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Hearing, Reflection, and Cultivation: Relating the Three Types of Wisdom to Mindfulness

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Abstract: A text-historical perspective on the Buddhist scheme of three types of wisdom, acquired by hearing, reflection, and cultivation, shows that a bare listing in the earliest textual strata has led to somewhat differing perspectives in later exegesis of the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda traditions, the former apparently being influenced by what appears to be an error in oral transmission. The more convincing position taken in Sarvāstivāda exegesis sees these three types of wisdom as interrelated activities that can rely on mindfulness, thereby testifying to the flexibility and broad compass of mindfulness in Buddhist thought as something not limited to a rigid division between theory and practice.

Keywords: cultivation; hearing; learning; reflection; theory and practice; three types of wisdom; wisdom



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1. Introduction

A quality of central importance in the Buddhist traditions is the development of wisdom. One particular mode of analysis of this quality presents a threefold distinction of wisdom according to its sources.¹ These could be “hearing,” which in the ancient oral setting was the main means to acquire learning, “reflection,” and meditative “cultivation.”

Perhaps at first sight somewhat unexpectedly, each of these three kinds of wisdom can involve the cultivation of mindfulness. Before examining the perspective on mindfulness that emerges in this way, however, a closer look at these three types of wisdom is required, starting off with the early discourses and proceeding from these to early canonical Abhidharma and later exegetical works.

2. The Saṅgīti-Sutta

Among Pāli discourses, the three kinds of wisdom feature only once, in a discourse titled *Saṅgīti-sutta*. The relevant passage has a counterpart in Sanskrit fragments. The two versions proceed as follows:

Three [kinds of] wisdom: wisdom produced by reflection, wisdom produced by hearing, and wisdom produced by cultivation (DN 33).²

Three [kinds of] wisdom: wisdom produced by hearing, wisdom produced by reflection, and wisdom produced by cultivation (Sanskrit fragment).³

The main difference between the two presentations is a matter of sequence, in that the two types of wisdom produced by hearing and by reflection occur in the opposite order. Variations in sequence between lists transmitted by different reciter lineages, which otherwise have preserved the same content, are a fairly frequent occurrence in the early discourses, reflecting the vagaries of oral transmission (Anālayo 2011, pp. 873–76). Although such variations are often not of much significance, in the present case, this difference can lead to somewhat differing perspectives on the relationship between these three, a topic to be explored in more detail below.

Another noteworthy point is that two extant Chinese parallels to the *Saṅgīti-sutta* do not refer to these three types of wisdom.⁴ This difference can best be appreciated by turning to the function and apparent development of the discourse in question.

The introductory narration of the *Saṅgīti-sutta* refers to quarreling that had broken out among the Jains after the death of their teacher. In order to forestall possible disagreements arising among the followers of the Buddha, his chief disciple Sāriputta reportedly presented a sort of inventory of key doctrines and terms, listed in numerical order. The assembled monastics were to recite these together as an expression of communal harmony and agreement on these teachings. Tilakaratne (2000, p. 186) explained:

The sutta is meant to contain the entire teaching of the Buddha in a condensed form. It makes available the teaching in one piece so that everyone knows what its content is, thereby removing any possible room for doubt.

Comparative study of the *Saṅgīti-sutta* in the light of its parallels points to a gradual process of textual growth where, based on a common set of doctrines as their starting point, different reciter traditions appear to have incorporated other textual items that were deemed to deserve the honor of inclusion in this discourse. Rhys Davids (1921, p. 199) commented on the *Saṅgīti-sutta* (and the subsequent discourse in the same *Dīgha-nikāya*, which is of a similar nature) that “they contain here and there matter which suggests that they took their present shape at a later date than the bulk of the rest of the *Dīgha[nikāya]*,” as a result of which “they become practically Abhidhamma rather than Sutta Piṭaka.”

Against the background of this function served by the *Saṅgīti-sutta* and its parallels, and of the process of development this discourse underwent, it seems fair to conclude that the three kinds of wisdom were not a central element of early Buddhist thought. Although recognition of the respective sources of knowledge as such is, of course, not an innovation, classifying them in the above manner probably results from a process of evolution evident in the different versions of the *Saṅgīti-sutta*.

