgerton translates the term *prahāṇika* as “characterized by religious strenuousness.”²⁶ Rhys-Davids and Stede translate the Pāli cognate *padhānika* as “making efforts, exerting oneself in meditation, practicing ‘padhāna’.”²⁷ Silk calls the *prāhāṇika bhikṣus* “roughly, meditators.”²⁸ Schopen frequently translates the term *prahāṇika bhikṣu* as “a monk who practices religious exertion.”²⁹ So these were Indian monks whose specialty was some form of seated “religious exertion” that involved neither textual recitation nor the administrative duties of the monks’ residence (*S. vihāra*).

²⁵ See Heinrich Lüders, and Klaus L. Janert, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse, 3.F., 47 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), 82-83. See also, Th. Damsteegt, *Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit: Its Rise, Spread, Characteristics and Relationship to Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit*, *Orientalia Rheno-Traiectina*, v. 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 247.

²⁶ Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, s.v. *prāhāṇika*.

²⁷ Rhys Davids and Stede, *Pali-English Dictionary*, 411.

²⁸ Silk, *Managing Monks*, 15, n. 5.

²⁹ Gregory Schopen’s unpublished translations of *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge Tha 213b.3-214a.7, Derge Da 35b.2-36a.3, *Poṣadhavastu*, Tog Ka 201b.3-202b.7, etc. See also Schopen’s discussion of the *prāhāṇika* monk in Schopen, “On Monks and Menial Labors,” in *Architetti, Capomastri, Artigiani*.

As Schopen has noted,³⁰ it appears that scholars have generally not been cognizant of the fact that the term *prahāṇika* is used with relative frequency in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*.³¹ And the *Poṣadhavastu*'s characterization of the *prahāṇika* as a dirty, disheveled nuisance is in keeping with most other references. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* consistently depicts “meditating monks” as both foolish and dangerous. And unfortunately for the *prahāṇikas*, soiling the carpet is not the worst fault laid at their unwashed feet. We find stories in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* in which *prahāṇika* monks meditate outside the monastery and inadvertently anger gods and kings, bringing serious trouble on themselves and the other monks.³² When they try to meditate inside the monastery, *prahāṇika* monks come in conflict with monks who are reciting sacred texts.³³ And even when there is no reference to meditation at all—outside of the word *prahāṇika* of course—these monks are depicted as somehow bothersome or inadequate, e.g., they do not wash their feet often enough. One way or another, they are continually falling out of line and often this is directly related to their views regarding the importance of meditation and where it should be practiced. Here, a few samples from the *Kṣudrakavastu* and other sections of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* will help demonstrate that this

³⁰ Gregory Schopen, “On Emptying Chamber Pots,” *Journal Asiatique* 296 (2008): 229-56, 232, ft.26.

³¹ For just three of the many examples see *Vibhaṅga*, Derge ‘dul ba Cha 188a.5-196a.6; *Kṣudrakavastu* Derge ‘dul ba Tha 213b.3-214a.7; Da 35ba.2-36a.2

³² See below.

³³ See above, section 2.1 Recitation and Meditation: A Closer Look at “The Two Activities of a Monk” for more specific references.

attitude of disdain and mistrust was the default attitude of the majority of those involved in the composition of our *vinaya*.³⁴

We might first consider a narrative from the *Kṣudrakavastu* that we have already referenced—albeit briefly—in this study.³⁵ It begins in the following way:

In the city of *Rajaḡṛha*, there was a *prahāṇika* monk who now and then, having gone into the forest, engaged in meditative concentration (T. *bsam gtan byed*). There, a goddess from the realm of Mara tried to make love to him but he would not agree to it. The story goes on to say that the goddess, greatly angered by the *prahāṇika* monk’s refusal, threw him a great distance. The monk landed on top of King Bimbasara, who was sitting atop his palace. The king chastised the monk for dwelling in such a dangerous place. Hearing of this, the Buddha compared the king’s criticism to “a bolt of lightning.” He then made a rule that monks were not to stay in such dangerous places, i.e. the forest. This episode clearly resonates with the episode from the *Poṣadhavastu* summarized earlier where a monk or monks, in this instance a *prahāṇika* monk, meet with disfavor and censure for practicing meditation in a place that is not fit for meditation.

There are several other stories of a similar nature, which do not mention *prahāṇika* monks specifically, but do center on monks who meditate in the forest and the trouble their practice causes. For example, Nandika, whose story we visited in detail, is not called a *prahāṇika*, but his actions conform to the general characteristics of the *prahāṇika* monk. He

³⁴ In his work, Gregory Schopen has also noted this ambivalence towards meditation and meditating monks. See, for instance, Schopen, “Art, Beauty, and the Business of Running a Buddhist Monastery,” in *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters*.

³⁵ See *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Da 35b.2-36a.2; Tog ‘dul ba *Tha*: 50b.5-51b.2.

frequently goes into the forest to meditate, and this gets him into trouble.³⁶ Similarly, the monk named Gokulika, who we looked at in Chapter I, was not called a *prahāṇika*. But his narrative follows this same pattern—he spent much time in the forest meditating and this brings trouble upon him and other monks. Furthermore, as the rule regarding the requirement for *prahāṇikas* to wash their feet would suggest, Gokulika was exceedingly unkempt. His disheveled appearance led the Buddha to make the rule that monks must shave their heads and faces.³⁷

But meditating monks, and more specifically *prahāṇika* monks, are not only a nuisance when they venture outside of the monastery. Even inside the monastery they cannot seem to merge seamlessly into the everyday business of other monks. Another narrative, which we looked at in Chapter II, from the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*³⁸ tells the story of a *prahāṇika* monk who could not “attain one-pointedness of mind” because of the noise created by other monks who are reciting texts in the monastery. Again and again the *prahāṇika* found himself unable to meditate because of the noise created by the recitation of other monks, and he became exceedingly angry. In a fit of frustration, he likened the reciters to “croaking frogs,” and for this outburst the *prahāṇika* monk was reborn as a frog.