3. Abhidharma Perspectives

Further information on these three kinds of wisdom, enumerated in the *Saṅgīti-sutta* and its Sanskrit fragment parallel, can be found in the corresponding early canonical Abhidharma texts of the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda traditions, namely in the *Vibhaṅga* and the *Saṅgītiparyāya* (T 1536). Here are their respective presentations which, for the purpose of facilitating comparison, are taken up together according to each of the three types of wisdom. For the case of hearing, the expositions given in the *Vibhaṅga* (translated first) and then in the *Saṅgītiparyāya* proceed in this manner:

Herein, what is wisdom produced by hearing? . . . it is the acceptance, view, liking, intelligence, consideration, penchant for accepting the teaching, which is of the type that [affirms] ownership of karma or is in conformity with the truth, or with the impermanence of material form, or with the impermanence of feeling tone, or with the impermanence of perception, or with the impermanence of formations, or with the impermanence of consciousness, being gained by having heard it from another: this is called wisdom produced by hearing (*Vibh*).⁵

What is wisdom accomplished by hearing? The answer is: In dependence on hearing, in reliance on hearing, due to being established in hearing, in one way or another one has the strength to gain on one’s own correct and pervasive penetration. How is this matter? Suppose a monastic has either memorized the discourses, or memorized the Vinaya, or memorized the Abhidharma, or heard what the preceptor said, or heard what the teacher said, or heard what has been said in the textual collections that have been successively transmitted, or heard what has been said according to someone who is correct; this is called ‘being heard.’ Because in dependence on such hearing, in reliance on such hearing, due to being established in such hearing, in one way or another one has the strength

to gain on one's own correct and pervasive penetration, this is called 'wisdom accomplished by hearing' (T 1536).⁶

The two explanations can be seen to agree on placing an emphasis on the role played by someone else from whom one hears what will give rise to wisdom. The *Vibhaṅga* provides some indications of the content of what is heard, which could be related to karma, truth, or the impermanent nature of the five aggregates. The part elided in the above translation additionally establishes a relationship to different settings in which such hearing could occur, such as in relation to some work or craft, etc. The understanding gained in this way finds expression in a series of terms beginning with "acceptance."

The *Saṅgītiparyāya* is not concerned with the content of what is heard or in what setting this may happen; instead, it lists different potential sources for hearing. These could be one's own memorization (obviously based on having heard it previously) or the words spoken by authoritative persons.

Before turning to the next type of wisdom, it needs be noted that the *Vibhaṅga* follows the sequence of the Pāli version of the *Saṅgīti-sutta* by taking up reasoning first and only then turning to hearing. In other words, the passage translated above on hearing covers the second type of wisdom in its treatment, whereas the one that comes below (which only differs from the one already translated in speaking of "not having heard") is the first one in its presentation:

Herein, what is wisdom produced by reflection? . . . it is the acceptance, view, liking, intelligence, consideration, penchant for understanding things, being of the type that is in conformity with ownership of karma, or in conformity with the truth, or with the impermanence of material form, or with the impermanence of feeling tone, or with the impermanence of perception, or with the impermanence of formations, or with the impermanence of consciousness, on being gained by not having heard it from another: this is called wisdom produced by reflection (Vibh).⁷

What is wisdom accomplished by reflection? The answer is: In dependence on reflection, in reliance on reflection, due to being established in reflection, in one way or another one has the strength to gain on one's own correct and pervasive penetration. How is this matter? That is, for instance, if there is correct reflection, writing, calculation, and confirming, or else what accords with work that is to be undertaken step by step, this is called 'being reflected on.' Because in dependence on such reflection, in reliance on such reflection, due to being established in such reflection, in one way or another one has the strength to gain on one's own correct and pervasive penetration, this is called 'wisdom accomplished by reflection' (T 1536).⁸

As already mentioned earlier, when introducing the above translated passages, the presentation of wisdom produced by reflection in the *Vibhaṅga* differs from the case of wisdom produced by hearing only in replacing "having heard it from another" with "not having heard it from another." The *Saṅgītiparyāya* instead presents a new perspective, as it describes various instances of reasoning.

The third and last type of wisdom receives the following explanations:

And all wisdom of one who has attained is wisdom produced by cultivation (Vibh).⁹

What is wisdom accomplished by cultivation? The answer is: In dependence on cultivation, in reliance on cultivation, due to being established in cultivation, in one way or another one has the strength to gain on one's own correct and pervasive penetration. How is this matter? That is, suppose with skillful means and with one's own effort one cultivates the path to complete seclusion from defilements. Because of such cultivation of the path to seclusion from defilements, and being secluded from sensual desires and bad and unwholesome states, with application and sustaining, with joy and happiness born of seclusion, one dwells

accomplished in entry into the first absorption ... (to be spoken in full up to) ... dwells accomplished in entry into the fourth absorption, this is called 'being cultivated.' Because in dependence on such cultivation, in reliance on such cultivation, due to being established in such cultivation, in one way or another one has the strength to gain on one's own correct and pervasive penetration, this is called 'wisdom accomplished by cultivation' (T 1536).¹⁰

The explanation given in the *Vibhaṅga* just briefly refers to what has been "attained." The reference in the *Saṅgītiparyāya* to the four absorptions could be taken as an illustration of such attainment. Attaining the four absorptions could indeed produce wisdom, as long as it is part of a cultivation aimed at complete freedom from defilements, whereas absorption on its own is not necessarily able to fulfil this function (Anālayo 2020).

In sum, with these two early canonical Abhidharma works, the implications of each of the three types of wisdom can be fleshed out with more detail. Combining and simplifying the indications provided in this way, the relevant type of hearing concerns topics productive of wisdom (such as karma, truth, and impermanence), which could be taught by an authoritative teacher or be reproduced by one's own memorization. For reflection to lead to wisdom, it should proceed similarly to how one reasons when writing, calculating, or planning some work. The third type of wisdom relies on meditative attainment, an example of which would be the cultivation of the four absorptions (as long as this takes part under the overarching goal of liberation from defilements).

A difference of further consequence for the present exploration is that the *Vibhaṅga* explicitly indicates that the wisdom produced from reflection (which in its presentation is the first of the three) arises upon *not* having heard it from another.

4. A Perspective from Later Exegesis: Buddhaghosa

The three kinds of wisdom occur in a broad range of later texts, a comprehensive survey of which will not be possible within the confines of the present exploration. Instead, keeping in line with the two Abhidharma works already taken up, just the perspectives offered by exegetical treatises of the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda traditions will have to suffice. Representative of the former is Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*. Whereas the Pāli commentary on the *Saṅgīti-sutta* just quotes the explanation given in the *Vibhaṅga*,¹¹ the *Visuddhimagga* precedes the same with an additional explanation:

Wisdom gained without having heard from another, accomplished by the power of one's own reasoning, is 'produced by reflection.' Wisdom gained on having heard from another, accomplished by the power of hearing, is 'produced by hearing.' Wisdom accomplished by the power of cultivation in one way or another, the attainment of absorption, is 'produced by cultivation.'¹²

A similar position can be seen in the *Vimuttimagga* (T 1648), a path manual extant in Chinese that appears to have set a precedent for Buddhaghosa's compilation of the *Visuddhimagga* (Anālayo 2009a). After listing the three types of wisdom in the order of reflection, hearing, and cultivation, the relevant passage proceeds as follows:

Herein, what one has not heard from another, if it is produced by one's own discriminating knowledge, if it is gained by following knowledge associated with the characteristic of truth, being in the sphere of skill and understanding, is reckoned wisdom of reflection. In this case, what is wisdom gained by hearing from another is reckoned wisdom of hearing. If one enters concentration and that wisdom is completely developed, it is wisdom of cultivation.¹³

In this way, the *Vimuttimagga* and the *Visuddhimagga* continue the pattern established in the *Saṅgīti-sutta* of listing reflection first. They also follow the *Vibhaṅga* in presenting the three types of wisdom as somewhat discrete, which is particularly evident in the specification that wisdom produced from reflection is gained without having heard from another. According to Jayatilleke ([1963] 1980, p. 302), "this classification is based on a strictly dichotomous division, which is implied rather than stated." That is, wisdom derives

either from meditative attainment or not, and the latter is either from hearing or from reflection.

This mode of understanding is in itself a possible interpretation of the adjective *maya* appended to each of the three sources that make up the three kinds of wisdom. This adjective can convey different nuances (Hamilton 1996, p. 138). One sense of *maya* is being “produced from,” an example being the description of a certain supernormal ability of directing the mind to the creation of a body that is “produced by the mind.”¹⁴ Of more frequent occurrence, however, is another sense of *maya* as indicative of what something is “made of.” Examples are references to material things that could be “made of iron,”¹⁵ “made of [a certain type of] grass,”¹⁶ or “made of all [kinds of] jewels.”¹⁷

The interpretation adopted in the *Vibhaṅga* and *Visuddhimagga* appears to follow this alternative meaning, understanding the three types of wisdom to be “made of” reflection, hearing, and cultivation in the sense of what constitutes them. For this reason, in the translations provided of these texts, it would have been more appropriate to employ the rendering “made of” instead of “produced by,” which has only been used to maintain consistency of translation terminology throughout this study. On adopting this alternative sense of being “made of”, the three types of wisdom can be neatly set apart from each other, such as considering the one made of reasoning to be independent of having heard from another.

In the context of the three kinds of wisdom, however, the other understanding of *maya* would be considerably more compelling in the sense that, in this setting, *maya* would be intending to convey that wisdom is “produced by” these three, a perspective that facilitates seeing their interrelation. The essential interrelatedness of the three types of wisdom can be illustrated with the help of an explanation given by Balagangadhara (2005, p. 1006), according to whom the second phase involves the “internalization” of the answer(s) one had previously received through hearing, and the third phase then requires that one “contemplates the insight achieved and observes its impact on experience.” Deroche (2019, p. 283) presents the same basic process in the following manner:

Listening to a teacher or studying texts can be seen as the first input of relevant information from outside, which begins to reorient one’s own priorities, interests, and attention through learning from the wisdom accumulated by past generations, especially the Buddha. Nevertheless, there is then the need to go from the words to the meaning . . . This is the role of personal reflection . . . bringing a deeper sense of conversion, unification, and conviction. But such result, still unstable, is then to be fully achieved through cultivation. By its function of repeated training with embodied methods, cultivation is said to overcome the mechanistic reactivity of our karmic imprints, subconscious tendencies, passions and create new virtuous habits and states of being.