Another narrative from the *Kṣudrakavastu* implies that *prahāṇika* monks may not have been given the same rights and privileges as other monks. The story begins this way:

³⁶ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 102a.5-102b.7; Tog ‘dul ba Ta 154b.2-155b.2.

³⁷ For still more stories on monks who go to the forest to meditate and getting into trouble, see *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge Da 35b.2-36a.2; Tog Tha 50b.5-51b.2, and *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge Tha 71b.3-71b.7.

³⁸ *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts*, iii 1, 56.20-57.18; for the Tibetan version see Derge ‘dul ba Kha 151a.2-151b.2; Tog ‘dul ba Kha 199a.3-199b.7.

The Buddha, the Blessed One, was dwelling in Śrāvastī, in Jetavana—the park of Anāthapiṇḍada. In Śrāvastī a young monk had come to depend upon a *prahāṇika* monk.³⁹

The *prahāṇika* thought to himself, “The Bless One has said that to withhold instruction from one who has entered the religious order is the same as killing him. Yet, this young disciple has not been trained. However, because I am a *prahāṇika*, he should be given to another for training. I will entrust him with someone else.” Having thought this, he went to another monk and said, “Venerable, please train this youth.”⁴⁰

The first interesting point to note here is that the *prahāṇika* himself articulates, in thought at least, the limitations of his own group. Given the attitude towards *prahāṇikas* that we find throughout the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, the point of this passage is clear. Apparently *prahāṇika* monks could not be trusted to train young monks properly. It is interesting that meditation is not mentioned here. Yet that has no bearing on the point of the episode or on the attitude of the

³⁹ For more on this role of dependence, see Gregory Schopen, “The Good Monk and his Money,” in *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters*.

⁴⁰ *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 213b.3-214a.7; Tog ‘dul ba Ta 319a.6-320a.7; *sangs rgyas bcom ldan ‘das mnyan yod na rgyal phyed kyi tshal mgon med zas sbyin gyi kun dga’ ra ba na bzhugs so // mnyan yod na dge slong spong ba pa zhig la dge slong gzhon nu zhig gis gnas bcas pa dang / de ‘di snyam du bcom ldan ‘das kyes dge slong dag rag tu phyung zhing bsnyen par rdzog par byas nas gdams ngag ma byin zhing rjes su ma bstan pa bas ni shan pa byed kyang bla’o zhes gsungs te / ‘di ltar nye gnas kyang de bzhin du slob ma yin na / bdag kyang spong ba pa zhig pas ‘di gang zhig sbyin par byed pa ‘ga’ zhig la gtad do snyam bsams nas de dge slong zhig gi thad du song nas tshe dang ldan pa gzhon nu ‘di bslab pas gyis shig //*

authors towards the *prahāṇika*. Even when the practice of meditation is not directly involved in the situation, “meditating monks” are depicted as somehow inadequate and inferior.

This hesitance to allow *prahāṇikas* to engage in the instruction of younger monks may be explained—at least to some degree—by yet another episode found in the *Kṣudrakavastu* that we looked at earlier.⁴¹ This is the episode in which one *prahāṇika* crushes his penis⁴² beneath a rock because it continually “becomes active”⁴³ while he is seated in the cross-legged position and trying to engage in “mental work”⁴⁴. As we saw, when the Buddha hears of this, he reprimands the monk, saying: “Oh monk, did I not say that contemplation of the repulsive (S. *aśubhabhāvana*) is the remedy of desire? What should be smashed by an ignorant person is one thing; what was smashed by you is another.”⁴⁵ The Blessed One then admonishes his monks to practice “contemplation of the repulsive.” There is one detail of importance here that was not fleshed out before. This monk is said to have assumed the cross-legged posture after he returned from begging and put away his bowls and robe. So we know his endeavors were understood to

⁴¹ See above, section 1,2 *Aśubhabhāvana*—Its Prominence in the Mūlasarvāstivādin Tradition; the story can be found at *Kṣudrakavastu*, Derge ‘dul ba Tha 39a.6-39b.5; Tog ‘dul ba Ta 57b.4-58b.1.

⁴² T. *yan lag*.

⁴³ T. *nam pa las su rung bar gyur*.

⁴⁴ T. *yid la byed pa la zhugs*.

⁴⁵ T. *bcom ldan ‘das kyis bka’i stsal / dge slong ngas ‘dod chags kyi gzhen po ni mi sdug pa bsgom pa’o zhes ma gsungs sam / mi gtu mug can brdung par bya ba ni gzhan yin na khyod kyis ni gzhan brdungs so /*.

have occurred within the monastery. Again, this demonstrates that *prahāṇikas* made trouble both inside and outside the walls of the monastery.