Paraphrasing a position taken in the *Samādhinirmocanasūtra*, Deleanu (2019, p. 18) explains that, based on the literal understanding gained through hearing and the revelation of the true intent of the words through reflection, “meditative cultivation . . . attains the real cognition of the object itself by . . . non-conceptual modes made possible by the contemplative act.”

The comparatively less compelling position taken in the *Vibhaṅga* and *Visuddhimagga* appears to be a consequence of the sequence in which the three types of wisdom are listed in the *Saṅgīti-sutta*, with reflection coming before hearing. Such a mode of presentation does not encourage viewing the three as involving a natural progression. This would in turn have encouraged reading *maya* in line with the examples of something being made of iron, grass, or jewels. On this assumption, the sequence found in the *Saṅgīti-sutta* would have eventually resulted in viewing each type of wisdom as somewhat discrete.

5. A Different Perspective within the Theravāda Tradition

As was already noted by Gethin (1992, p. 222) and Skilling (2020, p. 93), within the same Theravāda tradition a different perspective can be found. This emerges in two

manuals for exegetical methodology that can be situated at a time substantially later than the closure of the canonical Abhidharma collection but still before Buddhaghosa's compilation of the *Visuddhimagga* and Pāli commentaries. One of these two manuals is the *Peṭakopadesa*, which lists the three types of wisdom by placing the one produced from hearing first:

Monastics, there are these three [types of] wisdom: produced from hearing, produced from reflection, and produced from cultivation.¹⁸

The other manual is the *Nettippakaraṇa*, which offers an interesting perspective on how the wisdom produced from hearing relates to that produced from reflection:

The teacher or some companion in the holy life, who takes the standing of a teacher, teaches someone the Dharma. Having heard this Dharma, one gains confidence. Herein, any investigation, application, gauging, and examining is wisdom produced from hearing. In reliance on having heard, any investigation, application, gauging, and examining is wisdom produced from reflection.¹⁹

This passage brings out the intrinsic interrelationship between these two types of wisdom, explicitly indicating that the wisdom produced from reflection takes place “in reliance on having heard.” Such indication marks a significant difference compared with the presentation in the *Vibhaṅga*, *Vimuttimaggā*, and *Visuddhimaggā*. The *Nettippakaraṇa* continues after the above quote by showing that the third type of wisdom takes place by way of cultivation based on the groundwork laid by the other types of wisdom. In this way, the natural interrelation between the three types of wisdom becomes fully evident.

Notably, the presentation in the *Peṭakopadesa*, mentioned earlier, takes the form of a canonical quotation. Ñāṇamoli ([1964] 1979, pp. 92, 382) related this to the *Saṅgīti-sutta*, at the same time noting that the quote does not match the source exactly. This is indeed the case, as the *Peṭakopadesa* and the *Nettippakaraṇa* do not follow the order adopted in the Theravāda version of the *Saṅgīti-sutta*. This gives the impression that these two works were based on a different version of this discourse, which had the three types of wisdom in the order found in the Sanskrit fragment parallel to the *Saṅgīti-sutta* and in the *Saṅgītiparyāya*.

The reliance on originals that differ or are even unknown in the received Theravāda canon appears to be a recurrent trait of these two manuals. Ñāṇamoli ([1964] 1979, p. xxiv) counts “211 traced quotations and 42 untraced” in the *Peṭakopadesa* and “200 traced and 65 untraced quotations” in the *Nettippakaraṇa* (Ñāṇamoli 1962, p. lv). This shows that both works were based on collections of discourses that differed from those now extant in Pāli. In fact, Zacchetti (2002) found close similarities between the sixth chapter of the *Peṭakopadesa* and a text translated by An Shigao, and Bechert (1961, p. 81) identified a Mūlasarvāstivāda source for one particular *Nettippakaraṇa* quote. In this way, as noted by von Hinüber ([1996] 1997, p. 82), it is “likely that Nett[ippakaraṇa] and Peṭ[akopadesa] intruded from outside into the Theravāda as handbooks to understand and to explain the Suttantas”.

The precedent set in this way by the departure from the Theravāda norm in the *Peṭakopadesa* and the *Nettippakaraṇa* appears to have, in turn, influenced Dhammapāla's commentary on the *Udāna*, as he adopts the sequence beginning with wisdom produced from hearing:

And mundane wisdom is produced from hearing, produced from reflection, and produced from cultivation.²⁰

The resultant variations have inspired the eminent Thai scholar-monk Phra Payutto (2017, p. 84) to attempt an explanation as follows:

The discrepancy between having either *sutamaya-paññā* or *cintāmayā-paññā* as the first of the three factors depends on whether the focus is primarily on exceptional individuals, or whether it is on the practice by general, ordinary individuals. In the case where *cintāmayā-paññā* is placed first, the examination begins with . . . the

Buddha (or with a ‘Silent Buddha’—*paccekabuddha*). Such a person has discovered and revealed the truth without relying on the instructions and teachings by others.

The reasonable attempt to harmonize the two different sequences of presentation by assuming that the one which places reflection first refers to those who reach awakening on their own, without having received any teachings, is not fully convincing. The problem is that in such a case, this type of listing should not mention wisdom produced from hearing at all. As the venerable author himself notes, based on reflection, such an exceptional individual “moves directly to *bhāvanāmayā-paññā* (he needs not rely at all on *sutamaya-paññā*)” (p. 84).

From a text-historical perspective, it seems instead that an apparent error during the oral transmission of the *Saṅgīti-sūta* led to a change in the sequence of listing the three types of wisdom, which in turn influenced the interpretations adopted in Theravāda Abhidharma and exegesis. Thanks to the input received from outside of the Theravāda tradition by way of the *Peṭakopadesa* and the *Nettipakaraṇa*, the more convincing sequence of the three types of wisdom was also able to make itself heard within the same Theravāda tradition.

6. A Perspective from Later Exegesis: Vasubandhu

Due to the sequence adopted in the Sanskrit fragment version and the *Saṅgītiparyāya*, the interrelationship between the three types of wisdom is more easily discerned. This is therefore naturally evident in the following explanation offered by Vasubandhu in his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (VI 5a):

Having heard, one reflects; having reflected correctly, one engages in cultivation.²¹

As was already noted by Adam (2006, p. 83), the “account given by Vasubandhu regards the three kinds of wisdom as progressive,” each building on the preceding one(s).²² Besides clarifying the progressive and interrelated nature of the three kinds of wisdom, however, Vasubandhu has still more to offer (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* VI 15a):

The establishment of mindfulness has wisdom as its innate nature. What kind of wisdom? The wisdom produced by hearing, etc., [that is, wisdom] produced by hearing, produced by reflection, and produced by cultivation.²³

At first sight, this presentation may be unexpected, as the establishments of mindfulness would naturally seem to fit under the header of “cultivation.” The Pāli discourses regularly speak of their “cultivation,” *bhāvanā*, or of someone who “cultivates” them, *bhāveti*, which relates the establishments of mindfulness to the third category of wisdom. Yet, as Fiordalis (2018, p. 283) points out, the position taken by Vasubandhu implies the following:

By identifying wisdom as their common basis, Vasubandhu suggests how the discursive practices of learning the Dharma and reasoning about it might belong on a continuum of practices alongside the cultivation of mindfulness.

The perspective that emerges in this way has considerable ramifications for understanding mindfulness practice in turn. Deroche (2021, p. 19) reasons that

mindfulness plays a critical role at each of these steps, forming the common thread joining them together. Beyond opposing statically the mnemonic, conceptual, and attentional dimensions of mindfulness, this threefold paradigm of ‘mindful wisdom’ can serve to articulate them dynamically within the context of the path.

7. The Relationship to Mindfulness

The relevance of hearing and reflection to the cultivation of the establishments of mindfulness could be illustrated with the help of an instruction given in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its two parallels under the header of “contemplation of the body.” The last of the exercises concerned with the body takes as its object the corpse of another person. The parallel versions describe in much detail different stages of decay a dead body would go

through if it were left out in the open, from being bloated and livid via being eaten by various animals and decomposing to the eventual crumbling to pieces of its bones. The practitioner's task is to bring to mind, or perhaps visualize, one of these stages and then engage in the following mode of practice:

As though one were to see a corpse thrown away in a charnel ground ... one compares this same body with it: 'This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate' (MN 10).²⁴

One contemplates another's corpse ... having seen it, one compares oneself to it: 'This body of mine now is also like this, it is of the same nature, and in the end cannot escape [this fate]' (MĀ 98).²⁵

One contemplates a corpse ... one contemplates that one's own body is not different from that: 'My body will not escape from this calamity' (EĀ 12.1).²⁶

This mindfulness exercise clearly involves a form of reflection, which serves to relate the condition of the dead body of another to the nature of one's own body, and it is based on such reflection that the actual cultivation takes off. Moreover, the actual reflection to be used for this exercise is something the practitioner must have heard previously, when receiving instructions. Still, in all three versions, this is a mindfulness practice, it belongs to the first "establishment of mindfulness" (*satipaṭṭhāna*, *smṛtyupasthāna*, 念處, *dran pa nye bar gzhag pa*).

In addition to this corroboration of the relationship of hearing and reflection to the actual practice of an establishment of mindfulness, a complementary perspective would be the relevance of mindfulness to hearing and reflection (as long as these are of the type that can produce wisdom). In order to appreciate this perspective, the oral setting of ancient India is of relevance. In such a setting, any instruction or teaching has to be memorized right away in order to be of any use. Not listening properly or getting distracted means that the instruction has irretrievably been lost. In the absence of any written or digital recording, there is simply no way of keeping the teaching alive unless it has been memorized.