Given the prominent place that meditation has been afforded in modern representations of the Indian tradition, this dynamic is a rather surprising. The fact that these monks chose to specialize in meditation granted them no degree of respect or admiration among the composers of our text. Rather, they were perceived as a burden on the larger community. As we have seen, the *Kṣudrakavastu* includes many narratives wherein the Buddha’s followers—sometimes large groups of followers—attain enlightenment. But it does not occur once in all these stories that a *prahāṇika* is cited as reaching any of the various degrees of enlightenment. Instead their meditation-centered religious program leads them into trouble. Their stories were, it seems, meant to dissuade other monks from following this area of practice. They are at times even forbidden to continue their specialization, as with Nandika.

There is another facet of this dynamic surrounding meditating monks that makes it even more surprising: How widespread it was. These meditating monks, their marginal position within the monastic community, the challenges they faced, and the challenges they brought to the larger monastic community were not an exclusive feature of the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition. At least this is the case by the 5th century of the Common Era—the later date of our sources. To see this, we turn to the literature of the Theravāda tradition.

In an earlier section,⁴⁶ I mentioned the fourth chapter of the *Visuddhimagga*—an exceedingly detailed treatment of meditation theory and practice. 5th century Theravāda monk Buddhaghōṣa begins this chapter of his commentary by listing eighteen characteristics that make

⁴⁶ See above, section 1.1 *Dhyāna*—As the General Practice of Meditation.

a monastery unfit for meditation practice.⁴⁷ These characteristics center on the monastery being too busy and distracting. For example, the sixth characteristic reads:

If he goes with his meditation subject to sit by day where there are many sorts of edible *leaves*, then women vegetable-gathers, singing as they pick leaves nearby, endanger his meditation subject by disturbing it with sounds of the opposite sex.⁴⁸

So the notion that monasteries were not fit places to meditate was not limited to the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition. And this again may help us understand why *prahāṇika* monks had to be ordered to wash their feet every so often. They were, apparently, engaged in a religious specialization that was not easily facilitated inside a typical monastery and therefore spent much of their time walking in the forest.

But there is more to this section of Buddhaghōṣa's work that speaks to our present conversation. He goes on to say that, when a monk does find a suitable place to meditate,

Then he should sever the lesser impediments: one living in such a favorable monastery should sever any minor impediments that he may still have, that is to say, long head hair, nails, and body hair should be cut, mending and patching of old robes should be done, or those that are soiled should be dyed. If there is a stain on the bowl the bowl should be baked. The bed, chair, etc. should be cleaned up. These are the details for the clause, 'Then he should sever the lesser impediments'.⁴⁹

Here Buddhaghōṣa's admonition would seem to be that when a monk does decide to focus on meditation practice he should not abandon the monastic norms of cleanliness and deportment

⁴⁷ Buddhaghosa and Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *Visuddhimagga*, 118-122.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

that keep him tied to the larger community. This passage from Buddhaghosa could apply directly to the unkempt monk Gokulika, or to those Mūlasarvāstivādin *prahāṇikas* who did not wash their feet enough and were therefore in danger of sullyng the carpet of the monastery. This passage from the *Visuddhimagga* makes it clear that Buddhaghosa was also familiar with the tendency of meditating monks to remain disheveled, and that the figure of the bedraggled meditating monk was not exclusive to the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition.

There are also instances in Buddhaghosa's work in which a meditating monk serves as a model of wrong behavior. The first of these involves a monk known as Padhānika Tissa. *Padhānika* is the Pāli cognate of the Sanskrit *prahāṇika*. This story is found in Buddhaghosa's *Dhammapada-atthakatha*, a commentary on the *Dhammapada*.⁵⁰ Therein Buddhaghosa relays a story in which the Buddha gave meditation instructions to the elder monk Padhānika Tissa and 500 other monks. Padhānika Tissa and the other monks went into the forest to practice. But after having admonished the other monks to practice diligently, Padhānika Tissa went to sleep. When the other monks realized this, they questioned Padhānika Tissa. But he simply told them to continue their practice and then went back to sleep. When the Buddha heard of this, he told of a former life in which Padhānika Tissa was a lazy rooster who would not crow at sunrise. So Buddhaghosa also knew of the *prahāṇika* monk—or *padhānika*, as the case may be—and he also understood them to be unreliable and troublesome.

⁵⁰ For a full translation of the story, see *Harvard Oriental Series, Volume 29* (Cambridge, MA: Ginn & Co., 1921), 354-356. See also G.P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali proper names*, (London: Pali Text Society, 1960), s.v. Padhanika Tissa, 139.

For one final example from the Theravāda tradition, we turn to the *Majjhima Nikāya* of the Pāli *Tipitaka*. Therein, we find the story of a forest-dwelling monk named Gulissāni.⁵¹ In this narrative, Gulissāni, who is straight away described as lazy, comes from the forest into the larger monastic community for the sake of some undisclosed business. He is so disrespectful and rude that Sāriputta (S. Śāriputra) delivers a discourse on the proper behavior of a forest monk. Sāriputta's instructions include such reproofs as: a forest monk should be respectful and deferential; he should know the customs regarding seats so that he does not take an elder's seat and does not leave a novice without a seat; he should not be haughty or vain; and he should not eat too much. Each of these admonishments contains the refrain, "What has this forest monk gained by his dwelling in the forest, doing as he likes, since he is not moderate in eating, [etc.]"⁵² Here, again, the chief issue with those monks who spend too much time outside the monastery is one of a lack of deportment and disciplined, laudable behavior. They are unable to fit into the business of the larger Buddhist community that composed and preserved these texts.