The need to give full attention can be illustrated with the Buddha's rebuke of a recalcitrant monk for not paying proper attention (with the slight difference that in the first version, the rebuke refers to the culprit in the third-person singular, whereas the second version directly addresses him in the second-person singular):

And this foolish person, while the Dharma is being taught by me, does not heed it, does not pay attention, does not engage with the whole mind, and does not hear the Dharma with ready ear (MN 65).²⁷

You certainly did not listen single-mindedly, not having the proper regard, and not paying attention mindfully (MĀ 194).²⁸

As stated explicitly in the second version translated above, which can safely be considered implicit in the first, there is a need for mindfulness at the time a teaching is given, lest it be lost. The role of mindfulness in relation to hearing (and by implication in relation to reflection as well) goes beyond merely ensuring proper retention in memory. This can be seen from a passage that relates the arousing of the awakening factors to the situation of hearing a teaching:

Having heard the teaching, one dwells withdrawn by two kinds of withdrawal: by bodily withdrawal and mental withdrawal. Dwelling withdrawn in this way, one recollects that teaching and reflects on it. Monastics, whenever a monastic, dwelling withdrawn in this way, recollects that teaching and reflects on it, at that time the awakening factor of mindfulness is aroused in the monastic, at that time the monastic cultivates the awakening factor of mindfulness, at that time the awakening factor of mindfulness comes to be accomplished in the monastic by cultivation. Dwelling mindfully in this way, one discerns, investigates, and makes an examination of that state with wisdom. Monastics, whenever a monastic dwelling mindfully in this way discerns, investigates, and makes an examination

of that state with wisdom, at that time the awakening factor of investigation-of-dharmas is aroused in the monastic, at that time the monastic cultivates the awakening factor of investigation-of-dharmas, at that time the awakening factor of investigation-of-dharmas comes to be accomplished in the monastic by cultivation (SN 46.3).²⁹

From time to time one gets to hear profound and sublime teachings. Having heard profound teachings, one accomplishes the twofold proper behavior, bodily propriety and mental propriety. At that time, one cultivates the awakening factor of mindfulness. Having cultivated the awakening factor of mindfulness, the awakening factor of mindfulness becomes fulfilled. The awakening factor of mindfulness having been fulfilled, one investigates the teaching, analyzes the teaching, and examines the teaching. At that time, one diligently cultivates the awakening factor of investigation-of-dharmas (SĀ 723).³⁰

A Sanskrit fragment has preserved several parts of a corresponding presentation.³¹ Although the Pāli version is more detailed than its Chinese counterpart (and what has been preserved in Sanskrit fragments), the basic message given in the parallel versions remains the same: Hearing teachings and reflecting on them can become an occasion for cultivating the awakening factors. The parallels continue by indicating that the development described in the excerpts translated above can lead to bringing the other awakening factors to fulfilment as well. In this way, a “cultivation” (*bhāvanā*) of the awakening factors, those mental qualities singled out in early Buddhist soteriology as the key requirements for the breakthrough to awakening, can rely on “hearing” and subsequent “reflection.”

That the breakthrough to awakening need not take place only when meditating is also evident from a survey of different occasions for liberation, recognized in the early discourses (Anālayo 2009b; Pāsādika 2017). Aside from meditation, these include the occasion of listening to a teaching and the occasion of reflecting on it. Each of these can result in the breakthrough to awakening.

8. Conclusions

The above exploration, taking off from the three kinds of wisdom and then relating these to the cultivation of mindfulness, can help to broaden the perspective on the range of applicability and compass of Buddhist meditation practice. Fiordalis (2018, p. 278) comments:

Among the many assumptions embedded in our contemporary discourse is the idea that “practice” differs, somehow basically, from “theory.” By these terms, we usually mean something rather vague: “doing” something, rather than “thinking” or “talking” or “writing” about it.

Yet, such a strong contrast between practice and theory does not do justice to the ancient Indian perspective. The early discourses concord with the position taken by Vasubandhu who:

places “thinking” (*cintā*) and “cultivation” (*bhāvanā*) along a continuum of different practices rather than in strict opposition. While they are distinctive forms of practice, they build upon one another and work together to instill wisdom in the practitioner. Classifying reasoning as theory and cultivation as practice, and then opposing them as we are apt to do, can lead to misunderstanding their nature and scope. As is typical among Indian Buddhist writers of his ilk, Vasubandhu classifies as “cultivation” many meditative practices that are discursive or conceptual in nature or at least begin as discursive or conceptual practices. Thus, theoretical reflection shifts to meditative cultivation more gradually than we might assume (p. 279).

In line with what has emerged from the above survey, the presentation of the three kinds of wisdom in their relationship to mindfulness “challenges the reader to understand these different practices of wisdom on a continuum of development, resisting the urge

to draw sharp oppositions between ... ‘discursive’ and ‘nondiscursive’ practices of self-cultivation” (p. 286).