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The dynamic surrounding "meditation monks" found in these two mainstream schools has much to tell us about the place of meditation in the Mūlasarvāstivādin community sometime between the beginning of the Common Era and the 5th century. As Schopen has noted,⁵³ the composers of our text have no doctrinal ground upon which to object to the actions of the monks

⁵¹ For a full translation of this story, see Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 572-576.

⁵² Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation; see previous footnote.

⁵³ See Gregory Schopen, "A Well-Sanitized Shroud" in *Between the Empires*.

they seek to marginalize. And they seem to be in no hurry to provide one. Rather, they are concerned with ensuring that the community of monks is able to thrive and function harmoniously. And this, it seems, is what monks who spent long periods of time away from the larger community threatened. Apparently meditation was not so important that it warranted a compromise of certain other values. For example, Buddhaghōṣa and the composers of our *vinaya* understood cleanliness to be one element of monasticism that meditating monks could not or did not conform to. And this was not acceptable to the larger community. We see this in the case of Buddhaghōṣa's work, in the story of Gokulika, and in the rule requiring meditating monks to wash their feet from time to time.

Clearly, Mūlasarvāstivādin monks were familiar with the image of a monk practicing meditation in solitude beneath a tree, and clearly many of them did not approve of this ideal. Given the prominent role that meditation has played in modern representations of the tradition, this treatment of monks who specialize in meditation as unsavory is a little puzzling. But, as with Nandika “the meditator,” the problem that our authors had with *prahāṇika* monks does not seem to be simply that they meditated, and this is an important point. The sheer volume of stories referenced in this study should make it clear that meditation was understood to be a fairly common monastic activity. Meditation was not, by default, a blameworthy practice.

The fault of these meditating monks was that they preferred to stay outside the *physical* and *cultural* bounds of the larger monastic community. They are more than once referred to as dirty and unkempt. They repeatedly bring embarrassment on the larger community of monks. They repeatedly disrupt the practice of recitation, which, as we saw in Chapter II, was a common practice built into the daily schedule of the monks. In sum, their religious program was one that

set them apart—both physically and culturally, to use Erikson’s terms—from the larger monastic community.

Furthermore, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* is representative of a settled and endowed monastic community. Such a community would, as has been noted,⁵⁴ find themselves in close proximity to, and therefore under the constant scrutiny of, the laity that funded their institution. However, the religious program of meditating monks necessitated long periods of time spent away from the larger community, and at these times the behavior of these monks could not be monitored, much less censured. This fact clearly caused the composers of our *vinaya* a good deal of anxiety. This is evident in the wide array of stories that we have seen wherein monks who specialize in meditation bring embarrassment upon themselves and the other monks.

Stated simply, these meditation specialists had dedicated themselves to a religious program that could not be facilitated by the larger Mūlasarvāstivādin community. And this is perhaps the most revealing fact in our study. Story after story makes it clear that the chief religious practice of the *prahāṇika* monk was long periods of silent, seated meditation. And story after story makes it clear that the monasteries in which our *vinaya* was composed were too busy, too noisy, or too small to facilitate such a practice. The only conclusion that can be made is that long periods of seated, silent meditation were not a regular part of the Mūlasarvāstivādin monastic program. And monks who made such a practice their specialization stood out in all the wrong ways.

⁵⁴ Ibid.; see also I.B. Horner, *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-piṭaka)*. (London: Pali Text Society, 1949), i, xvi-xvii, xxix.

3.3 The Fate of the *Prahāṇika*

The stories and ideas we have encountered in this chapter so far are leading us in an interesting, though perhaps not obvious direction. In India, in the Kuṣāna period, we find an established mainstream Buddhist *saṃgha*, represented by the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, that is apparently displeased with one group within its own community. This group of monks, called *prahāṇikas*, is characterized—both in their name and in the narratives in which they appear—by an emphasis on meditation. They persist in engaging in these religious practices outside of the physical and social boundaries of the community, often in the forest. Furthermore, the Kuṣāna period is, as is widely agreed, the period in which the Mahāyāna *sūtras* reached their finished versions in India.

In his work *Buddhist Saints in India*, Reginald Ray demonstrates that the bodhisattva of the forest had a “unique normativity” in early Mahāyāna texts.⁵⁵ He draws from texts such as the *Samādhirāja* (or *Candrapradīpa Sūtra*), the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*, and the *Ratnarāsi Sūtra* to demonstrate that, initially, the bodhisattva was praised precisely because he moved away from settled communities into the forest where he perfected meditation. In other words, these early Mahāyāna texts praise the bodhisattva for doing what the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* criticizes the *prahāṇika* monks and forest monks (S. *āraṇyakas*) for doing. This also resonates with Paul Harrison’s conclusions in his work on the role of ascetic monks in the formation of Mahāyāna. In his essay “Searching for the Origins of Mahāyāna,” Harrison demonstrates that “many Mahāyāna

⁵⁵ Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, see Chapter 8, but especially 251.

sutras give evidence of a hard-core ascetic attempt to return to the original inspiration of Buddhism, the search for Buddhahood or awakened cognition.”⁵⁶

In light of the narratives we have seen from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, there is still more scholarly work that points to a strong correlation between *prahāṇika* and forest-dwelling monks (*S. āraṇyakas*) and the formation of Mahāyāna. Ray’s ideas on these forest-dwellers are nuanced by Daniel Boucher in his analysis of the *Rāṣṭrapālapariṣchā-sūtra*. Boucher writes:

Note that the authors of the *Ugra* presumed that one could meet wilderness-dwelling monks and monks who practiced the *dhutaṅgas* within a monastery, confirming our sense—contra Reginald Ray—that *āraṇyakas* did not spend all of their time in the forest but maintained a regular relationship, however intermittent, with their sedentary brethren.⁵⁷

This again points to the relationship—at least as it is articulated in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*—between *prahāṇikas* and *āraṇyakas* on the one hand and mainstream monks on the other. Therein, *prahāṇikas* seem to exist on the fringe of the normal practices and modes of established Indian monasteries; they live within the larger community of monks, but do not entirely conform to its modes and practices. And, perhaps more importantly, they have not altogether disappeared or been excluded from the *saṃgha*.