Stepping out of the limitations that can come from excessive reliance on a sharp opposition between theory and practice toward instead viewing these as interrelated dimensions of mindfulness practice would also do better justice to the statement, made particularly in the context of the awakening factors, that mindfulness is always useful:

I say that mindfulness is always useful (SN 46.53).³²

The mindfulness awakening factor is always of use (SĀ 714).³³

I say that mindfulness is to be cultivated at all times (Up 7003).³⁴

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Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Nett	<i>Nettipakaraṇa</i>
P	Peking edition
Peṭ	<i>Peṭakopadesa</i>
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Suttanipāṭa</i>
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i>
T	Taishō edition
Ud-a	<i>Paramatthadīpanī</i>
Up	<i>Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā</i>
Vibh	<i>Vibhaṅga</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>

Notes

¹ See, e.g., *Mahāvvyutpatti* entry no. 75, Sakaki (1916, p. 124).

² DN 33 at DN III 219: *tisso paññā: cintāmayā paññā, sutamayā paññā, bhāvanāmayā paññā*.

³ Stache-Rosen (1968, p. 84): (*tisrāḥ prajñāḥ: śrutamayī prajñā cintāmayī prajñā bhā(vanāmayī prajñā)*).

⁴ DĀ 9 and T 12.

⁵ Vibh 325: *tattha katamā sutamayā paññā? ... kammassakatam vā saccānulomikam vā rūpaṃ aniccan ti vā, vedanā aniccā ti vā, saññā aniccā ti vā, saṅkhārā aniccā ti vā, viññāṇam aniccan ti vā, yaṃ evarūpiṃ anulomikam khantiṃ diṭṭhiṃ ruciṃ mutiṃ pekkham dhammani-jjhānakkhantiṃ parato sutvā paṭilabhati: ayaṃ vuccati sutamayā paññā*.

⁶ TXXVI 387c: 聞所成慧云何? 答: 因聞, 依聞, 由聞建立, 於彼彼處有勢力得自在正遍通達。其事如何? 如有苾芻或受持素咀攢, 或受持毘奈耶, 或受持阿毘達磨, 或聞親教師說, 或聞軌範師說, 或聞展轉傳授藏說, 或聞隨一如理者說, 是名為聞。因此聞, 依此聞, 由此聞建立故, 於彼彼處有勢力得自在正遍通達, 是名聞所成慧。

⁷ Vibh 324: *tattha katamā cintāmayā paññā? ... kammassakatam vā saccānulomikam vā rūpaṃ aniccan ti vā, vedanā aniccā ti vā, saññā aniccā ti vā, saṅkhārā aniccā ti vā, viññāṇam aniccan ti vā, yaṃ evarūpiṃ anulomikam khantiṃ diṭṭhiṃ ruciṃ mutiṃ pekkham dhammani-jjhānakkhantiṃ parato assutvā paṭilabhati: ayaṃ vuccati cintāmayā paññā*.

⁸ TXXVI 387c: 思所成慧云何? 答: 因思, 依思, 由思建立, 於彼彼處有勢力得自在正遍通達。其事如何? 謂如有一如理思惟書數算印, 或隨一一所作事業, 是名為思。因此思, 依此思, 由此思建立故, 於彼彼處有勢力得自在正遍通達, 是名思所成慧。