⁵⁶ Paul Harrison 1995, “Searching for the Origins of Mahāyāna” *The Eastern Buddhist* 28: 1 (1995): 48-69, 65.

⁵⁷ Daniel Boucher, *Bodhisattvas of the Forest and the Formation of the Mahāyāna: A Study and Translation of the Rāṣṭrapālapariṣchā-Sūtra*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 75.

Here we see a striking correlation between mainstream and Mahāyāna literature, centered on this figure of the *prahāṇika*. Could it be that the ideals of the *prahāṇika*, who consistently served as a model of wrong behavior in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, eventually came to be articulated in what we now know as “Mahāyāna” literature? If so, then these stories from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* have something to tell us about the development of Mahāyāna in India. And there is other evidence to suggest that this is the case.

Unfortunately, the term *prahāṇika* is rarely encountered outside the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. We do, however, find it used in at least three other sources. First, on the base of a pillar in Mathurā, dating from the same period as the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*,⁵⁸ we find the following inscription: “This pillar base is the gift of the monks Śūrīya and Buddharakṣita, who are *prahāṇikas*. May this surrender of a pious gift be for the bestowing of health on all *prahāṇikas*.”⁵⁹ While this does not link the *prahāṇikas* directly to the Mahāyāna, it does tell us that *prahāṇika* was not just a literary term and that the *prahāṇikas* saw themselves as a collective entity within the Buddhist monastic community. The inscription also tells us that this self-identification extended beyond the practice of meditation and into other religious activities, such as making donations.

⁵⁸ As I noted, scholars generally agree that the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* was completed sometime around the 1st or 2nd century CE. For still more on dating the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, see Gregory Schopen, “The Bones of a Buddha and the Business of a Monk: Conservative Monastic Values in an Early Mahayana Polemical Tract.” *Figments and Fragments of Māhāyana Buddhism in India*: 63-107, see 75-77.

⁵⁹ Lüders and Janert, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, 82-83; Damsteegt, *Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit*, 38-39.

We do, however, find a direct link between Mahāyāna literature and *prahāṇika* monks in Śāntideva's *Śikṣāsamuccaya*. Though Śāntideva wrote in the eighth century, long after the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* was completed, he draws his material from a much earlier source—the *Ākāśāgarbha Sūtra*. This text survives in its Chinese and Tibetan translations, but the only remnants of its Sanskrit version are those preserved by Śāntideva. The *Śikṣāsamuccaya* is basically a collection of passages that pertain to the stages of the bodhisattva's path on his way to Buddhahood. In Chapter Four, Śāntideva enumerates several sets of "root offenses," the first two of which are taken from the *Ākāśāgarbha Sūtra*. One of the offenses listed reads as follows:

And among householders [reprehensible monks] come forth with blame for monks who are diligent in contemplative practice (S. *prahāṇa*). And that ruler with his court makes blame and speaks abusively in the presence of monks who are diligent in contemplative practice (S. *prahāṇa*). In that case, that which is the necessities of living for meditating monks (S. *prahāṇikānām bhikṣūṇām*,) they give that to monks who engage in textual recitation. They are both guilty of a grave offense. Why? A monk involved in meditation is a good field, not one who depends on the business of study, not one devoted to study.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ C. Bendall, ed. *Śikṣāsamuccaya: A Compendium of Buddhist Teaching Compiled by Śāntideva Chiefly from Earlier Mahayana-sūtras*, Bibliotheca Buddhica, vol. I (St. Pétersbourg: Commissionnaires de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences, 1897-1902); 64. See also Silk's treatment of this same passage in *Managing Monks*, Chapter 2, esp. 17-21; *te ca prahāṇābhiyuktānām bhikṣūṇām gṛhastheṣv avarṇaṃ niścārayanti / sa ca kṣatriyaḥ saparivārah prahāṇābhiyuktānām bhikṣūṇām antike praduṣyati avadhyāyati / yas tatra prahāṇikānām bhikṣūṇām upabhogaparibhogas taṃ svādhyāyābhiratānām bhikṣūṇām niryātayanti / te*

The third reference outside the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* to a *prahāṇika* monk is found in Chapter 5 of Prāṇakaramati's 11th century commentary on Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, and is simply a quote from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. It therefore has little bearing on our discussion. In his commentary, Prāṇakaramati references this grave offense, changing some of the wording, but not the specific term *prahāṇika*.⁶¹

When compared to the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* and its depiction of *prahāṇikas*, the passage from the *Ākāśāgarbha Sūtra* cited above is rather striking. It points to a connection between the *prahāṇikas* we find in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* and the formation of proto-Mahāyāna texts in India. First of all, the term *prahāṇa* as a category of specialization for monks is used three times. In the third instance, the specific term *prahāṇika* is used. This points to a shared vocabulary between the *Ākāśāgarbha Sūtra* and the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. Furthermore, the stance taken towards *prahāṇika* monks by the *Ākāśāgarbha Sūtra* suggests the

*ubhayato mūlāpattim āpadyante / tat kasya hetoḥ // dhyāyī bhikṣuḥ sukṣetraṃ /
nādhyayanavaiyāvṛtyāśritā nādhyayanābhīyuktāḥ //.*

⁶¹ For a searchable version of the text, see University of the West, "Bodhicaryāvatāra (pañjikā): Chapter 5," *Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon*.

<http://www.uwest.edu/sanskritcanon/dp/index.php?q=node/35&textID=614cd162b68323556ea>.

Prāṇakaramati's wording of the rules is as follows: *dharmādharmavivādanāpūrvam*

śikṣāpraṇayanāt, tanmūlācāravipannānām satkārat,

prahāṇikānāmupabhogaparibhogāṅyanyatra pariṇāmanāt ubhaye'pi mūlāpattimāpadyante|

iyamaṣṭamī //. The Sanskrit can also be found in Louis de La Vallée-Poussin, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*

Pañjikā: Prajñākaramati's Commentary to the Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva [śāntideva], an

Introductory Treatise on the Duties of a Buddhist (Calcutta: Asiatic Soc, 1900).

opposing voice in a dialogue of contention over the status of monks who make contemplative practice their primary religious endeavor. Apparently, Śāntideva, or whomever he may be quoting, thought the *prahāṇika* monk was a rather virtuous fellow, one more worthy of honor than monks who were “engaged in recitation” (S. *svādhyāyābhirata*). And this dynamic—contention between *prahāṇika* monks and monks who specialize in recitation—is apparent in at least two narratives of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, both of which we have visited in this study. First, we have the story from the *Bhīṣajyavastu* in which a *prahāṇika* monk curses monks who are reciting texts because their endeavors prevent him from attaining one-pointedness of mind. As a consequence of his angry remarks towards them, the *prahāṇika* monk is reborn as a frog. The second *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* narrative in which this tension is evident is found in the *Bhikṣuvibhaṅga*.⁶² Therein, two groups of nuns living in the same space come into this exact conflict. The first group, lead by the imminent nun Mahāprajāpatī, were *prahāṇikas*.⁶³ The second group, lead by the nun Dharmadinnā, were *sūtrāntikas*,⁶⁴ which, as we have seen, indicates that they were specialists in the recitation of *sūtras*. Neither of the two groups could develop in their respective areas of specialization because of the conflict of interest inherent in the two religious specializations. Eventually they became so frustrated that they were forced to seek funds for the construction of a second nunnery so that the two groups could practice independent of one another. These two stories from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* and Śāntideva’s quote point to the same conflict within the Indian community of monks, a conflict that centered on the figure of the *prahāṇika* monk and his (or her) inability to cultivate his area

⁶² *Bhikṣu-vibhaṅga*, Derge ‘dul ba Cha 188a.5-196a.6.

⁶³ T. *spong ba ma*.

⁶⁴ T. *mdo sde’i mtha’ pa*.

of religious specialization in the presence of monks who were busy memorizing and reciting scripture. In regard to this conflict, the general stance of the Mūlasarvāstivādins is clear. In the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, the *prahāṇika* monk's criticism of recitation monks incurred for him an unfavorable rebirth. However, whoever penned Śantideva's quote from the *Ākāśagarbha Sūtra* was not only aware of the *prahāṇikas* as a religious group, but sympathetic towards and supportive of them, to say the least.

These *prahāṇika* monks from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* are looking more and more like the monks whose values were articulated in some strands of early Mahāyāna literature. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* and its stories that feature *prahāṇikas* suggest that the emergence of something like Mahāyāna Buddhism within the mainstream *saṃgha* was not an entirely amiable affair. This is also clear from the side of Mahāyāna literature, where we find many heated, polemical passages such as that quoted above from the *Ākāśagarbha Sūtra*. And these Mahāyāna polemics were often aimed directly at norms of mainstream religious practice.⁶⁵ However, heretofore we have not been able to detect the other side of this discussion in Indian Buddhist literature—that is, the voice of the mainstream *saṃgha* speaking directly to the emerging Mahāyāna movement. And the question of how mainstream literature could have remained silent towards a movement like Mahāyāna—which came from within the mainstream *saṃgha* itself and produced a vast body of literature—has long vexed scholars of Indian Buddhism. But clearly the composers of the Mūlasarvāstivādin *vinaya* were familiar with religious groups—again, within

⁶⁵ For another instance of Mahāyāna literature aimed at mainstream practices, see Gregory Schopen's paper on the *Maitreyamahāsimhanāda-sūtra*, "The Bones of a Buddha and the Business of a Monk: Conservative Values in an Early Mahāyāna Polemical Tract," in *Figments and Fragments of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India*.

their own community—that operated in a manner very similar to that of at least some strains of early Mahāyāna, as they are represented in early Mahāyāna literature.

What is most telling about the Mūlasarvāstivādin treatment of *prahāṇika* monks, and the religious movement they represent, is this: In no instance in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*—at least not one that I have yet found—is the Mūlasarvāstivādin’s treatment *prahāṇika* monks favorable. Only once—in the story of the nuns Mahāprajāpatī and Dharmadinnā—are *prahāṇikas* presented as equals. Stories involving *prahāṇika* monks inevitably involve some conflict within the *saṃgha* or some censure against the practices of these monks. Again, it appears from both Mahāyāna and mainstream polemics, that the emergence of this new movement was not a friendly affair for either side.