- 9 Vibh 325: *sabbā pi samāpannassa paññā bhāvanāmayā paññā*.
- 10 TXXVI 387c: 修所成慧云何? 答: 因修, 依修, 由修建立, 於彼彼處有勢力得自在正遍通達。其事如何? 謂如有一方便善巧自勤修習諸離染道, 由此所修離染道故, 離欲惡不善法, 有尋有伺離生喜樂入初靜慮具足住, 廣說乃至入第四靜慮具足住, 是名為修。因此修, 依此修, 由此修建立故, 於彼彼處有勢力得自在正遍通達, 是名修所成慧 (here, 有尋有伺 functions as a counterpart to the absorption factors *vitakka/vitarka* and *vicāra*).
- 11 Sv III 1002.
- 12 Vism 439: *parato assutvā paṭiladdhapaññā attano cintāvasena nipphannattā cintāmayā. parato sutvā paṭiladdhapaññā sutavasena nipphannattā sutamayā. yathā tathā vā bhāvanāvasena nipphannā appanāpattā paññā bhāvanāmayā*.
- 13 T XXXII 445a: 於是不從他聞, 若自作業智, 若得隨諦相應智, 於功及明處, 此謂思慧。於此處從他聞得慧, 此謂聞慧。若入三昧彼慧悉修, 是修慧; adopting the variant 及 instead of 乃。
- 14 DN 2 at DN I 77: *manomayaṃ kāyaṃ abhinimmināya cittaṃ abhinīharati abhininnāmeti*. For a critical evaluation of the interpretation of this type of supernormal feat proposed by Shulman (2021), see Anālayo (2021).
- 15 AN 3.35 at AN I 142: *ayomayā bhūmi*.
- 16 Sn 28: *dāmā muñjamayā*.
- 17 DN 17 at DN II 170: *sabbaratanamayo*.
- 18 Peṭ 72: *tisso imā, bhikkhave, paññā: sutamayī, cintāmayī, bhāvanāmayī*; note the shift from *-mayā* to *-mayī*.
- 19 Nett 8: *yassa satthā vā dhammaṃ desayati aññataro vā garuṭṭhānīyo sabrahmacārī. so taṃ dhammaṃ sutvā saddhamā paṭilabhati. tattha yā vīmaṃsā ussāhanā tulanā upaparikkhā, ayaṃ sutamayī paññā. tathā sutena nissayena yā vīmaṃsā tulanā upaparikkhā manasānupekkhāṇā, ayaṃ cintāmayī paññā*.
- 20 Ud-a 69: *paññā pi lokiyā sutamayā, cintāmayā, bhāvanāmayā*.
- 21 Pradhan (1967, p. 334): *śrutvā cintayati, aviparītaṃ cintayitvā bhāvanāyāṃ prayujyate*.
- 22 On wisdom produced by reflection in particular see also Eltschinger ([2010] 2016).
- 23 Pradhan (1967, p. 341): *svabhāvasmṛtyupasthānam prajñā. kīdrśī prajñā? śrutādimayī ... śrutamayī cintāmayī bhāvanāmayī ca*.
- 24 MN I 58: *seyyathā pi passeyya sarīraṃ sīvathikāya chaḍḍitaṃ ... so imam eva kāyaṃ upasaṃharati: ayam pi kho kāyo evaṃdhammo evaṃbhāvī etaṃ anatīto ti*.
- 25 T I 583b: 觀彼死屍 ... 見已自比: 今我此身亦復如是, 俱有此法, 終不得離。
- 26 T II 568b: 觀死屍 ... 自觀身與彼無異: 吾身不免此患。
- 27 MN I 445: *na cāyaṃ moghapuriso mayā dhamme desiyamāne aṭṭhikavā manasikavā sabbacetaso samannāharitvā ohitasoto dhammaṃ suṇāti ti*.
- 28 T I 749b: 汝必不一心, 不善恭敬, 不思念聽。
- 29 SN V 67: *dhammaṃ sutvā dvayena vūpakāseṇa vūpakatṭho viharati, kāyavūpakāseṇa ca cittavūpakāseṇa ca. so tathā vūpakatṭho viharanto taṃ dhammaṃ anussarati anuvitakketi. yasmim samaye, bhikkhave, bhikkhu tathā vūpakatṭho viharanto taṃ dhammaṃ anussarati anuvitakketi, satisambojjhaṅgo tasmim samaye tassa bhikkhuṇo āradḍho hoti, satisambojjhaṅgaṃ tasmim samaye bhikkhu bhāveti, satisambojjhaṅgo tasmim samaye bhikkhuṇo bhāvanāpāripūriṃ gacchati. so tathā sato viharanto taṃ dhammaṃ paññāya pavicinati pavicarati parivīmaṃsam āpajjati. yasmim samaye, bhikkhave, bhikkhu tathā sato viharanto taṃ dhammaṃ paññāya pavicinati pavicarati parivīmaṃsam āpajjati, dhammavicayasambojjhaṅgo tasmim samaye tassa bhikkhuṇo āradḍho hoti, dhammavicayasambojjhaṅgaṃ tasmim samaye bhikkhu bhāveti, dhammavicayasambojjhaṅgo tasmim samaye bhikkhuṇo bhāvanāpāripūriṃ gacchati*.
- 30 T II 195a: 時時得聞深妙之法。聞深法已, 二正事成就, 身正及心正。爾時修念覺分。修念覺分已, 念覺分滿足。念覺滿足已, 於法選擇, 分別於法, 思量於法。爾時方便修擇法覺; the parallel to SN 46.3 is actually SĀ 724, which has the relevant passage in abbreviation; hence, the corresponding part from SĀ 723 has been translated above.
- 31 Sanskrit fragment SHT I 533, folio 106V5–6, Bechert and Wille (1989, p. 215): *gaṃbhīragamabhīrām dhārmīm kathām śr[ā] ... [da] ... ṃ dharmā[m] śrutvā do[ay](e)[na] vyapakaṛṣeṇa ... ca smṛtisambodhyangam-asya tasmī[m] samaye ārabdham bhavat[i] smṛti[sambodhyāṅga](sya) bhā[va](ya)[taḥ]; and folio 106V2: [rita]rkayati parimāṃsām-āpad[ya] ... [tasmī](m) ... maye ārabdham bha[va]ti dharmavicayasam*.
- 32 SN V 115: *satim ca khvāhaṃ ... sabbatthikaṃ vadāmi*.
- 33 T II 192a: 念覺分者一切兼助。
- 34 D 4094 nyu 53a or P 5595 thu 94a: *dran pa ni thams cad du 'gro ba'o zhes nga smra'o*.

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