One final passage further demonstrates this conflict. To my knowledge, Mūlasarvāstivādin literature directly mentions Mahāyāna only once. And this reference also points to an uneasy relationship. In the opening lines of the teaching on “entering the womb”, the Buddha asserts that the sermon he is about to preach is “unadulterated” (T.*ma ’dres pa*). In his commentary on the *Kṣudrakavastu*, Śīlapālita explains the term “unadulterated” in the following way:

Regarding “unadulterated,” it makes for the expulsion of all suffering, and it is not concerned with the Mahāyāna (T. *theg pa chen po*).⁶⁶

So our commentator was, at least, aware of the term Mahāyāna and clearly he saw it as an inferior, “adulterated” teaching.

⁶⁶ *Āgamakṣudrakavyākhyāna*, Derge ‘dul ba Dzu 48a.1; *ma ’dres pa zes bya ba ni sdug bsngal thams cad zlog par byed pa la theg pa chen po la ltos pa med pa’i phyir ma ’dres pa ste / tshangs par spyod pa’o //*.

Given the diversity of Indian Mahāyāna literature, we must be careful not to make too many generalizations about its origin. For now we can only say that if this link between the *prahāṇika* monks of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* and the ascetic strands of Mahāyāna literature that speak in praise of meditating monks (S. *prahāṇikas*) and forest renouncers (S. *āraṇyakas*) is real, and I believe that further study will demonstrate that it is, then the unflattering depictions of *prahāṇika* monks found in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* have a lot to tell us about the development of the Mahāyāna in India. The *prahāṇika* monk, dirty feet and all, may be a rather telling figure in the history of Indian Buddhism. This indicates that at least one mainstream text had plenty to say about the beginnings of Mahāyāna, or proto-Mahāyāna, and practically none of what they said was favorable. These *prahāṇika* monks, their vision of the tradition, and the practices they espoused, were all cast by the authors of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* as barely tolerable.

Conclusion

In the *Kṣudrakavastu* we find a picture of meditation that is different than what has been widely assumed. Simply stated, it was not the locus of the religious program we find in this *vinaya*; it was only one of many practices that a monk or nun might engage in. It is not spoken of as a requirement of the monastic program, and there is no indication that periods of meditation were built into the daily schedule. The logistics of meditative practice were by no means a simple affair, either in terms of where and how it was practiced or in terms of the support it received from monks. Within those narratives that mention meditation, we find a variety of attitudes about its place and importance.

Nevertheless, there are several general patterns that we have uncovered in the preceding chapters. In Chapter I: Technical Terminology we looked at four Sanskrit terms from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* that relate to meditation. We saw that while *dhyāna*—i.e. the general practice of meditation—was an area of specialization for some monks, it was not a requirement for all monks. Furthermore, meditation was not understood to be the only, or even the primary means by which the monks in our stories attained enlightenment. Rather, it was the more general monastic program—the observance of rules and hearing the *dharma* preached—that brought about this experience. Because soteriological ends were not met through meditation, the attainment of deep meditative states—also *dhyāna* in Sanskrit—reads as a kind of supernatural power wielded by the Buddha’s enlightened followers (S. *arhat.*)

In the section on “contemplation of the repulsive” (S. *aśubhabhāvana*) I demonstrated that this technique was the most popular meditation technique found in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. Here we began to see the importance of understanding meditation as a practice that

occurred within the context of monastic discipline. This technique centers on the cultivation of detachment towards objects that inspire feelings of lust. It is likely that the predominant place it holds in our sources is a result of the difficulties that must have accompanied the larger community's insistence on complete celibacy for all its members. It has been said that monks undertook monastic discipline for the sake of perfecting meditation. But here it seems more fitting to think in terms of monks meditating in order to perfect monastic discipline, which, as the story of the nun Dharmadinnā makes clear, bore real salvific power.

In Chapter I we also saw that terms like “resting in seclusion” (*S. pratisamlī*) and “the establishment of mindfulness” (*S. smṛtyupasthāna*) were most often associated with the day-to-day business of the monastery, rather than with silent, seated meditation. In our stories, the monks who “entered into seclusion” did so for the sake of going to sleep. And monks were admonished to “establish mindfulness” for the sake of maintaining cleanliness and deportment during activities such as eating and reciting texts.

In Chapter II: The Vocation of a Monk, we looked at the monastic program more generally and the role meditation played therein. As we saw, there were at least two aspects of monastic training that were consistently presented as more important than meditation. These two are scriptural recitation and the observance of monastic rules. The practice of recitation is treated in much greater detail in our sources. Periods of recitation were built into the daily schedule of the monks and it is repeatedly cited as an obligation. The observance of rules was so important that a meditating monk—named Nandika—who broke the rule of celibacy was given a schedule that clearly excluded the possibility of pursuing meditation as a specialization. Despite not being allowed to meditate for long periods, Nandika attained the highest spiritual aspiration of the tradition.

Also in Chapter II, we saw that enlightenment and/or the cultivation of good qualities was not the only objective associated with meditation. Enlightened monks also entered into the *dhyānic* mind states for the sake of summoning fire and lightening, traveling to the heavens, or producing some other magical effect. Such magical powers were frequently demonstrated for the sake of authenticating the spiritual capacity of the Buddha and his enlightened followers. They were also demonstrated for the sake of securing an individual's conversion, as in the story of the monks Dāsaputra and Pāla.

In Chapter II I also argued that while the Buddha and his followers embraced certain associations with images of death and dying, “contemplation of the repulsive” may have been one practice that they were eager to keep out of the eyes of the public. This hesitance was a result of the spiritual pollution linked to contact with the dead in Indian, and specifically brahmanical culture.

In Chapter III: Monks Who Meditate, we looked at the figure of the *prahāṇika* monk, whose area of religious specialization was seated, silent contemplation. We began by looking at the Mūlasarvāstivādin ambivalence towards the physical space outside the village or monastery, which is most often presented as dangerous and unpredictable. Nevertheless, our sources make it clear that monks who, like the *prahāṇika*, wished to meditate for long periods of time had no other option but to do so outside the monastery, usually in the forest. This resulted in a strong sense of unease and suspicion surrounding these meditating monks. In fact, our composers frequently used meditating monks as reminders to other monks about what *not* to do.

Finally, I argued that the values and practices of these marginalized meditation monks may have had an influence on the formation of early strands of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India. In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* and other mainstream literature the *prahāṇika* monk is consistently

blamed and censured for his inability to fit seamlessly into the business of the larger community. However, in the *Ākāśagarbha Sūtra*—an early Mahāyāna text, the *prahāṇika* monk is praised as the highest and most worthy recipient of gifts.

Tension is another theme that we have seen throughout this study. Meditating monks and nuns repeatedly came into conflict with fellow monastics who specialized in recitation. They also came into frequent conflict with members of the lay community, particularly kings. In the *Poṣadhavastu*, when monks attempt to implement the seated *yoga* taught by the Buddha, they are repeatedly shamed by those outside the monastic community. The work of Buddhaghōṣa demonstrates that such tension was not exclusive to the Mūlasarvāstivādin community.

Not surprisingly, all the stories we have seen bear the mark of *vinaya* specialists—monks who were charged with the administration and maintenance of the larger community. They indicate that our composers had little more than a cursory knowledge of those features of mainstream meditation that have been treated widely in both Buddhist commentaries and modern scholarship. For example, if they were aware of any painstakingly detailed analysis of the various mental factors that comprise the *dhyānic* mind states, such an awareness was not reflected in the literature they produced. Also, consider the effort and time—both past and present—that has been expended on questions regarding the relationship between calm (S. *śamatha*, T. *zhi gnas*) and insight (S. *vipaśyanā*, T. *lhag mthong*) meditation.⁶⁷ As we saw, the compound *śamathavipaśyanā* is used only twice in the *Kṣudrakavastu*. In one instance, mastery of the two is listed as one of the Buddha’s superpowers, and in the other instance it is simply stated that the Buddha admonished his followers to develop the teachings related to *śamathavipaśyanā*. So our composers were certainly aware that meditative practices related to

⁶⁷ See above, section 2.3 The Importance of Morality in *Śamatha* and *Vipaśyāna*.

“calm” and “insight” existed within their tradition. But their literature lacks the kind of technical nuance that we find in *sūtras* and commentarial literature.

Simply stated, meditation was not the defining feature of this Indian monastic tradition. Meditation was only one of many practices we find, and in our sources it is not given the same preeminence that we find in work such as the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* of the Theravādin Pāli Canon, which is frequently cited in discussions of meditation in the Indian tradition. This is not to say, however, that the monks represented by the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* were not concerned with spiritual attainment. But it has been widely assumed that meditation was the primary—and perhaps even the only—tool used by Indian monks to tame the mind. But a rather different picture emerges from the chapters of our study. In his commentary on Kāmalasīla’s *Bhāvanakrama*, Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th and current Dalai Lama wrote:

One thing that should be very clear is that Dharma teachings have only one purpose: to discipline the mind.⁶⁸

The Mūlasarvāstivādin program for training the mind centered on monastic discipline, hearing the *dharma*, and the recitation of texts. And the multitude of instances in which enlightenment occurs demonstrates that they understood this program to be every bit as efficacious as formal, seated meditation. Meditation may have been employed by some, perhaps to a small extent by all, but seated contemplation was certainly not the *sine qua non* their spiritual program or their means to “discipline the mind.”

I would like to conclude this study with two final points. First, the ideas presented here are made possible only by an inclusion of *vinaya* sources in our consideration of the character

⁶⁸ Bstan ’dzin rgya mtsho, Geshe Lobsang Jordhen, Lobsang Choephel Ganchenpa, Jeremy Russell, and Kamalāsīla, *Stages of Meditation* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2001), 1.

and development of the Indian Buddhist tradition. There was, after all, an entire discipline within the Indian *saṃgha* dedicated to the preservation of *vinaya* literature. The values preserved by these specialists in the monastic code (*S. vinayadharas*) have much to tell us about how the tradition was understood and how it operated and grew in ancient India. The *vinayadhara* is, it seems to me, one of the unsung heroes of the Buddhist tradition. In a world that praises renunciation and transcendent mind states, this monk was faced with the task of governing a great variety of personalities, and ensuring that the monks in the community observed a host of rules, many of which must have seemed extreme and unreasonable to the average Indian.

Second, we see here at least some of the many problems that accompany the assumption that all of the Indian Buddhist tradition—or any other religious tradition for that matter—can somehow be encapsulated by one practice, such as meditation. This assumption silences the historical, social, rhetorical, and ritual contexts in which meditation itself was practiced. These different contexts serve as the soil in which the variegated forms, approaches to, and perspectives on meditation grew.

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